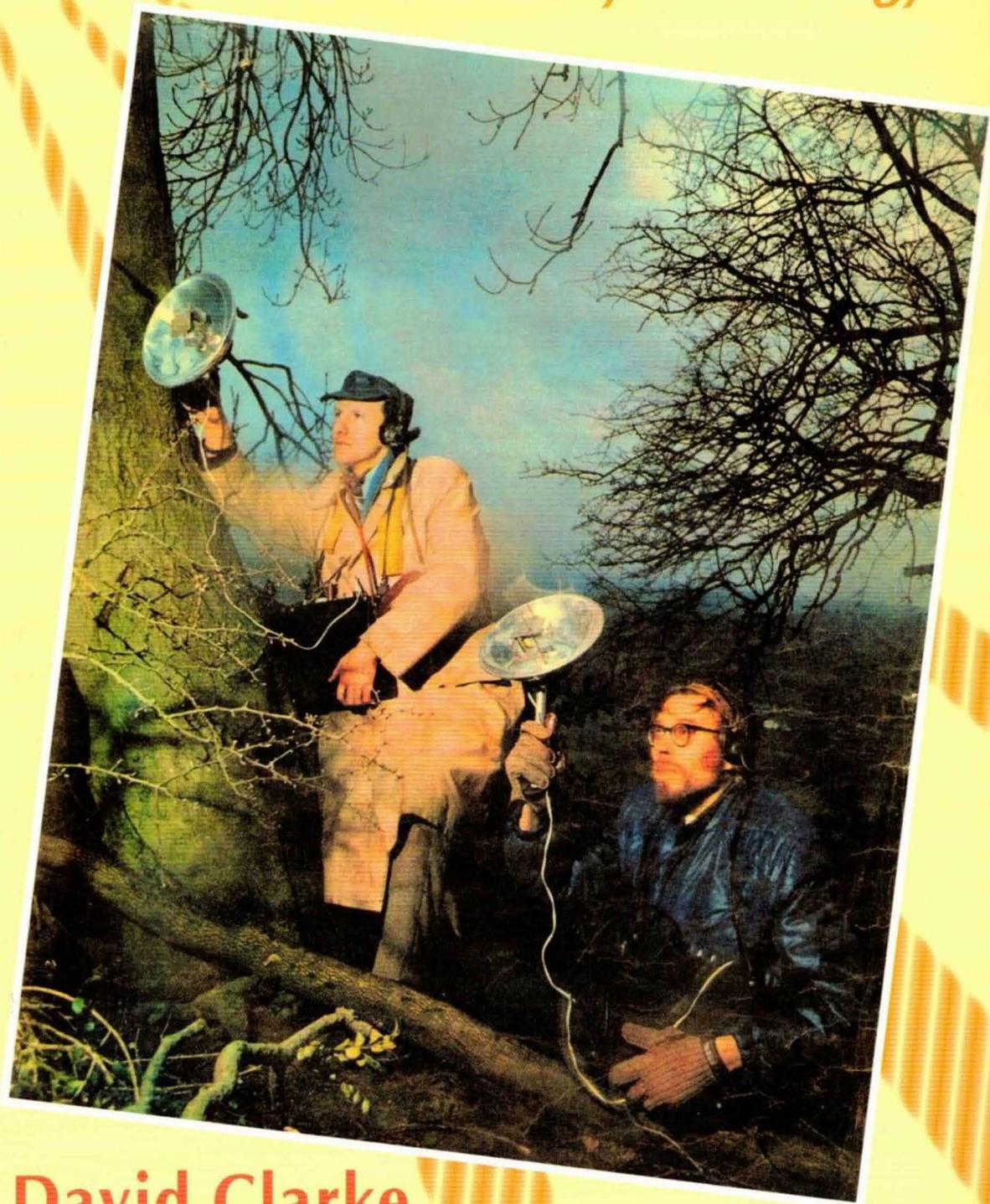


Flying Saucers

A social history of UFOlogy



David Clarke
and Andy Roberts

Since August 1945 the Western world has been fascinated with the notion of 'flying saucers', subsequently termed 'Unidentified Flying Objects' or 'UFOs'. Numerous 'experts' have offered explanations, often involving extraterrestrial entities.

The various opinions of these 'experts' generated extensive tabloid and media attention in the 1950s and 60s with the result that reported sightings became wrapped up in any number of beliefs and legends. David Clarke and Andy Roberts carefully unpick the origin of these beliefs, looking carefully at the key individuals involved. This reveals how the paranoia of the Cold War era generated its own myths and also shows that many aspects of the subsequent 'New Age' ideology had their origins in the UFO cults.

Flying Saucerers is not written for people who believe in UFOs. Readers are not expected to believe in their 'nuts and bolts' existence, still less the prospects of a Close Encounter of the Third Kind. Instead it is both a social history and a history of ideas, revealing how the notions of a few inspired 'experts' evolved into one of the most pervasive modern day myths.

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Previous books by the authors:

Phantoms of the Sky: UFOs, a Modern Myth?

Twilight of the Celtic Gods

The UFOs that Never Were (with Jenny Randles)

Out of the Shadows: UFOs, the Establishment & the official cover-up

Previous books by David Clarke

Supernatural Peak District

The Angel of Mons

Previous books by Andy Roberts

Ghosts and Legends of Yorkshire

Catflaps: A Study of Northern Mystery Big Cats

Flying Saucerers

A social history of UFOlogy

David Clarke and Andy Roberts

**ALTERNATIVE
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Flying Saucerers – A social history of UFOlogy

David Clarke and Andy Roberts

Cover photograph: unknown UFO enthusiasts with detectors
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Contents

Glossary	viii
Foreword by Shirley Mclver	x
Introduction: Flying Saucers – The Making of a Myth	1
1 Is another world watching?	4
2 Nuts and bolts – the birth of UFOlogy	18
3 The saucerer’s apprentice	38
4 The great and good	53
5 King of the saucers?	72
6 Whispers from space?	90
7 The old straight track to the new age	106
8 Flying saucers from hell	124
9 Slouching toward Warminster?	139
10 UFOlogy in the 60s	158
11 A saucer full of secrets	178
12 In preparation for the landing	192
13 To infinity and beyond?	208
Bibliography	216
Index	225

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Personal

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Glossary

UFOlogy is full of obscure words and acronyms. This is a list of some of those used in the text. In certain instances a precise definition is necessary. In others the authors' interpretation of their meaning is supplied.

- Abductees:** Persons who believe they have been taken on board a flying saucer against their will.
- Alien:** '(a being) from another planet, especially one visiting the earth' (Ayto 1999:256), a term frequently used in science fiction. The term appears to have acquired 'non-earthly' meaning during the 1930s but the *OED* has found earlier isolated examples of this usage.
- BFSB:** The British Flying Saucer Bureau, Britain's oldest UFO club, founded in Bristol in 1953.
- BUFORA:** The British UFO Research Association, founded in London in 1964. Britain's longest surviving active national UFO group.
- Channelling:** A method of receiving messages from extraterrestrials and other supernatural entities via telepathy.
- Contact (UK):** National UFO group founded by Brinsley le Poer Trench (Lord Clancarty) in 1967. Based in Oxford. (see Chapter 10).
- Contactee:** Persons who believe they have had consensual physical or mental contact with extraterrestrial intelligences.
- Counter-culture:** The hippie sub-culture, consisting of those espousing values, beliefs and lifestyles in opposition to the mainstream.
- Cover-up:** A belief, or conspiracy theory, that the US, British and other governments are withholding information about the nature and purpose of flying saucers and their occupants.
- Earth Mysteries:** Catch-all term for interest in landscapes and their mysteries both natural and supernatural.
- Entity:** Occupant of or connected to a flying saucer. Another term for 'alien' used by UFOlogists.

<i>Establishment:</i>	The political, military and scientific nexus in Britain.
<i>Flap:</i>	A US military term used by UFOlogists to describe a series of UFO sightings centred around one location or period of time, for instance at Warminster (see Chapter 9).
<i>Flying Saucer:</i>	‘A disc or saucer-shaped object reported as appearing in the sky and alleged to come from outer space’ (Ayto 1999: 275). Phrase coined in 1947 and widely used in 1950s and 1960s (see Chapter 1). Eventually its usage became synonymous with UFO.
<i>FSR:</i>	<i>Flying Saucer Review</i> . The world’s pre-eminent flying saucer publication, founded in London in 1955. See bibliography for contact details.
<i>Ley Line:</i>	Term coined by Alfred Watkins during the 1920s to refer to invisible straight lines in the landscape, often between ancient sites.
<i>MoD:</i>	Ministry of Defence (UK).
<i>New Age:</i>	The complex of spiritual and consciousness-raising movements originating in the early twentieth century.
<i>Orthoteny:</i>	Term coined by French journalist and UFOlogist Aime Miche in 1958 to refer to the lines flying saucers <i>appeared</i> to travel along.
<i>Skywatch:</i>	Term for the activity by individuals or groups of people who gather to specifically look for UFOs.
<i>UFO:</i>	Unidentified Flying Object: ‘a term introduced to lend an air of scientific respectability to what had hitherto been known mainly as flying saucers’ (Ayto 1999:377). First coined in the USA circa 1950 by the USAF (Ruppelt 1956). Adopted in Britain much later. By the 1960s it was interchangeable with flying saucer.
<i>UFOlogist:</i>	One who studies, at any level, reports of UFOs or flying saucers.
<i>Wave:</i>	A series of UFO sightings reported across a large area of the country, for instance the 1967 wave (see Chapter 10).

Foreword

The origin of the term 'flying saucer' may lie in the USA but the phenomenon of UFOs has a distinctly British dimension. What else could unite such diverse characters as Prince Philip, the astronomer Patrick Moore, the Findhorn Community and rock musicians like the Rolling Stones and Pink Floyd? It is a subject inextricably linked with eccentricity and as such, one which has not received much serious attention from the academic community.

There appears to have been little follow-up to the research on British UFOlogy which I carried out for my PhD thesis between 1979 and 1983. This social history is the exception and so it was with great interest that I read the manuscript. More than twenty years have passed but in a matter of minutes I was once more immersed in the colourful and intriguing world of UFOlogists, where particular areas of the country, such as Bristol, Warminster, Glastonbury and Milford Haven, have special meaning.

The book looks in some depth at different aspects of British UFOlogy, tracing the history and context from the early beginnings in 1947, through the UFO 'waves' and group membership 'heydays' of the 1950s, 60s and 70s to the more recent 'footnotes'. On the way it conjures up a flavour of what life was like for those of us who were interested in UFOs and were looking for explanations.

There are a number of themes running through the different chapters. The overlap between UFOs, and other areas of the 'unexplained' such as spiritualism, parapsychology and the occult, is one of them. In Chapter Two the origin of early clubs is described including the British Flying Saucer Bureau which started in Bristol and had meetings where 'members get together to discuss anything from flying saucers to parapsychology and the occult'. The fate of the club raises some interesting questions. Apparently it has gradually faded into obscurity and the chairman, Dennis Plunkett, was reported as saying that meetings had been suspended. This was picked up by the international media and reported as a symptom of the 'death of UFOlogy'. In 2003 the chairman of the Bureau interpreted this response as a sign that the media were part of a 'cover up' to draw attention away from continual sightings and conferences about the subject. So what is the truth here? Is interest in UFOs still high?

This book suggests that interest in UFOlogy as a distinct subject is declining. There certainly appears to be some evidence that membership of UFO clubs has declined although not all clubs have folded. Chapter Five describes the Aetherius Society,

which is said to be the oldest surviving UFO-based organisation in the UK and the oldest surviving UFO based religion in the world. It was subject to Special Branch investigation for many years but some members continue to climb Kinder Scout in the Peak District on a monthly basis to visit one of the places where the founder George King stood in 1959 and which was one of the mountains charged with cosmic energy in Operation Starlight.

The UFO-based origins of the Findhorn Community in Scotland are also mentioned, although current members of this strong organisation are not keen to publicise this aspect of their history. Chapter Four is devoted to tracing the interest in UFOs of a number of prominent figures, including Prince Philip and also Patrick Moore who rather surprisingly explains that his TV career started as a result of his interest in UFOs. It also appears that he was responsible for at least one UFO hoax.

So UFOs have featured in the lives of many different types of individuals. Some have seen them as unexplained natural phenomena, others as superior beings from another planet, to some they are demons, and to others, beings from another dimension. There is no one interpretation. Some people have stuck with their interpretation through thick and thin and maybe continue to 'skywatch' at Warminster. Others, like Roger Stanway and Randall Jones Pugh, have been profoundly scared by perceived demonic forces and have left the subject behind (see Chapter Eight).

Unfortunately although during my research I was able to identify how people join UFO groups, the lack of further research means that we know little about why membership of these groups fluctuates. Why for example, did membership of clubs increase and then rapidly decrease following distribution of the film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* in 1978, and why did current sightings decrease but reporting of old sightings increase during the same period?

We also know little about the impact of the wider cultic milieu on UFOlogy. During my research I identified a new type of UFOlogist – the secular seeker – who was '... more interested in questions than answers, in the mystery rather than its solution.'

This social history covers the decades from the 1940s onwards in good detail, including the late 1960s and early 70s and the British form of psychedelia which involved 'dancing gnomes and flying saucers' (see Chapter Eleven). This was the period during which the cultic milieu expanded, although it had existed long before that time. A telling quotation from a hippie about the difference between his own belief in flying saucers and that of the editor of *Flying Saucer Review* seems to capture something about the modern attitude towards 'the unexplained'. The hippie retorts 'The difference between him and me is that I'm not so bloody *serious* about it.'

This could be interpreted as meaning that the belief does not have such a significant part to play in his life because it is merely of entertainment value. On the other hand, it could demonstrate an extension of counter cultural irreverence and delight in the mysterious.

The final chapter brings the history of British UFOlogy completely up to date, including media queries about 'Whatever happened to UFOs?' in 2006. The authors have some interesting conclusions on this subject. They present a strong argument for the decline of the traditional 'flying saucerer' whose individualism and diversity of thought led to a refusal to co-operate with mainstream science which ultimately marginalized them and led to their decline.

Rather than a separate subject for investigation, UFO sightings and contact with aliens have now become a part of a wide spectrum of phenomena that include contact with supernatural entities such as angels and demons and other mysteries such as ESP and ghosts. As the authors point out, recent opinion polls show that a third of the British population believe that extraterrestrials have already visited the earth and so public belief in flying saucers would appear to be as strong as ever even if membership of dedicated groups has declined.

This book brings together some important details about the social networks and experiences of those who shaped the development of British UFOlogy and raises questions for future social researchers about the groups and networks that have taken their place.

Dr Shirley Mclver

December 2006

Introduction:

Flying Saucers – The Making of a Myth

‘Man cannot live without religion and when the day comes and he has no religion he will resort to myth.’

Carl Jung

In August 1945 the Western world emerged, reeling, from the carnage of the Second World War. The slaughter of the bombing campaigns, the atrocities of the concentration camps and the decimation of a generation had left people blindly searching for meaning in the universe. Science’s apparent mastery over the atom only served to underscore the thin veil between the shattered certainties of the old world and the mysteries which lay beyond human existence.

Whereas in the aftermath of the First World War people in their thousands turned to spiritualism and messages from the dead for their comforts, the world after 1945 was too cynical for that supernatural confidence trick to work again. Or was it? Nations yearned for salvation, for some glimmer they were not alone and that there was hope for the world. Organised religion had proved powerless against evil during the Second World War, and political value systems such as communism and materialism, while superficially attractive, merely served to create further tensions setting individuals against government, country against country, ideology against ideology. People now questioned what would protect them from the outcome of a new, cold war. The smoking ruins of Hiroshima and Nagasaki stood as witness to the certain outcome of any new conflict between the world’s superpowers and neither a political nor a religious solution seemed to be likely. For the ordinary person buffeted by events of the recent past and faced with the dawn of the atomic age a new, contemporary, source of salvation was needed.

That salvation came not through contact with discarnate entities, but in the form of whispers from space, contact with other worlds and other intelligences. Flying saucers and messages from space rapidly became the late twentieth century’s promise of deliverance from the possibility of a nuclear conflagration. The first use of the term ‘flying saucer’ on 24 June 1947 marked the genesis of a powerful myth that penetrated all levels of society and formed the crucible in which the New Age philosophies familiar to us today were forged. Within months flying saucers, initially dismissed as a passing fad of the summer of 1947, would become one of the most powerful myths in history. Nowhere did this myth impact more than in the British Isles.

Flying Saucerers is a social history of that period. It was a time when telepathic contact with extraterrestrials was a daily occurrence, when physical contact with extraterrestrials was expected at any moment and when vast numbers of the population believed an event of the magnitude of the second coming was close at hand. In the *Flying Saucerers*, we look at the social reaction to this myth, and how it affected everyone from schoolchildren to royalty, politicians and scientists. When we use the word myth in the context of flying saucers we are using the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of the word as meaning not something that is necessarily untrue, but rather 'a traditional narrative sometimes popularly regarded as historical but unauthenticated.'

The authors started out as UFOlogists and avid investigators of UFO cases. We wrote books dealing with important sightings and specific UFO theories. These books were no different to the thousands of other books written about the subject. Such books become exercises in rhetoric, or are endless debates about the merits of UFO reports and theories about them. They become literary exercises in fact versus fiction, attempts by the author/s to persuade the reader to accept their particular version of 'the truth' about UFOs.

Yet the subject of UFOlogy is not actually about UFOs. There are no UFOs to study, only *reports* of UFOs and the component parts of a sighting when it becomes resolved, for example an aeroplane or kite is misperceived as something extraordinary. This is a fascinating subject in itself but is the study of perception, not UFOs. If it is anything, UFOlogy is about the people who see, investigate and write about UFOs. UFOlogy is created by the interplay of these three groups and we scrutinise this complex relationship in *Flying Saucerers*. Of course, this labyrinthine interaction begs the question: 'Have UFOlogists *created* the entire UFO phenomenon themselves?'

While the study of UFOlogy is not the study of UFOs, any discussion must deal with UFO experiences in relation to the people who witness, investigate and report them. Where we have done this we have tried to adhere faithfully to what the witnesses, investigators and journalists have said about a case and have avoided revealing our own analysis. Perhaps disappointingly there is, as yet, no scientific evidence for the physical existence of flying saucers. But this in no way diminishes the power of the flying saucer myth or the effect it has had. Despite its subject matter, the study of flying saucers or UFOs is the study of the people who see them, who believe in them and the mechanisms by which the flying saucer myth is promulgated. In this respect, the news media have played a significant part in the development and sustenance of the myth and they, in conjunction with key individuals and ideas within the flying saucer subculture, have driven the subject, adding layer after layer of meaning – or obfuscation, depending on your point of view.

We have used the terms 'flying saucer' and 'UFO' interchangeably throughout this book. 'Flying saucer' was the preferred term of the press and public until the late 1960s, when 'Unidentified Flying Object' – quickly contracted to 'UFO' – took over. Both flying saucer and UFO indicate something seen in the sky, with the cultural

inference that the object is a structured object of unknown origin, presumably a spacecraft piloted by an extraterrestrial.

The book starts in 1947, when the term flying saucer was coined and the subject of UFOlogy as we know it today begins. We conclude our study in the late 1970s when interest in the topic reached its high watermark with the release of the Steven Spielberg film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Although flying saucers were first seen and named in the USA and although UFOlogy itself began there, the British manifestation of the subject has largely been ignored and most histories of the subject concentrate upon the American experience. British UFOlogy, although heavily influenced by the American version, has developed by a completely different route and is unique, at least until the 1980s. At the end of that decade, UFOlogy continued but the golden days of its formation had passed.

And what do we believe now, after over sixty combined years chipping away at UFOlogy's coalface? Essentially, we are sceptics about any form of supernatural event and agnostics about there being an extraterrestrial element in any UFO sighting. We do believe in one thing: the power of belief in UFOs and how that belief can affect people and change their lives forever. This belief in UFOs can grip people and societies with a fervour that can only be described as religious in its intensity. We also believe in the great levelling power of belief in UFOs, how such belief can lead royalty to summon schoolchildren to Buckingham Palace or can convert taxi drivers to cosmic avatars. We have written *Flying Saucers* because we wanted to capture the intensity of that belief.

The strength of belief in the physical reality of UFOs is an excellent example of how what is perceived as real is, in fact, socially negotiated and constructed. We take the majority of social constructs for granted and rarely question them. Governments, monetary systems, the education system and so on are all socially constructed and have a useful purpose. They are rooted in physicality and interpersonal transactions, and underpin our day-to-day existence. Patterns of established supernatural belief such as religions and faiths are also social constructs. Although there is no physical evidence for their claims, to their adherents they appear to represent objective truths. Belief in UFOs or any other supernatural phenomena, especially those which have dramatic claims read into their spectral and transient experiences, are also social constructs, ones far more mutable than the daily social constructs we accept as reality.

Flying Saucers illuminates an aspect of recent history which until now has been ignored by other social historians because the subject matter has been unfashionable at best, unpalatable at worst. Yet there is a fascinating story here, a hidden history of supernatural contact with saviours from space and of how society generated and sustained a myth. *Flying Saucers* is that story.

Chapter one

Is another world watching?

'Most of you who read this book will never have known a time when there was no such thing as a UFO. Yet there was such a time. UFOs are a creation of our time, and when their time came, they were born.'

(Evans 1997: 257)

'**flying saucer** n (1947) a disc- or saucer-shaped object reported as appearing in the sky and alleged to come from outer space.'

(Ayto 1999: 215)

The birth of the flying saucer mystery can be traced to 1947. It was then, as the world recovered from the carnage of the Second World War that one of the greatest unsolved mysteries of the twentieth century began. One historian of the subject, Chris Aubeck, has argued that 'flying saucers' were known long before 1947. He found examples of North American trap shooters using the phrase to describe clay pigeons at the turn of the last century (personal communication, 2006). How likely was it that the phrase had been forgotten by 1947 and, if it was still being used, what role did its earlier associations play in moulding perceptions of the shape which these unidentified objects in the sky might take? This is just one early example of the way language and media would influence the terminology of the ensuing UFO controversy. The modern usage of 'flying saucers' was itself largely a media creation. The term was quickly seized upon by the newswire services to describe nine mysterious objects reported by a private pilot, Kenneth Arnold, on the afternoon of 24 June 1947.

Shortly before 3 p.m. that day Arnold was cruising above the Cascade Mountains of Washington State in the light aircraft he flew for his private business. He was searching for the wreckage of a downed C-46 transport plane when his attention was suddenly attracted by a 'tremendous bright flash' in the sky ahead of him. Scanning the skies he spotted a group of 'nine peculiar looking aircraft' moving towards him at

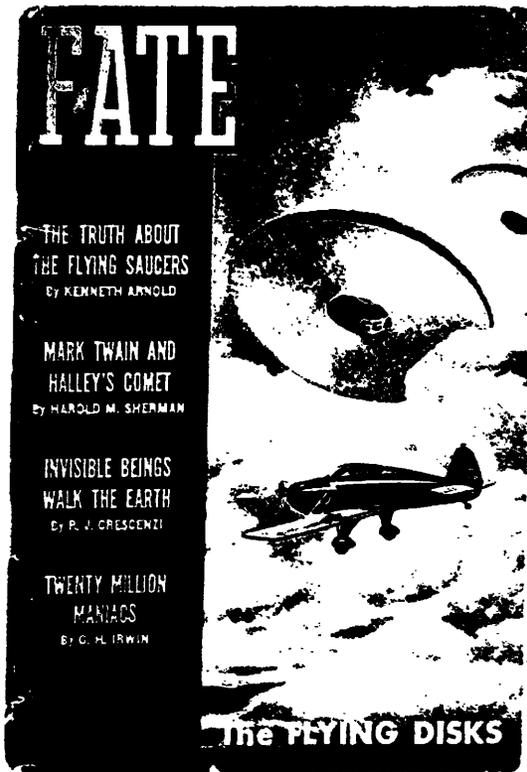
Pilot Kenneth Arnold who saw the first 'flying saucers'. (Photo supplied by Mary Evans Picture Library)



tremendous speed. Eight of the objects were semicircular and the lead craft, which flew slightly higher than the rest but in tight formation, was crescent or bat-wing shaped. The objects flashed brightly as they reflected the sun, and appeared to be fifty feet long and three feet thick. Timing them as they moved between mountain peaks Arnold was amazed to find they were moving at around 1,700 mph (2,700 km/h), more than 1,000 mph faster than the fastest aircraft in existence at that time. Eventually they disappeared towards Mount Adams in the south (Arnold 1997: 32).

Arnold abandoned his search and radioed his sighting through to the airfield in Pendleton, Utah. When he landed the story had already reached the press and he was surrounded by newspaper reporters who asked him to describe what he had seen. Arnold, who died in 1984, was always emphatic that he had not described the objects as 'saucers', but the part of his story that entered modern legend is that he described their movements as 'like a saucer skipping on water.' 'Flying saucers' was a headline gift for sub-editors and before June was out the story was picked up by the US newswire services. Flying saucers became a household word overnight but it would take many months, even years, before the phrase became synonymous with the term 'interplanetary spacecraft'.

In 1947 the Western world was preoccupied with the aftermath of the war and the possibility of future conflict with the growing Soviet empire. Kenneth Arnold himself assumed the aircraft he saw were a secret US Government project, such as guided missiles or new jet planes. 'I felt certain they belonged to our Government,' he wrote in his official report to the US Air Force. This preoccupation with secret weapons and atomic experiments is borne out by the responses to the first ever Gallup Poll on the



Contemporary depiction of Arnold's sighting in the first issue of Fate magazine. (Supplied by Mary Evans Picture Library)

subject of flying saucers, published in the USA on 14 August 1947. Posing the direct question 'What do you think these saucers are?' the most popular response was 'no answer, don't know' (33 percent), followed by 'imagination, optical illusion, mirage, etc' (29 percent) and hoax (ten percent). Other explanations included US or Russian secret weapon or 'weather forecasting devices' (Durant 1997: 231). The answers gave no indication of the tidal wave of belief in extraterrestrial visitations that would put down deep roots across the world by the early 1950s. The poll results do give an insight into the mind of a public who were both fascinated and puzzled by the sky phenomenon. In fact, the Gallup poll determined that within a few months of the term flying saucer being coined, nine out of ten Americans had heard of them.

At this time there were no 'UFOlogists' who in later years would collect and investigate the phenomenon on a voluntary basis and speculate about the origins of flying saucers. The closest comparison at that time were members of the Fortean Society who were dedicated to promoting the work and ideas of the eccentric writer and collector of anomalies Charles Fort (1874–1932). Fort had published accounts of strange lights and unidentified airships collected from newspapers and journals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and gently mocked attempts by scientists to explain away phenomena that could not be accommodated in their world view.

Britain's first recorded flying saucer sighting reported in the Yorkshire Observer, 9 July 1947.

Rector's Wife Says She Saw 'Saucer' Over Kent

MRS. MARJORIE HYDE, wife of the Rector of St. Andrew's, Deal, Kent, is wondering whether she has seen a "flying saucer." Whilst waiting at the level crossing gates at Sandwich about 5.15 p.m.

on Monday, 30 June, she saw what she describes as "more of a ring than a saucer" in the heavens.

"I have been reticent about it," said Mrs. Hyde yesterday, "because I had no wish to be laughed at, but there has been so much in the Press since that I must say something about what I saw."

"Up to now I've tried no one but my husband. He says I must have made a mistake, but I'm prepared to swear to what I saw."

"Just as the gates opened I saw this ring. I called out to my husband, but he didn't hear me above the noise of the gates and traffic. By the time I had

attracted his attention it had disappeared.

"I saw it for only a second or two. It was dark against the clouds—like a grey shadow, a little darker than the cloud. I think it was revolving, but I wasn't sure."

"I am positive it was not a smoke ring from the passing engine."

"Flying saucers" were also reported yesterday as having been seen during the last couple of days over Denmark, Johannesburg, and Sydney.

The United States Army Air Force announced at Roswell, New Mexico, last night, that a "flying disc" was found last week on a ranch near Roswell, and was now in the Army's possession.

Speculation about visitors from Mars and elsewhere did not arrive out of the blue in 1947. The novels of H.G. Wells and Jules Verne had planted the idea of visits and even invasions from other worlds firmly into the collective imagination half a century earlier. During the 1930s images of rocket ships and alien worlds were widely published in science fiction and pulp magazines such as *Amazing Stories* that featured the first Buck Rogers story in 1928. Sci-fi writer Ray Palmer (1910–77), who became editor of *Amazing Stories* in 1939, went on to incorporate many other elements of future UFO mythology into the heady mixture, such as abductions of humans by aliens and Government conspiracies. That the astute Palmer realised just how latent the idea of alien visitors was is clear in the July 1946 issue of *Amazing Stories* (one year before 'flying saucers' arrived). He wrote:

If you don't think spaceships visit the earth regularly then the files of Charles Fort and your editor's own files are something you should see. And if you think responsible parties in world governments are ignorant of the fact of spaceships visiting the earth, you just don't think the way we do.

(Keel 1983: 54)

In 1948 Palmer founded his own magazine dedicated to anomalous phenomena, *Fate*. The first issue featured an article by Arnold titled 'The truth about the flying saucers' and the pair began working together, publishing a book, *The Coming of the Saucers*, in 1952. As Hilary Evans has written, 'looking back to that day, 50 years ago, when the flying saucers arrived, we can see that they were unquestionably an idea whose time had come.' (Evans 1997: 258) Indeed, if Arnold had not seen his saucers, someone would have had to invent the idea and that person may have been Ray Palmer.

Although this book is about the early history of UFOlogy in Britain, it has been necessary to begin our story in the USA because it is there where the flying saucer mystery effectively began. Even in Europe, the saucers did not suddenly appear to fill a void. There were some people in Britain and on the continent who were aware of earlier unsolved sightings made by Allied aircrew during the war which USAF pilots called 'foo-fighters', a phrase which some believe came from the French word *feu* for fire (Clarke and Roberts 2002: 7). British crews also saw these UFOs but described them as 'The Thing' or 'The Light' on the RAF grapevine. Immediately after the war, ghost V-rockets were being reported from parts of Scandinavia when news of Arnold's 'saucers' filtered through from America.

While the first US newspaper stories appeared around 26 June 1947 it wasn't until 4 July that flying saucers came to the attention of the British press. This was the result of the syndication of the story via the Associated Press newswire on the American national holiday. Versions were sent to Europe via Reuters and British United Press. Earlier in the century, news travelled slowly and during the war was the subject to strict censorship. By the end of the Second World War rapid developments speeded up travel and communication technology which allowed breaking news to circle the world in a matter of days. Freed from censorship, news spread from London to Sydney, Hong Kong and Cape Town within a week of Arnold's sighting. One of the first accounts published in Britain was carried on page one of the *Daily Express*, headlined: 'Flying saucers ablaze in sky'. The paper, then at the height of its post-war popularity, described them as: 'a round projectile without propeller, wings or tail,' following the account of Richard Rankin, an experienced pilot who claimed to have seen ten flying in formation over California. Like many others, his sighting occurred before the publicity surrounding Arnold's report and he said he had kept quiet until Arnold's story was published. Now so many had reported sightings of 'discs' and 'saucers' that the US Army Air Force had ordered an investigation (*Daily Express*, 4 July 1947).

The next day the *Express* reported further sightings in the USA and Canada together with the first hints of official scepticism which would become a central theme in the future controversy. Reporter C.V.R. Thompson was told by the USAF that 'preliminary inquiries show that there is nothing to give realism to these reports.' In contrast, the US Navy told him that some of the reports fitted the description of the V1-73 wingless plane they had developed nicknamed 'The Flying Pancake.' There was one problem with this explanation. There was only one V1-73 and it had never left its base in Connecticut. The *Express* then listed some of the theories which were circulating in America: 'rockets or dud bombs being demolished', secret weapons being tested by American forces, experiments with a new missile by 'a foreign power' and optical illusions. A final theory, Thompson added, came in a letter to a San Francisco newspaper: 'They are spaceships from an older planet.' (*Daily Express*, 5 July 1947)

The immediate impact of the 'flying saucer' stories in Britain can be seen reflected in a diary entry made by Edie Rutherford, of Sheffield, Yorkshire. Mrs Rutherford was one of many hundreds of ordinary people who contributed their writings to the social research organisation Mass Observation. The survey, founded in 1937, aimed to

record everyday life in Britain via a panel of untrained volunteers who kept detailed diaries and responded to questionnaire surveys. Her diary entry, dated Sunday 6 July 1947, just two days after the first reports of flying saucers appeared in British papers, is revealing in its simplicity:

Husband much keyed up about the flying saucers over American skies. One of his pet subjects. Papers can't report enough about them to satisfy him. Just like a small boy about it.

(Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex, M-DA DI22)

The excitement and anticipation felt by Edie Rutherford's husband reflected the Gallup findings in America that revealed more people had heard of flying saucers than had heard about the Marshall Plan for European recovery. Their time had clearly come. It was only a matter of time before people began seeing saucers in British skies. Unfortunately no detailed search of British newspapers from 1947 has been carried out to assess how initial excitement was transformed into experience. During the 1980s US historian Jan Aldrich founded Project 1947 which, as the name suggests, is a research project dedicated to the study of the first saucer 'flap' ('flap' being a US military term for a period of panic or confusion). Aldrich oversaw an ambitious survey of 5,000 newspapers in North America and across the world. Although incomplete, his team of volunteers have found a huge number of references to the phenomenon in newspapers far and wide during the summer of 1947 (Aldrich 1997). Few of them referred to pre-Arnold sightings, but one exception was a flurry of stories in the British press concerning a mysterious 'ghost plane' tracked on RAF radars as it flew across the North Sea early in January 1947. The story was broken by the London *Daily Mail* on 29 April 1947, almost three months after the incidents occurred, and newswire stories about the mystery were still appearing in US newspapers weeks before Arnold's sighting (Clarke and Roberts 2002: 40–1).

The 'ghost plane' mystery was quickly replaced by the more adaptable flying saucer. Our brief survey of British national newspapers in June and July 1947 for the purposes of this book uncovered the first account of a 'saucer' seen by a named witness in England. This came from Mrs Marjorie Hyde, the wife of a clergyman from Deal in Kent. Whilst waiting at a level crossing near Sandwich on the afternoon of 30 June she saw 'more of a ring than a saucer' in the heavens. 'I saw it for only a second or two,' she said. 'I called out to my husband but he didn't hear me above the noise of the gates and traffic. By the time I had attracted his attention it had disappeared. It was dark against the clouds – like a grey shadow a little darker than the cloud. I think it was revolving, but I am not sure. It was going at a fairly high speed. I am positive it was not a smoke ring from the passing engine' (*Yorkshire Post*, 9 July 1947).

Shortly afterwards the *News Chronicle* reported a sighting of 'circular metallic objects whirling around' which tore across the sky. These were spotted by two startled men as they sunbathed near Brighton on 8 July 1947. Another newspaper referred to a sighting by Mr R.P. Thomas and three others who saw a flying saucer passing over Birmingham during a 'freak storm.' Journalist and Fortean researcher Harold P. Wilkins wrote in 1954 that he had spoken to one of these witnesses, who claimed this experience occurred at the time of the Arnold sighting (Wilkins 1954:

46). Nevertheless, surprisingly few reports were published in the British press in 1947. Many more would be reported retrospectively when, three years later, the mystery became a media sensation and 'flying saucers' became a catch-all phrase to describe a range of anomalous objects seen in the sky.

Examining the early reports makes it clear that many of the sightings did not describe 'saucer' shaped objects at all, but were classified as such by the media. In Europe memories of the devastation caused by the Nazi V-weapons were still fresh and as a result some accounts described torpedo or rocket-shaped objects falling from the sky. It is equally intriguing that, although Kenneth Arnold described crescent or bat-wing shaped objects, newspapers now described any unusual aerial phenomena as 'flying saucers'. Subsequently, many thousands of people across the world reported seeing saucer shaped objects as often as they reported seeing circular or rocket shapes.

Although the press were initially tempted to treat the subject in a light-hearted fashion attitudes were slowly changing, particularly in the USA. Some stories were taken seriously by the public and governments alike because of the social status of the witnesses. Arnold himself was both an accomplished private pilot and successful businessman. Others were military pilots who, it was assumed, would be able to draw a distinction between 'flying discs' and natural phenomena such as planets, balloons and other aircraft. One such 'credible witness' was a civilian pilot, Captain Norman Waugh, who had served with RAF Bomber Command during the war. Waugh was flying a Vickers Viking over the Bay of Biscay on 11 July 1947 at the height of the saucer scare when he saw 'an object travelling at lightning speed that looked like a grey tadpole.' He told a journalist that 'within 15–20 seconds it passed about six miles off and vanished, leaving a long vapour trail. We estimate the object flew at 600 miles an hour at 15–16,000 feet over the sea.' (*Daily Express* 14 July 1947)

Waugh's description is a possible example of a daylight meteor or bolide, burning up in the atmosphere and leaving a trail of debris in its wake. These phenomena are very rare and it is unlikely even a commercial pilot with thousands of hours flying time would ever have encountered one. If this is what Waugh and his crew actually saw it is easier to understand how, in light of the media hype surrounding flying saucers at the time, he chose to report it as 'a flying saucer.' Months earlier Waugh may well have described his experience as a 'ghost rocket' or even, if it had occurred during hostilities, a 'foo-fighter'. It was careful descriptions such as these by credible witnesses that would become a major factor in altering perceptions as thousands of reports poured into official channels both in the United States, Europe and the rest of the world. Sightings by pilots added weight to the notion that the flying saucers must be physically real. And if they were real, just what were they, and who was piloting them?

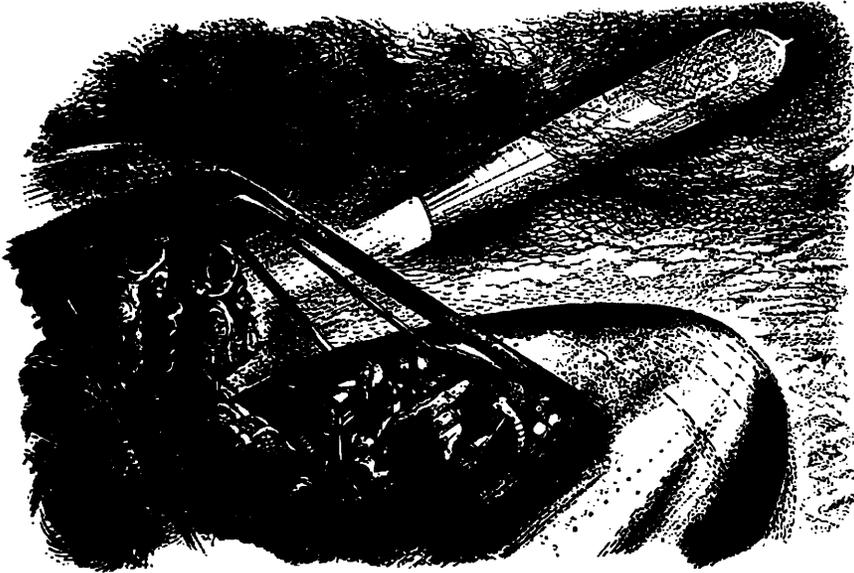
In the post-war period the USA retained its dominant position as the world leader in military technology, so it was natural for witnesses like Kenneth Arnold to initially speculate that the saucers were American secret weapons. With the opening of the Cold War, the technological superiority of the USA was challenged and in 1949 the

USAF pilot Thomas Mantell who died chasing a flying saucer. (Photo supplied by Mary Evans Picture Library)



Soviets tested their first atomic bomb. As Western fears of communist expansion increased, it was logical for some military authorities to suspect that the 'flying saucers' could be of Soviet origin. It was known that the Russians had captured German scientists and V-rocket secrets at the end of the war and some believed it was possible these had been developed to produce a disc-shaped spy plane. When it became apparent that terrestrial aircraft could not account for all the reported speeds and manoeuvres reported, the 'secret weapon' hypothesis lost ground to the idea that saucers were piloted by 'men from Mars'.

Indeed, by the beginning of 1948 what became known as the 'Extraterrestrial Hypothesis' (ETH) was the favoured option for a faction within the US military. The USAF had been in existence only a matter of days when on 23 September 1947 Lt. Gen. Nathan F. Twining of Air Materiel Command sent his 'opinion on flying discs' to Brigadier General George Schulgen of the Army Air Force. His view was clear: 'The phenomenon reported is something real and not imaginary or fictitious' and he recommended that a detailed study be undertaken (Pflock 2001: 185–6). As a result, on 30 December 1947 Project Sign came into existence. Sign, known to the public as 'Project Saucer', began work immediately. Their first major investigation was the legendary Mantell incident of 7 January 1948 in which a young Air National Guard pilot, Thomas Mantell, died when he lost control of his F-51 whilst pursuing a strange circular object over Kentucky. His last words, radioed back to ground control were: '... I've sighted this thing. It looks metallic and its tremendous in size... it's above me and I'm gaining on it.' The shambolic official investigation suggested that Mantell had chased the faint planet Venus which was dimly visible in the afternoon sky, until he lost consciousness due to lack of oxygen and crashed to the ground. But the unconvincing way in which the USAF dealt with this tragic case had a major impact upon public opinion both in the USA and across the world. Flying saucers were now 'serious business' and no longer a joke. Many now began to suspect the



"Both pilots saw what looked like a row of lighted windows and Chiles noticed a saucer-like radar pole. As it zoomed upwards with a tremendous burst of flame from the rear it rocked the D.C.3 with its backwash."

WHAT ARE THESE FLYING SAUCERS?

IN the afternoon of June 24, 1947, Kenneth Arnold, owner of the *Castle of the Clouds* near Roswell,

It was announced last week that an unidentified sound object had been seen over Cowes, Isle of Wight, travelling at 2,000 miles per hour. These 'flying saucers' have been reported many times in

speeds and accelerations are far in excess of anything known on Earth. Two other of the mysterious sa-

Artist's impression of the Chiles-Whitted sighting 1948 '... as it zoomed upwards with a tremendous burst of flame from the rear it rocked the DC3 with its backwash.' (From Everybody's Magazine 13 August 1950)

authorities knew we were being visited by creatures from other worlds but would not admit it. Mantell's death was a turning point, but many years later the case was reopened and the object he died pursuing was finally identified as a giant Skyhook balloon released by the US Navy from a base in Minnesota. As in many other cases, the final explanation had little or no impact upon the belief which the initial story helped to generate and spread. For millions of people across the world this incident signified that flying saucers were real and could be hostile.

A second significant sighting was made by two commercial pilots from a DC-3 passenger plane over Alabama on 24 July 1948. Clarence Chiles and John Whitted reported a torpedo-shaped, wingless object similar to the 'ghost rockets' sighted over Norway and Sweden immediately after the war. They described it as like 'one of those fantastic Flash Gordon rocket ships' and said it tore past their plane before turning upwards and disappeared into clouds. This sighting further persuaded some of Sign's personnel at the Air Technical Intelligence Center (ATIC) that UFOs were of extraterrestrial origin. Largely as a result an intelligence briefing document was prepared by a group within Project Sign, which became known as 'Estimate of the Situation'. This document has achieved legendary status mainly because of its

sensational conclusions that the extraterrestrial origin was likely for the saucers. In his 1956 memoirs Captain Edward Ruppelt, head of the USAF's Project Blue Book, stated that he once saw a copy and summarised the contents, which appeared to be a collection of disparate reports of aerial phenomena that included the English 'ghost planes' sighted in January 1947. Its findings did not cut any ice with the Air Force General Hoyt Vandenburg, who rejected the conclusions and ordered all copies of the report to be destroyed. He felt the evidence – based entirely on eyewitness testimony – was not sufficient to support such way out conclusions (Ruppelt 1956: 41–2).

As 1948 approached British newspapers had relegated the flying saucer stories to the category that journalists describe as 'silly season' because they break during the summer holidays when news is scarce. From the point of view of the British press, flying saucers were merely an American fad which had its day and was promptly filed alongside reports of the Loch Ness monster. For at time the mystery was forgotten, but the *idea* had planted fertile seeds in the imagination of thousands. Little did anyone suspect that saucers would soon explode once more into popular consciousness. Before we move on to explore Britain's first flying saucer flaps in the 1950s we must examine one additional story that provides us with a unique insight into one of the central pillars of flying saucery.

Roswell

Writing about the flying saucer craze of 1947 without mentioning Roswell is impossible. The first issue of the British magazine *Flying Saucer Review* in 1955 carried a story told by one of Britain's best known entertainers. Hughie Green later became a household name with his television shows *Double Your Money* and *Opportunity Knocks* but in the summer of 1947 he was still serving in the RAF and was driving from Hollywood to Pennsylvania where he was due for a business appointment. During the long journey across the desert Flight Lieutenant Green tuned his radio to local stations to relieve the monotony. 'About 250 miles out of Philadelphia a commentator interrupted the programme to announce that a flying saucer had crashed in New Mexico and that the Army were moving to investigate,' Green recalled. 'Later the programme was interrupted again and quite a few details were given. Several newsflashes about the incident from various stations followed. The last I heard was just before reaching Philadelphia. The announcer promised further bulletins. None followed. When I got there I bought all the newspapers I could lay my hands on. But not one carried the story. And questions at radio stations just drew a blank.' (Dempster 1955)

Green confessed he had been 'mystified ever since' and his story was swiftly added to the growing body of rumours that claimed the US Government had a crashed flying saucer in its possession. In hindsight there is no doubt that what Hughie Green heard that July day was in fact snatches of radio bulletins describing what would become known as 'the Roswell incident.' For believers and sceptics alike Roswell contains the seeds of everything which characterises the UFO mythology: alien bodies, crashed flying saucers, government cover-ups and witnesses being 'silenced'. The basic narrative that an alien craft crashed in the New Mexican desert and was



The wreckage of the 'Roswell flying saucer' displayed at a USAF press conference in 1947. (Photo supplied by Mary Evans Picture Library)

retrieved by the US military and hidden away in a secret hangar has survived for over fifty years. The story has become so well known that Professor Jan Brunvand classified it as a category of urban legend associated with government and conspiracy (Brunvand 1984: 198). In fact, the modern version of the narrative can be traced to a book published in 1980, *The Roswell Incident* (Berlitz and Moore 1980). It was only at this later stage that accounts of bodies and wreckage with amazing properties were added to the basic story overheard by Hughie Green in 1947. Indeed, it had such little impact at the time that memories of the news reports which followed the announcement had faded by the time Hughie Green told his story eight years later. As a result the incident was rarely mentioned in any of the saucer books published before 1980.

The Roswell legend originated from a hasty press release issued by Roswell Army Field at the height of the flying saucer craze on 8 July 1947. This part of New Mexico was, and still is, the home of some of the USA's most secretive defence establishments where the atomic bomb was developed and tested in great secrecy during the war. After the war secret research was being carried out on German V-2 rockets and aircraft captured from the Axis forces. Roswell Army Air Base itself was the home of the USAAF's 509th bomber wing, at the time the only nuclear equipped force in the world. The press release issued by the base press officer said a disc-shaped object had landed (not crashed) on a ranch near the town and, when found some time later, was removed and the wreckage 'lent to higher headquarters.'

As had been the case with Arnold's sighting two weeks earlier, the news was picked up by the Associated Press and the next day the story was carried by newspapers across the world. It must be appreciated that the story came just days after the first reports of flying saucers were published and the news was fresh. The crash or capture of one of the craft was required to ease the narrative tension of the yet unresolved mystery. In Britain, the story from Roswell was prominently featured in both the national and local newspapers, including *The Times* and *The Scotsman*. But the initial excitement was dampened within hours when the Eighth Army Headquarters announced that the 'flying disc' had been identified as a lowly weather

Is another world watching?

Bernard Newman book cover. The first British book on the flying saucer mystery published in 1948.



balloon and had nothing to do with flying saucers. According to a statement by Brigadier General Roger Ramey when the remains were examined by meteorologists the 'saucer' was found to be of 'flimsy construction, almost like a box kite.' (Pflock 2001: 26) This statement killed the story and Roswell disappeared into obscurity, where it would remain for three decades. It was only then that stories of bodies and alien artefacts covered in strange symbols began to circulate.

That *something* happened at Roswell is not in doubt. Even the US Government accepts that an incident did occur but despite several changes of story remains adamant the 'flying disc' was a balloon, but not an ordinary weather balloon as was stated in 1947. According to a detailed USAF study completed in 1994 the object was actually part of a covert project, code-named Mogul, that used specially-adapted apparatus carried to high altitudes by balloon trains to track Soviet nuclear tests. A balloon train from the Mogul project was lost in the area at the relevant time, and the descriptions of scattered debris and box-kite structure do appear to fit the descriptions of the debris from 1947 (Pflock 2001). As was the case with the Skyhook balloons which led Captain Mantell to his death, the Mogul project was so secret that staff at Roswell Army Air Base, who were responsible for the initial press release, did not have sufficient 'need to know'. The release of the 'weather balloon' story may have been a tactic to cover a public relations blunder.

You can accept the official explanation or reject it as whitewash to conceal something else, be that something alien or something more sinister and down to earth. It is entirely up to you. But before you make up your mind, consider a strange coincidence. Most of us are aware of the main elements of the Roswell story, but few know that the idea of an international conspiracy involving a saucer crash was a central theme in a fictional story written by a member of the British secret service. *The Flying Saucer*, billed as 'a thriller by Bernard Newman', was published by Gollancz in June 1948, the month the Cold War escalated with the Soviet Union's blockade of Berlin (Newman 1948). Although a novel, this was the first book dealing

Flying Saucers

specifically with the flying saucers to be published anywhere in the world by a British author. The plot revolves around a group of influential scientists who, worried by the impending Third World War, concoct a method of uniting the world's leaders by faking a series of saucer crashes. Although written in the context of 'flying saucers' the crashes involve objects described as 'rockets' or V-bombs, a clear reference to the scare in Scandinavia that was fresh in the public mind when Newman began writing his book. Newman transfers H.G. Wells' image of Martian cylinders crashing in Edwardian Sussex to post-war Leicestershire, where the action begins. Suspicions that the saucer is Russian are quickly dispelled when further crashes occur in the Soviet Union and, significantly, New Mexico. Here the Martian rocket is quickly surrounded by the American army and removed for examination by scientists. As they examine the 'saucers' they discover they are made of a unusual metal so hard it cannot be cut or marked. On the exterior of the English object are found 'certain markings, as if made by a chisel' which an expert from the British Museum compares to Egyptian hieroglyphics.

While the media speculate about an invasion from Mars, the boffins decide to include the remains of an alien pilot in a subsequent crash but they are careful to ensure the victim is destroyed by the impact. An 'alien autopsy' then follows, with the team confusing the pathologists with a collection of exotic animal parts. As the international team of experts and atomic scientists begin their detailed study of the remains the major powers are forced to the negotiating table and local conflicts across the world are resolved. Cold War tensions are replaced by a co-operative league, a New World Order, for the defence of mankind against the Martian foe. Early in the book one of leading scientists traces the idea for the deception to a speech by Britain's wartime Foreign Secretary (and later Prime Minister) Anthony Eden, who said he feared that the world would only be united when 'they find someone in Mars to get mad against.' (*The Times* 3 March 1947). In his autobiography, Newman reveals this story was founded in reality:

'This was the heyday of the Flying Saucers, and the rumours that they emanated from Mars. One of my team of scientists... used them in the interests of the peace of the world. He adopted Sir Anthony Eden's view that the nations of the world would only unite *against* something.'

(Newman 1960: 157)

Newman adds that Eden 'was very amused by the book' and his remark can be compared to that by UFO-believer President Reagan to Gorbachev at the UN General Assembly in 1987. The US President was reported to have said: 'I occasionally think how quickly our differences worldwide would vanish if we were facing an alien threat from outside this world.' Anecdotes such as these have stoked the fires of conspiracy theorists across the world.

Despite its unique status and intriguing content, *The Flying Saucer* has often been ignored in later discussions of the Roswell incident. Newman, who was fluent in a number of languages, produced spy and detective stories at a rate of four or five per

Is another world watching?

year under the pseudonym Don Betteridge. He was also an accomplished non-fiction author specialising in travel, current affairs, global politics and warfare, occasionally using real people and situations as characters for his plots. There was clearly more to Newman than was apparent from his lengthy entry in *Who's Who*. His unrevealing autobiography (Newman 1960) says he served on the Western Front and worked as a lowly civil servant in England during the inter-war period. Despite the economic conditions of the 1920s, he managed to afford lengthy holidays in Eastern Europe, Russia and Germany. Surviving personal correspondence reveals that post-war he was certainly working for British intelligence, primarily MI5. His travels pre-war imply he may also have worked for the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6). His knowledge of official secrets at this time might provide an additional inspiration for his saucer novel, but like other serving and former spies he was prevented by the Official Secrets Act from writing about his career. As a result some former spies disguised characters and events under a cloak of literary fiction.

In an obituary published in 1968, his friend and fellow intelligence expert Captain Basil Liddell Hart praised Newman's knowledge of military strategy, but was careful not to refer to his intelligence work. Indeed, in the presentation copy of *The Flying Saucer* which Newman sent to Liddell Hart in 1948 he wrote the following in the flypaper: '[I hope you] may find this [book] amusing.' Liddell Hart was himself fascinated by the saucer mystery and collected newspaper cuttings on the subject from its inception up until his own death in 1970. The two friends, who shared similar military backgrounds and connections, were just the first of a long line of soldiers and scientists who believed the saucers were real and important for the future of the world. Another former intelligence officer who wove flying saucers into his fiction was Dennis Wheatley. His novel *Star of Ill Omen* equally blended fact and fiction into a James Bond-style plot which left readers in no doubt that flying saucers were of extraterrestrial origin (Wheatley 1952).

UFO commentator Peter Rogerson notes that Newman's book was 'written by a member of the intelligence community close to the political milieu, introducing the idea of a UFO crash being faked to further a political agenda... within a year of Roswell' (Rogerson 1996: 17). Although we have no proof that Newman's inspiration came from the aftershocks from Roswell itself, he must have begun writing his book soon after the first saucer flap in summer of 1947. What's more, the resemblance between the incident described in *The Flying Saucer* and Roswell are too close for comfort. They include a saucer crash in New Mexico, the dead body of an alien, metal so hard it cannot be cut by earthly tools and strange hieroglyphics carved on the wreckage of the craft. All these elements would be absorbed into the modern legend. But one question remains unanswered: what did secret agent Bernard Newman really know?

Chapter two

Nuts and bolts – the birth of UFOlogy

Are we on the verge of a breath-taking discovery? Yes, I believe we really are! I say I believe the flying saucer does exist and that the coming years will vindicate such men as Captain Mantell, Kenneth Arnold and countless other pioneers in this field. May I say to all members at home and abroad – carry on the good work, and above all, do not be disappointed, discouraged or deluded by the jeers and sneers of the ignorant so-called majority.'

New Year message 1953 from Captain Edgar Plunkett, chairman of the British Flying Saucer Bureau (Plunkett 1979)

The craze for seeing flying saucers had taken root in Britain by 1950 when it became the subject of a media frenzy. In just three years the *idea* of flying saucers had been successfully exported from America to Europe. Around the world, the basic foundation stones of what would become the UFO mythology were being laid down. In Britain the saucers were welcomed by those who were looking for an exciting distraction from the drab realities of post-war Britain. This was a unique time. Fears of atomic destruction, rationing and poverty existed in stark contrast with a positive and enthusiastic view of a bright future delivered through scientific and technological progress.

Seeing and believing in flying saucers quickly became a British obsession. In 1950 the first and most influential of three books specifically focused on the mystery was published: *The Flying Saucers are Real*, written by a retired US marine corps major turned freelance journalist, Donald Keyhoe. Keyhoe's interest can be traced to the publication of the final report by the USAF's Project Sign in 1949 which concluded sightings were the result of 'misinterpretation of various conventional objects, a mild form of mass hysteria, and hoaxes.' Despite these findings, the investigation continued as Project Grudge and, in 1952, Project Blue Book. Unlike the British authorities whose investigations were carried out in secrecy, the USAF decided to publish their reports and issue press releases summarizing their findings. By 1950 the

Nuts and bolts – the birth of UFOlogy

Former US marine Donald Keyhoe, author of The Flying Saucers are Real. (Photo supplied by Mary Evans Picture Library)



USAF were using the acronym 'UFO' – unidentified flying object – a term created by Capt Edward Ruppelt to replace 'flying saucer' in an attempt to demystify the subject. This more neutral term was quickly adopted by the US and British authorities, but 'flying saucers' continued to be widely used by the media.

In 1949 Ken Purdy, editor of the New York-based *True* magazine commissioned Keyhoe to undertake a detailed study of the subject. Purdy was puzzled by the USAF's contradictory stance and had a tip, possibly similar to that heard by Bernard Newman, that the saucers were a 'gigantic hoax to cover up [an] official secret.' He became convinced the saucers were from outer space and the USAF and Government were involved in a cover-up as a precaution to prevent mass panic. Keyhoe became the first person to push the idea of a conspiracy in a serious and convincing manner. His article was published in the January 1950 issue of *True* and the theme was expanded in his book published in June. In both texts, Keyhoe focused upon the death of Captain Mantell and the 'ghost rocket' sighting by the DC-3 pilots (see Chapter 1) as the two outstanding incidents which Project Sign had been unable to explain. Keyhoe's writings had a massive impact on public opinion and as a result he became a major public relations headache for the USAF for years to come.

At this point, outside military circles, the British public was largely unaware that flying saucers had continued to plague the USA. In March *The Times'* Washington correspondent reported on 'a new crop of reports' from the USA and Mexico. These included rumours concerning a crashed saucer in Mexico City which contained a little man just 23 inches in height and another in Denver, Colorado, where three little men, or in one version a monkey, had been thrown from the wreckage (*The Times* 11 March 1950). By the end of the year the public would be familiar not only with these fantastic stories but dozens of others, some reported by ordinary people in Britain.

**The Story That May Be Bigger
Even Than Atom Bomb Wars**

FLYING SAUCERS

Full Inquiry Into The No. 1 Sensation Of The Age

BY THE EDITOR OF THE SUNDAY DISPATCH

I HAVE decided to publish in the SUNDAY DISPATCH a series of the most sensational articles ever printed in any newspaper. The word "sensational" is much overworked, but I use it deliberately today because there is no other expression that can properly describe either the subject or the articles.

For the question is the most "sensational" in the world today—**WHAT ARE THESE FLYING SAUCERS?**

Millions of people long at newspaper reports of Flying Saucers. They do not believe they exist, they do not believe anyone has seen one, they dismiss the whole subject as nonsense not worth a minute's serious thought.

But not everyone takes that view and I have found that many, intelligent and distinguished people in all parts of the world are intensely interested in Flying Saucers and treat such reports very seriously indeed.

Some months ago I published in this newspaper an article entitled "The Day They Saw The Flying Saucer at Ormskirk." It consisted of extracts from a local paper in a small American town in which a Flying Saucer had appeared a few days earlier.

Personal Letter

A few days after I had printed the article I received a personal letter from one of the most famous men alive today. I will not give you his name, but I must ask you to excuse me when this...

*How the Sunday Dispatch launched
flying saucers to the British public.
(By permission of the British Library.)*

At this stage British sightings were largely lights in the night sky or fast-moving objects glimpsed briefly in daylight but gradually more substantial reports filtered through. In June the *Daily Mail* reported a daylight sighting of a saucer-shaped object by the pilot of a Meteor jet on an exercise from RAF Tangmere. His report was supported by a simultaneous radar trace of an unidentified object in the sky (*Daily Mail* 7 June 1950). During the same month BBC radio broadcast a short programme on the subject presented by Charles Gibbs-Smith, an aviation historian from the Victoria and Albert Museum, who would soon become a proponent of the subject (BBC 1953). A string of articles then began to appear in daily newspapers and popular magazines which led many sceptics to take a serious interest. One of the first articles was by former RAF pilot Richard Greenhough, published by the *Daily Mail* in April. Greenhough said he was convinced 'the saucers... are man-made and part of some fantastic and fabulous secret.' The supposed link between saucers and secret weapons was also backed by G. Tilghman Richards, a lecturer at South Kensington Science Museum. In an article for the *Sunday Dispatch*, Richards carefully categorized sightings as 'explained' and 'unexplained' and suggested some of the latter could be 'trials of experimental disc-shaped aircraft.'

Given the public fascination with the topic, newspaper publishers quickly realized the potential boost flying saucers could provide for circulation figures. Journalists across the land were suddenly prepared to suspend their natural cynicism and behind the scenes two rival mass circulation Sunday newspapers began competing to break the latest saucer exclusive. The editor of the *Sunday Dispatch*, Charles Eade,

The cover of Britain's first non-fiction book on flying saucers.



was so impressed by the evidence that he decided to launch a pro-'saucer' campaign. In making the decision to splash saucers across the front page, Eade was heavily influenced by the views of his friend, Lord Mountbatten of Burma, whom he had served as press secretary during the war in the Far East. Mountbatten had a fascination for space travel and avidly consumed the early flying saucer literature. His personal papers show that in 1950 he began to collect saucer stories from his friends and acquaintances and by the autumn was urging Eade to publish all the available evidence in the *Sunday Dispatch*. Sensing a major scoop Eade tried to persuade Mountbatten to allow his name to be used in the series as this would add to its credibility.

Eade's story made front page headlines on 1 October 1950 with a strap-line proclaiming flying saucers to be 'the story that may be bigger than atom bomb wars.' He explained how for years the subject had been dismissed as nonsense but now 'many intelligent and distinguished people in all parts of the world are intensely interested in Flying Saucers and treat such reports very seriously indeed.' One of these 'top people' was 'one of the most famous men alive today' whom he could not name but who 'commands universal respect and admiration.' It was a discussion with this mystery man, the editor said, which had made him decide 'to place before the readers of the *Sunday Dispatch* all that is known about Flying Saucers and all the theories about them, no matter how sensational and fantastic.'

Thousands of people read these amazing revelations and the circulation of the *Sunday Dispatch* reflected the level of fascination the subject had aroused. Even at this early stage people were taking positions for and against the reality, or otherwise, of the saucers. The impact of the controversy may be reflected by the paper's circulation figures. Before the *Dispatch* began its campaign it sold around 50,000 copies but in 1957 after seven years of sensational saucer headlines this had risen to

2,500,000. As columnist A.J. Cummings put it, flying saucers had become a world-wide talking point:

... partly because of the sinister implication that it signifies the appearance of hostile visitants from another planet, partly because it may be the trying out of a new secret weapon – American or Russian – and partly, perhaps, because after the splitting of the atom most of us are ready to believe that anything can happen.

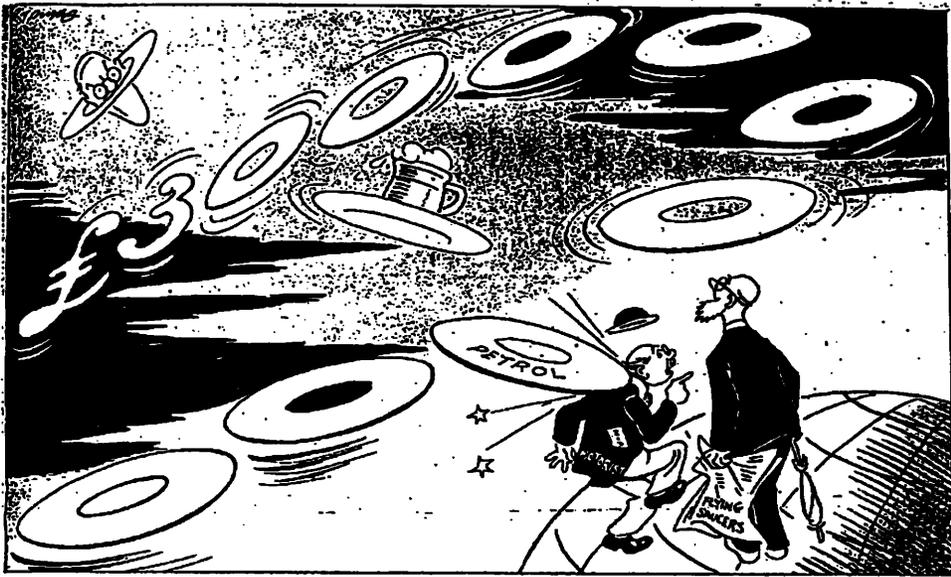
(*News Chronicle* 31 October 1950)

No doubt wincing at the scoop obtained by its rival, the *Sunday Express* bought the serial rights to Gerald Heard's *The Riddle of the Flying Saucers*. It was published by Carroll and Nicholson of London in October 1950 and was the first non-fiction book on flying saucers by a British-born author. Heard (1889–1971) was from an Anglo-Irish family and received a classical education at Cambridge before embarking upon a career as a broadcaster and writer on science and philosophy. As a freethinker he did not shy away from writing about taboo subjects. Heard mixed with many of the literary figures of the day including his friend Aldous Huxley and, like Charles Fort, was interested in the anomalies which scientists had rejected. In 1921 Heard was impressed by Marconi's claim to have received radio messages from Mars and continued to collect similar stories until the arrival of flying saucers. By then, he had emigrated to the USA where he settled in Los Angeles and in 1937 became a devotee of a Hindu religious order. In later years he met and befriended LSD guru Timothy Leary and became a fellow evangelist in the use of psychedelic drugs to attain spiritual enlightenment. Heard has achieved recognition as one of the pioneers of the New Age movement in California. Given his colourful background, it is hardly surprising that Heard saw flying saucers as presaging a New Age of increased cosmic and spiritual awareness. Philip Taylor, reviewing the book in 1997, wrote that *Riddle of the Flying Saucers*:

... follows a now-familiar pattern that was to be repeated in endless books during the next 30 years... [It] begins with a series of chapters presenting the USA Flying Saucer reports of 1947–49, presented at face value, with little or no context or critical analysis.'

(Taylor 1997)

Later in the book Heard reviews the current theories for saucer origin. He rejects the secret weapon theory and turns directly to the extraterrestrial hypothesis as the only possible answer. He examined each planet in the solar system as a possible origin for the visitors before settling, like Bernard Newman, on Mars. Although it might seem naïve in hindsight, in 1950 there was still much serious speculation about the possibility of advanced life existing on our nearest planetary neighbours. This was an era before satellites or space probes and many people were influenced by the speculations of science fiction writers who believed the planets of our solar system were populated by intelligent beings. In a remarkable conclusion, Heard developed his own unique theory that giant bees from the Red Planet must be the pilots of the saucers, as only tiny insects could survive the immense G-forces produced by the



"Phenomena, my hat! I tell you they're real!"

Flying saucer cartoon: 'Phenomena, my hat! I tell you they're real!'

saucer's amazing speed and manoeuvres (Heard 1950). Heard's interplanetary bee theory never quite caught the public imagination and was added to a list of bizarre ideas proposed and rejected in the early days of the mystery. Kenneth Arnold, for example, came to believe that flying saucers were not machines but 'sky creatures' who lived in the upper reaches of the atmosphere.

Gerald Heard's background was very different to Keyhoe. Taylor notes that as a UFO author he is 'a lot less interesting than as a philosopher.' Heard was a polymath who wrote about subjects that caught his attention before moving on to new literary pastures. *Riddle of the Flying Saucers* (published in the USA under the title *Is Another World Watching?*) was his first and last book on the subject. He never ventured into the controversy again, other than to endorse psychologist Carl Jung's views of saucers as 'a modern myth'. While the *Sunday Express* and his publisher portrayed him as 'a noted scientific author, broadcaster and lecturer' this description rather sold him short and Heard's contribution to the early development of the flying saucer story has remained largely overlooked.

On 8 October 1950 – one week after the *Sunday Dispatch* launched its series – the *Sunday Express* splashed Heard's ideas across its front page and posed a number of open-ended questions of its readers:

Is another world watching us? As the watchers cannot possibly be human beings what form could they take? Have they an intelligence higher than ours and are they controllers of power far beyond our knowledge? Why are they watching us and are they benign or hostile?

Flying Saucerers

The *Sunday Dispatch* preferred to wear its beliefs like a badge. Its published manifesto, developed from Donald Keyhoe's writings, provided the foundation stones for the next two decades of UFOlogy. The Earth, it declared, had been under periodic observation from another planet, or planets, for at least two centuries. These observations had increased following the detonation of the first atom bomb in 1945. The saucer flaps 'will continue indefinitely' and while the occupants would make no immediate attempt to contact mankind directly 'their actions indicate strongly indicate deliberate encounters to learn our planes' speed and performance.'

Charles Eade followed up his initial salvo by publishing extracts from Keyhoe's book alongside a large collection of letters from readers reporting their own sightings. By 29 October 1950 he felt confident enough to publish extracts from a second book from an American author, the third and last on UFOs to be published in Britain that year. If Keyhoe's stories fitted the description of sensational, then those from Frank Scully fell into the realms of the fantastic. *Behind the Flying Saucers*, wrote Eade, was 'the strangest of all... [Scully] says flying saucers have actually landed on this Earth [and] he claims scientists have examined the machines and the bodies of the occupants.'

This book was based on a story Scully heard from a mysterious scientist, a certain 'Dr Gee', who had worked on a secret programme to examine the wreckage of a flying saucer containing 'little men' that crashed in the New Mexico desert in 1948. The stricken saucer had been recovered secretly by the US Army and was being examined by a team of scientists. The ultimate source of this story may have been a combination of the rumours that grew from the Roswell incident and the novel published by Bernard Newman. Few took it seriously at the time and even the editor of the *Sunday Express*, while busily promoting Heard's book, came out strongly against Scully's book, of which he wrote: 'No investigator or expert regards [it] as a serious contribution to the solution of the problem.' In 1952 J.P. Cahn, a reporter for *True* magazine, published the results of his own investigation that revealed Scully's source – the mysterious scientist – was in fact two confidence tricksters who admitted their version of the story was a hoax. Despite this revelation, the stories in Scully's book, based as they were on a mass of rumours, have continued to contribute to the belief that the US authorities captured alien technology around 1947 and are still engaged in a conspiracy to hide the truth.

In response to the avalanche of weirdness, there followed a backlash from rivals who wished to debunk the saucer craze. The *Reynolds News* turned to establishment figures such as the Astronomer Royal, Harold Spencer Jones, to form its opinion. Speaking at a society function in Brighton, Spencer Jones said he was 'still patiently waiting for reports to come in of a flying saucer that had landed.' And he added that: 'it is very significant that most of the reports of flying saucers appeared to have emanated from a country where mass hysteria was prevalent.' (*Reynolds News* 15 October 1950). Under a bold front page headline 'The Great Flying Saucer Myth' the paper set out to debunk the claims of 'two mass circulation Sunday newspapers' which it said, 'in our opinion are creating a 20th century myth.' The paper then presented the findings of two of its reporters who had set out to collect the views of experts in a variety of fields, including astronomers and psychologists. Most

dismissed the idea of saucers as visitors from space as improbable because many of the reports – even those from pilots – could be explained as misperception. In one case, an astronomer cited the case of an RAF officer ‘who sent a pursuit plane after a “flying saucer” which had been seen glinting through a cloud, only to find it was the moon.’ The paper concluded that although some of the saucers might be experimental aircraft ‘one thing is certain... whatever people are seeing whizzing around – in the sky or in their minds – the men from another world remain where they have been for years – in children’s comic papers.’ To drive the point home, a fourth paper, *The Sunday Chronicle*, ordered a journalist to go out and come back with a picture of a flying saucer. Wasting no time, he booked a cottage in North Wales and having obtained a saucepan lid, a length of fishing line and a camera, produced the desired result. On returning to London with his prize ‘there was no trouble in convincing even the sophisticated that they were looking at a flying saucer.’ (*Sunday Chronicle* 15 October 1950)

The first flap

Hardly a week passed in Britain during the 1950s without the media reporting the latest sightings of flying saucers. Two American-made science fiction films utilizing the ‘visitors from space’ theme were released in 1951. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *The Thing from Outer Space* were different in that the first portrayed aliens as peace-loving and the second depicted them as evil creatures bent on destruction and invasion.

Saucer sightings came in peaks and troughs. By 1951 the largely pro-saucer campaign by the Sunday tabloids had run out of steam to the extent that in the spring of that year the *Sunday Dispatch* felt it necessary to ask: ‘Where have all the saucers gone?’ Readers did not have long to wait for an answer because the following year brought a fresh crop of stories from the USA. Significantly, the opening credits of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* opened with a wide vista of outer space which resolved to focus on planet Earth. This is followed by news announcements from around the world that a craft from outer space had been tracked by military radar. The use of news bulletin announcements were a reference to the radio adaptation of *The War of the Worlds* by Orson Welles which caused a panic in some American cities on Halloween in 1938. Suddenly the line between fiction and fact had become blurred, particularly given the context of an imminent conflict with the Soviet Union. The lead scientist of the Beagle 2 mission to Mars, Colin Pillinger, says the film is his personal favourite and recalls seeing it as a child, when the news-style opening played upon the very real anticipation and fear people felt at the time. ‘During the showing, the cinema manager pulled a classic Orson Welles stunt and stopped the film to announce that a spaceship had landed’ (*Guardian* 26 August 2004).

The fascination with flying saucers and alien invaders reached its height in 1953 when Ray Bradbury’s sci-fi horror flick *It Came from Outer Space* - filmed in 3D - terrified cinema-goers in London. At the same time those who had access to the new medium of television were mesmerised by Nigel Kneale’s six part drama *The Quatermass Experiment* that was serialised on BBC during the summer of 1953. The plot revolved around an alien life-form that infects the crew of a British space rocket

Flying Saucerers

that returns to earth with its deadly cargo. In the last episode one of the crew transforms into a horrific monster which attacks Westminster Abbey. Quatermass brought the idea of alien invasion into the family home and led to numerous complaints from frightened and irate viewers

The potential for public panic was fully appreciated by the American authorities who feared the Soviets might use fake saucer scares to confuse defences prior to launching a real attack. These fears were also evident in Britain where a minor scare followed the broadcast on BBC television of photographs from the book *Flying Saucers Have Landed* in October 1953. The presenter opened the item by saying: 'You may not believe this, but I do' and then panned to stills of the flying saucer whose landing he said had been witnessed by six reliable witnesses. Afterwards, BBC switchboards were jammed by anxious callers demanding to know if the story was true. James Harrison, the MP for Nottingham, wrote to the Director General of the BBC and the Home Secretary demanding an explanation, but was told the corporation was 'not responsible if viewers assumed the pictures are really flying saucers.' Mr Harrison told his local newspaper: 'A considerable amount of public concern has been created by the broadcast.' (*Nottingham Evening Post* 31 October 1953). The mini panic was spoofed by the Goons on the BBC's Light Programme shortly afterwards. According to an account:

There were two 'announcements' in the 'mad-hat' half-hour which caused some people to reach for their telephones and ring the BBC because they were worried, or though they had seen something which might have been a flying saucer. The programme, a recorded one, had been on the air for only a few minutes when there was a fade out and an authoritative voice was heard asking anyone who had seen an object in the sky – alleged to be a flying saucer – over East Acton to get in touch with the Defence Board at Milthorpe 203 (a fictitious number)

(*Sheffield Telegraph* 5 December 1953)

Afterwards the BBC told newspapers the joke 'was all part and parcel of the programme' but admitted some people had taken it seriously. Although *The Day the Earth Stood Still* was fiction, for a few days in the summer of 1952 it appeared the events portrayed in the film were about to become reality. A series of sightings were made of unidentified lights and objects by aircrew and on radar over Washington DC leading the US air force to scramble fighter aircraft to investigate. At a press conference, the largest since held since the end of the war, the head of USAF intelligence attempted to play down the fuss and explained the objects seen on airport radars were the result of 'temperature inversions'. The ripples from this controversy crossed the Atlantic where they led an elderly Winston Churchill to ask his Air Minister: 'What does all this stuff about flying saucers amount to? What can it mean? What is the truth?' (Clarke and Roberts 2002: 104)

By this stage if there were any doubts that saucers were simply an American craze or products of 'mass hysteria' these were suspended. The autumn of 1952 marked a turning point. A fresh wave of saucer sightings were made by RAF aircrew during a

major NATO exercise in the North Sea, Operation Mainbrace, which again made newspaper headlines. Flying saucers had survived a difficult birth. The subject would not go away, as Churchill's advisors in the Air Ministry had hoped. It had become a subject in its own right and with its own literature based upon a growing collection of stories from 'credible witnesses'. At this stage experts on flying saucers were mainly American but a group of British saucerers would soon emerge to brand their distinctive personality upon the subject. For some the saucers presented an opportunity to make money or to achieve fame. To others they offered an opportunity to challenge the establishment and the dominance of blinkered scientists who, some believed, were bringing the world close to destruction through their experiments with nuclear weapons.

The Flying Saucer Clubs

Sociologist Shirley Mclver has divided the origins of UFOlogy in Britain into a number of stages of development. The first was that of 'initial concern', when flying saucers became a focus of popular attention mainly through stories published in newspapers and magazines. The second – 'group formation' – arrived in 1952 when two new factors, the foundation of the first contactee groups and UFO research clubs, began (Mclver 1983: 12).

During the 1950s individuals and groups of friends who had become fascinated by the mystery came together to form a new 'movement'. Meetings and correspondence led to the creation of the first flying saucer clubs and societies. They had a variety of aims, from simply logging sighting reports to holding public meetings and inviting speakers to present the latest evidence. Some approached the subject purely from the point of scientific inquiry, while others leaned towards the occult, blending flying saucers with theosophy, spiritualism and other fashionable mystical beliefs. In an age before the Internet, many were initially 'correspondence clubs' which allowed like-minded individuals to swap news with pen friends. In Britain the first such group to appear was the Flying Saucer Club founded by Richard Hughes at Hove, near Brighton, in 1952. For five shillings [25p] a year members could receive the club's quarterly magazine *Flying Saucer News*, and join postal discussions with the worldwide membership.

One of the earliest American saucer groups to emerge was the Aerial Phenomena Research Organisation (APRO), founded in January 1952. It was closely followed in April by the International Flying Saucer Bureau (IFSB) based in Bridgeport, Connecticut. The IFSB was the brainchild of an eccentric factory worker, Albert K. Bender. Flying saucers were just one of Bender's many interests. He was equally obsessed with aliens, monsters, the occult and horror films, and this might explain why he subsequently left the subject as a frightened and worried man.

The IFSB was one of the first clubs of its kind in America and at one stage boasted a membership of six hundred. Its 'international' title led Bender to seek out overseas representatives. And it was an advert placed by the IFSB, published by the London *Daily Mail* in 1952, that was answered by 21-year-old Dennis Plunkett from Bristol. Dennis had become interested in saucers as a teenager when the first saucer wave

coincided with the disappearance of his cousin, Denis Harmer, in mysterious circumstances. Harmer was 27 when he joined the ill-fated crew of the Avro Lancastrian *Star Dust*, a British South American Airways airliner that vanished without trace over the Andes on 2 August 1947. The mystery was compounded by an enigmatic morse code transmission sent by Harmer just before contact was lost with the plane on a flight from Buenos Aires to Santiago in Chile. The meaning of the word 'STENDEC', sent three times in Morse code before transmissions ceased, has never been resolved.

During the 1950s the mysterious disappearance of aircraft became a central theme of the saucer lore. Donald Keyhoe and British writer Harold T. Wilkins developed the idea in their books, using the Captain Mantell incident as proof that some flying saucers might be hostile (Wilkins 1956:130–40). Dennis Plunkett believes it is significant that the disappearance of the *Star Dust* coincided with reports of fast-moving saucers reported from Chile during that fateful August (personal communication, 2005). The actual fate of the eleven crew remained a focus for speculation and conspiracy theories for fifty years. Then in 1998 wreckage from the Lancastrian was discovered at the foot of the Tupungato glacier, some 80 km east of Santiago. Investigators also located the bodies of crew members preserved by the freezing conditions. They established that the pilot had become lost or disorientated in cloud, possibly after meeting a jet stream at high altitude and, believing they were descending to land at Santiago, crashed into the glacier (BBC *News Online* 26 January 2000).

Dennis Plunkett was unaware of the fate his cousin had suffered when as a 16-year-old, he first began to connect the flying saucer mystery with his disappearance. As more sightings and mysterious losses of aircraft followed, his growing fascination led him to make contact with the IFSB. Bender quickly offered the enthusiastic young man the chance to become a card-carrying British representative of his organisation. But almost immediately the embryonic Bristol group faced two crises which threatened to kill it at birth. In October 1952 like many other young men in post-war Britain, Dennis was called up for a compulsory two-year spell of National Service, in his case with the RAF. Luckily Dennis's father, Captain Edgar Plunkett, stepped into the void and offered to take his son's place in the IFSB. Plunkett senior was to continue in that position for a further forty years.

Then, within just six months of the inception of the British branch, Bender wrote to all his pen friends to announce he was closing the IFSB. Little else was revealed until a colleague of Bender's, Gray Barker, published his book *They Knew Too Much About Flying Saucers* (Barker 1956). Barker revealed that while watching a science fiction film Bender had been horrified by the appearance of three shadowy figures with glowing eyes who told him that, in an article he had recently posted to a correspondent, he had accidentally stumbled upon the answer to the saucer mystery. The visit by the mysterious men, dressed entirely in black and wearing 'hats similar to Homburg style', scared him so much that he abandoned all further involvement with flying saucers. Bender's visit by the three 'Men in Black' or 'MIB', as they would become known, was the origin of a long tradition of paranoia among UFOlogists (this is discussed further in Chapter 8). The notion that UFOlogists were being

A young Dennis Plunkett during National Service with the RAF, circa 1954 (photo copyright Dennis Plunkett)



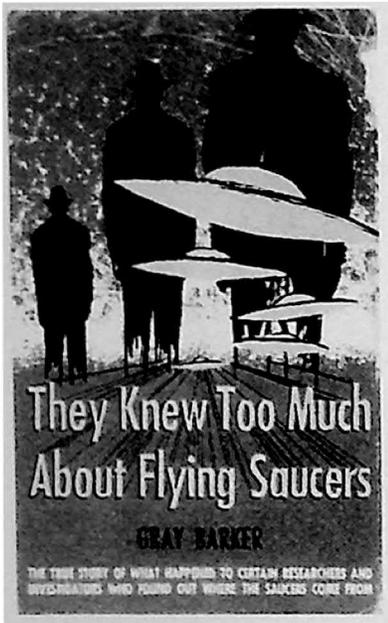
persecuted because of their access to secret information has become one of the most enduring UFOlogical sub-myths. While initially enthusiasts tended to believe the MIB were representatives of the Government, years later Bender debunked this idea in his own account, *Flying Saucers and the Three Men* (Bender 1963). This revealed the trio were really hostile shape-changing aliens from a secret UFO base in Antarctica whose mission was to obtain a rare element from the Earth's oceans. The book, which mixed black magic and spiritualism into this heady brew, read like one of the science fiction stories to which Bender was addicted. The fact that it was published by his friend and fellow saucerer Gray Barker – a self-confessed prankster – suggests it was a leg-pull.

True or false, the persecution of Albert Bender had a profound effect upon the fragile nerves of the saucerers. What was originally an innocent and harmless hobby had been transformed overnight into a potentially dangerous pastime that could result in dire warnings and potential danger to its adherents. Bender's experience was followed by a similar report from an IFSB representative in New Zealand and pen friends spread wild rumours warning visits would soon be made to branches in Canada and Britain. Bender's story was taken seriously, even though one of his contemporaries, James Moseley, writes that given his occult obsessions, it was hardly surprising that he would end up scaring himself:

While he may actually have believed his story, may even have been visited and threatened, I thought it more likely then, and still do, that he cooked the whole thing up to provide a dramatic way to cloak personal reasons for disbanding the club.

(Moseley 2002: 41)

Whatever the truth, Bender's fantastic story led UFOlogists across the globe to suspect they were being harassed or monitored by the MIB or by what became known as 'The Silence Group.' Undeterred by Bender's disappearance, members of



Cover of the 1956 book by Gray Barker on the 'Men in Black'. (Photo supplied by Mary Evans Picture Library)

the embryonic Bristol branch of the IFSB were unanimous in the decision to continue their work. As a result the British Flying Saucer Bureau (BFSB) was founded in November 1953 with Captain Plunkett taking over as secretary and first president. One of the bureau's associates wrote to the Air Ministry 'in order to find out whether or not we, like Bender, were dabbling in something that possibly might be top secret.' The answer was delivered not by the MIB but in the form of an ordinary letter which said the British authorities 'had nothing against anyone studying the subject at that time, but there was no guarantee that in the future the policy might not change.' (Dennis Plunkett, personal communication 2005)

Edgar Plunkett, Dennis's father, had a distinguished background serving in the war and later travelling the world as a radio operator with the Merchant Navy. Despite his public declaration of his belief in a 'nuts and bolts' origin for the saucers as visiting spacecraft, his acceptance of Bender's fantastic story belied his own occult leanings. Dennis Plunkett told us his parents became spiritualists *after* their interest in flying saucers developed and had a daughter who was a practising psychic medium. A slightly different impression is given in a 1953 account of the bureau's activities. This refers to BFSB meetings 'where local members get together to discuss anything from flying saucers to parapsychology and the occult.' It adds: 'They have even tried having séances with a member who is a medium' (Hughes 1953). Bender's own book reveals how as early as November 1952 the Bristol group had invited a trance medium, 'Nurse Woodall', to a meeting in order to contact the occupants of the flying saucers. It was inevitable given the overlap between saucers and spiritualism during this early period that the BFSB would attempt to contact the space visitors via the séance room.

During Edgar Plunkett's presidency the BFSB grew rapidly and at one stage boasted a membership of 1,500, one of the highest figures ever achieved by any UFO group in Britain. For a time Plunkett was kept busy answering up to forty letters per week

Dennis Plunkett, President of the British Flying Saucer Bureau.



from correspondents as far apart as the USA, New Zealand and South America. During those heady days the bureau organised a series of lectures in small venues in and around Bristol which were frequently sold-out with 'standing room only'. In addition to the public meetings bureau members collected and published sightings, made attempts to observe and photograph saucers themselves by attending 'sky-watches', organised exhibitions and evening classes and carefully logged all business in a ledger book. Founder member Dennis Plunkett took over as chairman following the death of his father in 1993. Mr Plunkett's collection of memorabilia illustrates the innocence and enthusiasm which characterised those early days, when members were issued with 'flying saucer club' badges and lists of rules and regulations.

The aims of the bureau, which have remained unchanged since 1953, are interesting in the way they set out in the importance of promoting 'free discussion and social contact' for enthusiasts in order to 'sustain and stimulate interest in, and to collect and disseminate information concerning the phenomena... to determine their nature, origin and purpose.' (Plunkett 1979). Another of the bureau's aims was to 'assist in dispelling any feelings of anxiety or hysteria consequent upon the possible arrival of visitors from space.' In expressing this view, the founding members revealed how close their beliefs actually were to those of the contactee movement who expressed a similar desire for contact with the 'space people' but in more overtly religious language.

Despite their success during the 1950s, the BFSB faded into the background as just one of many dozens of flying saucer groups. They did not make national headlines again until April 2001 when *The Times* published a story that proclaimed 'UFO bureau shuts as aliens shun Earth'. This was adapted from an interview which BFSB chairman Dennis Plunkett, now retired, gave to a Bristol newspaper. In the article he referred to a decline in sighting reports and the reliance of enthusiasts on the Internet for communication leading the bureau to temporarily suspend its meetings. Within



JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH FLYING SAUCER PUPPET AND FLYING SAUCER CLUB



ANOTHER AIR-TO-AIR SIGHTING!
Crew of Portuguese Airlines "Skyliner" see mystery 'cigar'
(See page five)

- ★ SAUCERS IN PARLIAMENT—Editorial
- ★ SWEDISH "GHOST ROCKETS"—Special feature article
- ★ PHOTOGRAPH FROM SUSSEX
- ★ B.F.S.B. NEWSLETTER ★ READERS WRITE
- ★ CONISTON PUZZLE—photo analysis

1/6

Left: A copy of Britain's first magazine devoted to flying saucers.

Opposite: BFSB membership form.

(Both supplied by Dennis Plunkett.)

days this remark was transformed into news of the bureau's closure as a symptom of the 'death of UFOlogy.' The story was copied by media across the world without its accuracy being checked. This, ironically, added to Dennis Plunkett's belief that the media was part of the 'cover up'. He wrote in 2003:

My own view is that this adverse publicity was deliberately engineered and timed to deflect interest from [a UFO conference] due to be held in Washington DC a few weeks later.

(Plunkett 2003)

The Flying Saucer Review

By 1954 many saucer groups and societies had appeared across Britain. Local clubs – many of them short-lived – sprang up in Tunbridge Wells, Stratford-upon-Avon, Edinburgh, Cheltenham, Manchester, Birmingham and Scotland each with their own publications and unique viewpoints. An Anglo-Polish UFO Research Club was founded in 1955 by a Polish émigré, Antoni Szachnowski, who settled in London in 1945. Szachnowski's interest was sparked, like many others, by a sighting of a UFO during the Second World War. As the editor of Britain's only national magazine,

British Flying Saucer Bureau

An information service for those who are interested in this extraordinary subject.

Formed from a small group of people seeking an answer to the question:-

WHAT ARE THEY ?

The Bureau endeavours to collect and disseminate reliable details of authenticated sightings.

OTHER AIMS AND OBJECTS INCLUDE:-

- (a). To promote, sustain, and stimulate interest in the phenomena commonly known as FLYING DISCS or SAUCERS.
- (b). To endeavour to determine their nature, origin and purpose.
- (c). To bring together for free discussion and social contact those interested in the above phenomena and related subjects.

CLUB FACILITIES:- Available for local members.

HEADQUARTERS:- Bristol, England.

MEMBERSHIP:- Open to all persons of either sex over 16 years of age.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION:- 5/- per annum. This sum to cover the four quarterly issues of the FLYING SAUCER NEWS.

MEETINGS:- General - Held monthly. Committee - Weekly or as necessary.

Applications are especially invited from persons with Technical Qualifications who would be prepared to assist in research. Knowledge of Astronomy, Aeronautics, Meteorology, Optics, Electronics, and Photography would be particularly valuable.

Application Form below, when completed, may be returned to the Secretary or any Committee Member.

BRITISH FLYING SAUCER BUREAU

Hon. Sec.: E. L. PLUNKETT (Capt.),
71, Cladworth Road, Horfield, Bristol, 7, England.

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

NAME: (Mr./Mrs./Miss)..... Block Capitals Please

ADDRESS:

.....

AGE:..... QUALIFICATIONS:.....

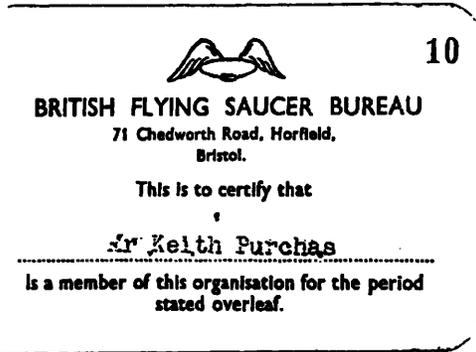
HOBBIES & INTERESTS:.....

IF PREPARED 'TO ASSIST' IN RESEARCH: Yes./No.

Flying Saucerers



Flying saucer ephemera from the BFSB. (Supplied by Dennis Plunkett.)



Flying Saucer News, Richard Hughes quickly found himself overwhelmed by its success and increasing demands upon his time. Although its circulation had risen to 2,000 he found it difficult to produce and distribute copies using a primitive letterpress machine installed in the front room of his home. In February 1954 he agreed to a merge his club with the BFSB so he could concentrate on producing the magazine while the bureau would handle correspondence and organise public lectures. *Flying Saucer News* continued to appear until 1956 when it merged with a new magazine, *Flying Saucer Review*, and Hughes left the stage.

Although UFOlogy was born in the USA for many decades its premier journal of record, the *Flying Saucer Review* (later *FSR*), was written and produced in Britain. Former RAF pilot Derek Dempster was the first of five editors who guided the magazine through half a century of its history. Founded in 1954, the first issue did not appear until the spring of the following year. After overcoming many initial changes of personnel and an equal number of financial crises, the magazine survived where many others had failed mainly because of the high quality of its production and the status of its contributors, who were drawn from the burgeoning international saucer community.

Dempster recalls how his personal interest in saucers began in 1952 when he took over the job of air correspondent for the *Daily Express*. In November 1953 Dempster's article 'Mystery at 60,000 feet' broke the news of a saucer sighting by the crew of an RAF Vampire aircraft over Kent. This story made the front page and propelled him into the world of flying saucery. It was through his reporting assignments that Dempster met another former RAF pilot, Desmond Leslie, whose



The Flying Saucer Review editorial team at the launch of the magazine on Hampstead Heath. (Photo supplied by Derek Dempster.)

book with American contactee George Adamski, *Flying Saucers Have Landed*, had been published in September by Werner Laurie. He recalls:

I knew Desmond quite well. Apart from the fact that we were both RAF pilots we were brought together by Waveney Girvan, the publisher of Desmond's book, who was also interested in flying saucers.

(personal communication, 2002)

Girvan was in contact with a young librarian, Denis Montgomery, who wanted to form an institute or library to collect information about flying saucer sightings and contacts with space people. One outcome was Girvan's idea to launch a popular magazine that could help to support an institute and, possibly, a learned journal. When in 1954 Dempster left his job at the *Daily Express* to freelance, it coincided with a meeting of minds at Werner Laurie's offices in central London. Present at that meeting were eight men who became the founders and publishers of the *Review*. They included Waveney Girvan, Desmond Leslie and his friend Oliver Moxon, Derek Dempster, Lewis 'Ned' Barton (managing editor of *Everybody's* magazine) and Denis Montgomery. Dempster recalls the informal meeting, late in 1954, which set the ball rolling:



Former RAF pilot Derek Dempster, the first editor of Flying Saucer Review. (Photo supplied by Derek Dempster)

We all got together and said 'this is big stuff', we ought to have a magazine specialising in it, and this is how *Flying Saucer Review* was born. They said: 'Derek, you're free now, you can edit it.' And Waveney Girvan gave me an office at No 1, Doughty Street and that's when we kicked off.

(personal communication 2002)

The founders all contributed to a fund of £100 which created a registered company, The Flying Saucer Service Limited, that would publish the magazine. Montgomery was appointed company secretary. One of the later editors, Gordon Creighton, said he was never able to fathom the reason for the 'weird title' of the company and quipped that 'anyone seeing this... must surely have thought that it was some sort of cosmic minicab firm!' Nevertheless, a Press Association newswire dated 18 November 1954 reports it was formed to 'receive, collect and disseminate information concerning the phenomena now known as "flying saucers" or "unidentified flying objects".'

Five issues of the *Review* were produced with Dempster as editor in the first year of publication. In those optimistic early days, it was hoped that if it was successful the company would expand into other activities, but its circulation remained small and commercial success eluded them. Montgomery left soon afterwards to pursue his career in Africa and severed his links with the subject. The magazine survived 'many difficult moments' but kept the title *Flying Saucer Review* for 83 issues before it changed to *FSR* in 1968 under its fourth editor, Charles Bowen. Dempster's interest had waned when he found he was losing work as a freelance journalist because of his association with the subject. Friends and employers, he found, 'were not taking me seriously anymore.' The solution was simple, if not as dramatic as the method chosen by Albert Bender to exit the stage: 'I thought, well I don't know, this is affecting my income and I'm not very happy about it. I edited eight issues and then left.' (personal communication 2002)

Nuts and bolts – the birth of UFOlogy

One of many flying saucer cartoons published during the 1950s. (Courtesy of Daily Mail)



Slowly public opinion was warming to the idea of flying saucers from outer space. There are few opinion survey results from this period that can be compared with the Gallup polls carried out in the USA. However, in 1954 the *Daily Express* published the results of a survey that addressed two matters which preoccupied the British public: the weather, and flying saucers (*Daily Express* 29 July 1954). Asked 'Do you believe that atom bomb and H-bomb tests affect Britain's weather?' a whopping 43 percent answered 'yes.' When the question 'Do you believe in Flying Saucers?' was posed 16.5 percent answered 'yes' and 65 percent 'no.' This answer demonstrates that while the believers remained a minority, in the space of just four years almost a fifth of the British population had been converted to the idea that flying saucers were real and not imaginary. This shift in opinion was summed up by the *The Times* review of the year which mentioned the prevalent notion that freak weather was caused by scientists meddling with the atmosphere: 'Like flying saucers people did not quite know whether to believe in it or not.'

Chapter three

The saucerer's apprentice

The extraordinary life of Desmond Leslie rivals any fiction by Nancy Mitford or Anthony Powell, with overtones of a Fifties sci-fi movie, and a little Weimar decadence thrown in.

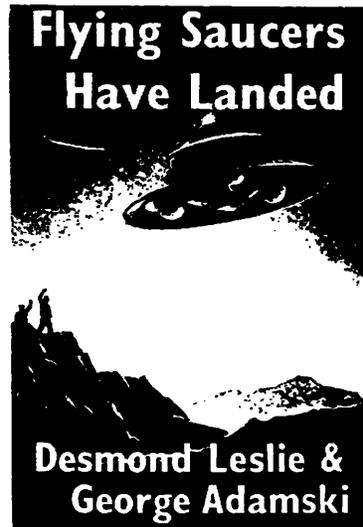
(Hoare 2001)

Desmond Leslie was the founding father of the modern fascination with alien contact and arguably one of the gurus of the New Age movement. His book *Flying Saucers Have Landed*, published in 1953, changed the world. It was co-authored with a Polish-American, George Adamski, who claimed to have met friendly visitors from Venus with whom he travelled around the solar system.

Even before probes reached our neighbouring planets scientists had established that conditions on Mars and Venus were not conducive to life as we know it. Nevertheless many continued to believe that Earth was under surveillance by a highly advanced alien civilisation elsewhere in our solar system. To the horror of those who dismissed Adamski as a fraud, the world went crazy for news of his meetings with angelic space people in the Californian desert. In England alone the book sold 50,000 copies in hardback. By the end of the decade, over one million copies had been sold worldwide and it was eventually translated into fifty languages.

Truth or falsity in Adamski's claims is of less interest than the curious events which launched his bizarre story into the media spotlight of the 1950s. At that time tales of alien encounters were found only in science fiction films, comics and novels. It was through Adamski's writing partner, Desmond Leslie, that the world was introduced to the possibility that not only did friendly aliens exist in our own solar system, but that contact had already been made with selected individuals on Earth. The idea of alien contact is commonplace today, but in 1953 it was accepted only by a small group of occultists and free thinkers who were looking for a new conduit for their spiritual yearnings. Flying saucers provided that channel. Desmond Leslie's skills as a publicist and mover and shaker ensured these fringe ideas were introduced both to a receptive public and to the lofty heights of the British establishment.

*The cover of Leslie and Adamski's 1953 book
Flying Saucers Have Landed.*



The life story of this eccentric Irishman is extraordinary in every respect. Born in 1921 into a family of Anglo-Irish aristocrats, Desmond was the youngest son of poet and author Sir Shane Leslie whose family seat was at Castle Leslie in County Monaghan. His mother was an American beauty from Vermont, Marjorie Hyde, who was a friend of Robert Louis Stevenson. Desmond followed in these exotic literary footsteps. During the Second World War he was a Spitfire pilot and celebrated VE Day by cycling to 10 Downing Street to deliver a bottle of celebratory claret to his cousin Winston Churchill. During the war he met German-born Agnes Bernelle, who worked for the Allies as a broadcaster sending propaganda back to her homeland. The couple married and settled in London where Bernelle followed her acting career and Desmond pursued his interests in music, film and literature.

During the 1950s they mixed in both aristocratic and showbiz circles and Desmond's family connections cemented his privileged access to those at the very heart of the British establishment. The hectic social whirl of the capital placed him in a unique position whereby he could spread his stories of contacts with space people to influential people.

Desmond's decision to reject the prevailing culture of scientific materialism in favour of the world of mysticism, spiritualism and flying saucers might seem at odds with his upbringing. He was, however, the product of a long line of eccentrics with occult leanings and had a sense of humour that endeared him even to his most vociferous critics. During his childhood at Castle Leslie he had been exposed to the mysteries of ancient history, archaeology and esoteric philosophies and he saw in them evidence of a world view that was radically different from that of his contemporaries.

During the Victorian craze for spiritualism the Leslies, like many other establishment figures and families of the time, had become fascinated with the lure of séance room and stories of ghosts and haunted houses. Desmond's father Sir Shane, a second cousin to Winston Churchill, was a colourful character who caused a sensation by

Flying Saucerers

converting to Roman Catholicism and the Nationalist cause. He spent part of his early life in Russia where he befriended Leo Tolstoy before travelling through Europe as a tramp. It was during these travels that he developed a deep fascination with the supernatural which led him to collect stories for his *Ghost Book*, published in 1955. Sir Shane's closest friends at this time were M.R. James and the eccentric Lord Tredegar, who dabbled in the black arts under the influence of Crowley at his country estate in Wales. The supernatural ran in the blood of the Leslies and almost every room in the family home is said to be haunted by their ancestors.

Desmond Leslie's interest in extraterrestrials can be traced to an experience at age of thirteen while at boarding school. One November night in 1934 after 'lights out' the dormitory was suddenly transformed by a brilliant green glare. Rushing to the windows with yells of delight, Desmond and his chums were just in time to glimpse of 'an immense green fireball' moving slowly across the sky before it disappeared behind the Sussex Downs. The glare was such that it reflected light from the walls of a white cottage half a mile away almost as brightly as a neon sign. The boys' excited chatter was stifled by the appearance of an angry schoolmaster, who was determined to put an end to the commotion (Leslie and Adamski 1953).

Desmond recalled this incident in the introduction to the book that was to become a founding manifesto for the UFO movement. In a 1954 interview with *Psychic News* he revealed that his interest in flying saucers began with a spirit message from his mother Marjorie who died in 1951. 'She has consistently influenced him in that direction,' it reported, 'and he has received valuable advice [from the spirit world] on how to stimulate public interest in the matter' (*Psychic News* 15 May 1954).

Flying Saucers Have Landed

Dashingly handsome and in his late twenties, by 1947 Desmond Leslie had written several novels and formed a film company which led him to write and co-direct the screenplay for a crime movie, *Stranger at My Door* (1950) which starred his actress wife. While working on this project he created a soundtrack that became his first venture into experimental music. He collected thousands of different recordings including the humming of bees, cars hooting and babies crying. Agnes Bernelle wrote how 'he used these sounds as a painter would use the colours on his palette to create "sound pictures" and ended up with whole symphonies.' (Bernelle 1996: 140). These were sold as incidental music and were used as soundtracks or accompaniments for dozens of TV programmes, films and commercials from *Dr Who* to Stanley Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove*. These techniques were years ahead of their time and are still being used today in contemporary music.

Desmond's conversion to a believer in flying saucers can be traced to the autumn of 1950 when the subject burst onto the front pages of Britain's Sunday newspapers. In her autobiography his wife refers to the time her husband decided to write 'a potboiler'. She describes how Desmond searched through the libraries 'for a suitable subject that might interest the general public and would make a good documentary' and adds:

The saucerer's apprentice

Desmond Leslie circa 1954. (Photo supplied by Clas Svahn)



He got interested in various esoteric movements and philosophies and finally developed a passion for the recent phenomenon of flying saucers, spending long hours on interviewing people who claimed to have had sightings and sometimes even encounters with the alleged interplanetary visitors.

(Bernelle 1996: 140).

Her account of this period is corroborated by Muriel Dowding, the wife of former Battle of Britain hero Hugh Dowding. In her autobiography she describes how during the mid-1950s the two couples became friends through their husband's mutual interest in flying saucers. Eventually Desmond explained to the Dowdings how he came to write his book:

Desmond had been browsing in a friend's library when his eye was caught by a slim volume called *Atlantis and Lemuria* by W.J. Scott-Elliott, published by the Theosophical Society in 1893. He opened it at random and discovered a chapter entitled *The Vimanas*. It contained allegedly ancient accounts of flying objects, described as 'round, glowing in the dark, and propelled by some unknown, etheric force.'

(Dowding 1980: 148)

Taking his lead from these sources, Desmond began research in the Oriental section of the British Library. He consulted the ancient Sanskrit sagas which form sections of the Mahabharata, the Hindu Vedas and other classics of Eastern literature. What he found made his eyes pop, for hidden within the verses appeared to be descriptions not only of objects in the sky, but also of what seemed to him to be accounts of modern weapons such as atomic bombs and lasers millennia before they were invented. As his research continued he combined the ancient myths with accounts from the middle ages and others culled from nineteenth century newspapers. Here

Flying Saucerers



Artist's impression of the meeting between George Adamski and a Venusian. (Photo supplied by Mary Evans Picture Library)

he borrowed heavily from the writings of an earlier collector of mysterious sky phenomena, Charles Fort, who shared Desmond's disdain for glib scientific explanations. Emerging from this stew was a theory that flying saucers have been with us throughout human history. It seemed to him that Earth had been under constant surveillance by highly advanced aliens who had hastened, or even seeded, our development as a species. In this respect Desmond was again ahead of his time. He was writing about 'ancient astronauts' almost two decades before Eric von Daniken wrote his bestseller *Chariots of the Gods?*

Despite the sensational nature of his subject matter Desmond had problems finding a publisher and Agnes Bernelle feared he was 'writing a crazy book that no one would buy.' While 'flying saucer' literature had a following in America in Britain the subject was deemed simply too far-out for the book-buying public. Muriel Dowding describes how publisher after publisher rejected the manuscript:

One of them, he told us, even turned it down on the grounds that it might have upset the Astronomer Royal! But all this procrastination was working in Desmond's favour. For it gave time for a Polish-born American, and amateur astronomer, George Adamski, to enter the picture.

(Dowding 1980: 149)

This was indeed the turning point, and his wife was forced to admit she could not have been more wrong. For it was the amazing story of the mystic, café-owner and amateur astronomer, George Adamski, that sold the book to a reluctant publishing industry. For while others simply said they had seen lights and objects in the sky, Adamski claimed flying saucers had landed and he had made contact with the occupants! Born in 1891 Adamski had emigrated with his parents to America as a child. Little is known of his early life but by the 1940s he had become a minor figure in the occult scene in California and ran a burger stall on the slopes of Mount Palomar, site of the renowned space observatory. Before flying saucers became fashionable he had dabbled in Eastern philosophy and had written a fictional account of journeys into space. From 1947 his experiences took shape as he began to spot saucers in the Californian desert sky from his home-made observatory. Using

a 15-inch telescope he took several crude photographs of the objects he called 'Scout ships' that would become the centrepiece of the controversy.

This build-up culminated in November 1952 when Adamski received a 'telepathic message' to go out into the desert where he finally met and communicated with the occupants of the saucers. Adamski took along six friends on his trip to the Mojave Desert on the borders of California and Arizona. He claims they all saw a large, silver, cigar-shaped object pass overhead. Shortly afterwards, after ordering his friends to stay well back, he watched a small saucer-shaped scout ship land. From it emerged a tall being with long hair dressed in a one-piece ski-suit. 'I fully realised I was in the presence of a man from space – a human being from another world!' was how Adamski described the meeting (Leslie and Adamski 1953). Through telepathy and sign language this being identified his planet of origin and his purpose. He wished to warn Earthlings about the danger of atomic weapons, whose radiation, he feared, could poison other worlds. The Venusian refused to allow Adamski to take photographs, asking instead for a roll of film that he promised would be returned. Sure enough in December the scout ship reappeared near Adamski's café and the occupant delivered the roll of film. When developed it contained a 'strange photograph' and a 'symbolic message' that could not be deciphered.

Meanwhile, Desmond's manuscript found its way to the desk of a sympathetic publisher who was fascinated by flying saucers. In 1950, Waveney Girvan had played a key role introducing flying saucers to Britain when he sponsored the publication of *The Riddle of the Flying Saucers*, by Gerald Heard (see Chapter 1). At this point George Adamski and Desmond Leslie had never met but the latter soon received news of the alleged contacts from articles in American newspapers. Desmond wrote to Adamski who immediately offered him the whole story plus photographs apparently without any financial reward. Soon afterwards Adamski was in turn offered syndication rights for his story by several large American newspapers. According to Girvan's account, although Adamski was under no legal obligation to his European correspondent, he declined the more lucrative offer and decided to place his story in Desmond Leslie's hands. It was this alleged episode that convinced both Leslie and Girvan that whatever Adamski's motives were, they were not primarily financial.

Desmond delivered his manuscript to the publisher's offices during the spring of 1953. The bundle also contained George Adamski's 'Scout ship' photographs along with a first draft of the Californian's account of a meeting with a visitor from Venus. In his own account of the period Girvan said the material had an immediate appeal to him: 'I felt that I was handling dynamite' (Girvan 1955a: 82). But even then he knew he was taking a risk. The danger of ridicule and the possibility of damage to his imprint if the story was a hoax remained a real possibility. But in the event it was as a direct result of Girvan's intervention that Desmond's 180 page chronology of saucer sightings were combined with Adamski's account of his meeting with a Venusian. The first edition of *Flying Saucers Have Landed* was published in September 1953. As Agnes Bernelle came to accept, the time was right 'and the public was ready for his book.'

Flying Saucerers

Described by one reviewer as 'part crackpot science, part cultural/historical sociology,' Desmond made no apologies for asserting that the first spacecraft from Venus had arrived on Earth in 18,617,841 BC. On a BBC radio broadcast in December, astronomer Bernard Lovell said he found this assertion particularly ludicrous, but Desmond was determined to challenge what he saw as the arrogance of the astronomers. '[The date] was calculated from ancient Brahmin tables,' he protested with characteristic wit. 'And the Brahmins were exceedingly accurate people.' And in response to the question: 'Why don't they land?' Desmond responded:

Their ship would be impounded for evasion of custom duties. Their clothes would be torn off and sold as souvenirs. They would be denounced as saboteurs, anti-Christis, disturbers of the peace, emissaries of Satan, and the rest... We can only conclude that our planet has a bad name in the stellar year books and travel brochures: like those signs in the roads running through jungles, which caution tourists not to tarry nor leave the safety of their cars. "Warning – Do Not Land on Earth. The Natives are Dangerous"

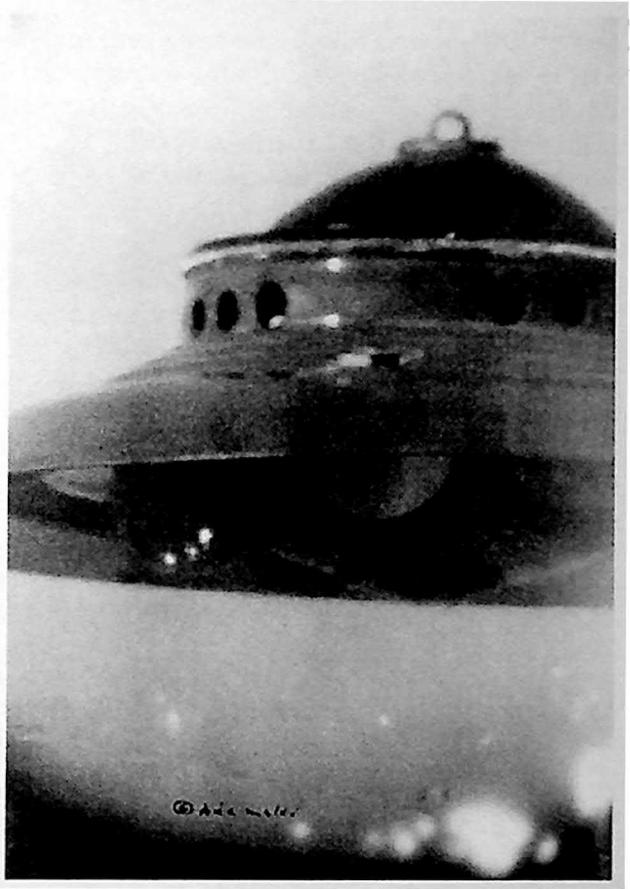
(Hoare 2001)

Flying saucers had arrived in force and Girvan's decision to take a risk on Leslie and Adamski paid off. In the face of guffaws from astronomers and scientists, a significant proportion of the British public were primed to accept the incredible. Given the escalation of the phenomenon from saucers in the sky to landings, the next logical step was actual contact with the occupants of the spacecraft. Adamski's story neatly supplied the goods. It was Desmond Leslie's genius not only to anticipate these events, but also to ride the crest of this breaking wave of interest and flip the 'alien invasion' genre on its head. The visitors were not the bug-eyed Martians envisaged by H.G. Wells or the evil monsters from *Quatermass* that reflected Cold War fears of invasion and conquest by foreign hordes. Instead, Leslie and Adamski's aliens came from Venus, the planet of love, and were peace-loving. They came here to save us from ourselves and to warn us of the dangers of nuclear weapons. This was a message that found a welcome reception among many who feared for the future of the planet.

Confirmation?

'... It had to happen. It has happened. A flying saucer has landed – in the United States!' This was how Maurice Goldsmith opened his account of Adamski's story in the 3 October 1953 edition of the weekly magazine *Illustrated*. His article reproduced the black and white photographs that George Adamski claims he took in December 1952 of a Venusian 'Scout Ship' 35 feet in diameter, complete with three portholes and three 'landing spheres'. Also featured were his photographs of 'six flying saucers' and a cigar-shaped Mother Ship taken through his telescope in 1951. Alongside the photographs was published an artist's impression of the 'man from Venus' whom Adamski claimed to have met in the desert. Goldsmith adopted a tongue-in-cheek stance throughout his extended review of the book and concluded dryly:

One of the photographs showing the Venusian scout ship taken by Adamski (photo supplied by Sir Peter Horsley)



... unfortunately, Adamski's logic is poor and I am prepared to wager that if ever I see life from Venus it will not look anything like me, or Mr Adamski or the being he encountered.

(Goldsmith 1953)

The exciting story of visitors from other planets was the very stuff of schoolboy fantasy. But many were not convinced. To Leslie's gratification, his book was denounced by exactly the sort of people he liked to infuriate. It was comprehensively denounced by astronomers, one of whom was, ironically, the Astronomer Royal, Harold Spencer Jones, whom Desmond had been warned not to upset. In a letter to *Daily Mail* science correspondent J. Stubbs Walker, Spencer Jones described *Flying Saucers Have Landed* as 'a most preposterous book.' The book fared no better elsewhere. Arthur C. Clarke dismissed it as 'deplorable' in a review published by the *Journal of the British Interplanetary Society* and Professor Lovell suggested it should be 'dumped overboard in space.'

In order to silence his critics Desmond needed some evidence that would provide independent confirmation of Adamski's story. He had been told by Adamski to 'watch out for something here [in Britain]' sometime early in 1954. This prediction appeared to come true when a 13-year-old schoolboy who had no connection with the authors produced two photographs apparently showing a Venusian Scout Ship.

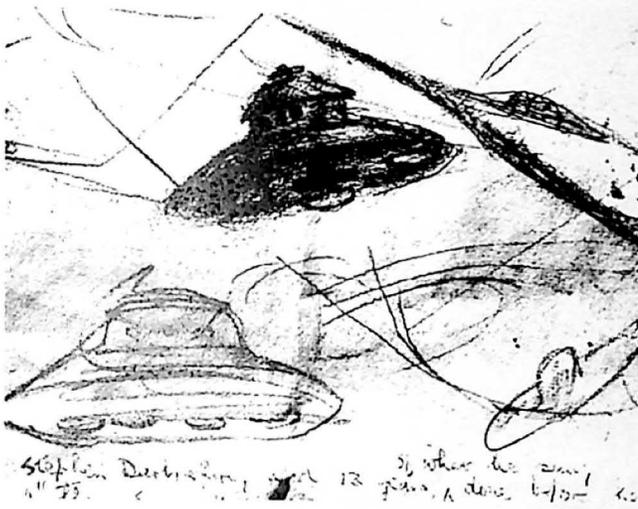
Stephen Darbishire's role in the story began as a result of what he told the authors was 'an accident of history.' On the morning of 15 February 1954 he and eight-year old cousin Adrian Meyer set off for an expedition on the slopes of Coniston Old Man near their home in the Lake District hills. Like Adamski, the two boys received 'a weird telepathic impulse' to leave the house and Stephen took a Kodak box camera recently purchased by his father, a retired doctor. To this day, Stephen maintains that at this point he knew 'absolutely nothing' about the subject of flying saucers. However, he clearly was a highly intelligent, creative boy who had displayed a talent for art that he would develop into a successful career as a landscape painter.

It was the younger boy who drew Stephen's attention to something odd in the sky in the direction of the mountain. Stephen was at that moment looking in the opposite direction when Adrian thumped him on the back and exclaimed: 'Look, what on earth's that?' The 'object' they saw had a silvery, glassy appearance, shining 'like aluminium in the sunlight.' It glided towards them from the direction of Coniston, descending until it disappeared behind a piece of high ground, then once again came into view as Stephen took the first of two photographs. As the shutter clicked a second time 'it suddenly went up into the sky in a great swish.' (Girvan 1955b)

The boys ran home where they found Stephen's father and the family watching TV, oblivious to the events unfolding outside. Dr Darbishire, according to Desmond Leslie 'frankly did not believe it' but made his son sit down and draw what he had seen. Stephen quickly produced some remarkable and accomplished pencil sketches which showed a 'flying saucer' complete with turret, three portholes and landing gear.

Dr Darbishire took the film for development while Stephen was away from home staying with his godmother. When the film was returned he could not believe his eyes. For the final two frames on the film *did* show a fuzzy, luminous saucer-shaped object apparently suspended above a grassy hillock exactly as his son had claimed. On 26 February 1954 the *Lancashire Evening Post* published Darbishire's sketches and a photograph alongside those of the Venusian Scout Ship taken by George Adamski, having taken advice from 'the leading British expert on the subject,' Desmond Leslie. Within days photos of Stephen, Adrian and the 'flying saucer' appeared in the national press and the story took a further peculiar twist.

Desmond seized upon the photos and Stephen's drawings as independent confirmation of Adamski's claims and immediately traveled to Coniston where he was a guest of the family for two days. He quickly dismissed the possibility that Stephen had faked the photographs. The boy's father maintained that he had cross-examined both boys thoroughly before he released the photographs to the press. Curiously, the drawings made by Stephen after his sighting – but before the photographs were developed – were almost but not quite identical to the pictures of the Venusian Scout Ship that had appeared in the magazine *Illustrated*. These were published in October 1953, five months before the schoolboy's own 'sighting'. Stephen later said that he had seen these photographs, an admission which should have raised questions about the reliability of his testimony. Nevertheless, Desmond Leslie ignored any factual concerns because he *wanted to believe*.



Top: *Stephen Darbishire's sketches of flying saucers. (Copyright Stephen Darbishire)*

Above: *One of the photographs taken at Coniston by Stephen Darbishire in 1954. (copyright Stephen Darbishire)*

Right: *Artist's impression of the Coniston sighting. (Illustrated Magazine 12 February 1955)*



Whether through accident or design Stephen Darbishire became a national celebrity overnight. His pictures were flashed around the world, and before February was out the inhabitants of Little Arrow Farm had been introduced to what Stephen calls 'the world of sympathetic magic... modern magic.' (personal communication, 2001) Desmond lost no time in proclaiming Stephen's photo as 'the second of the Adamski type to be photographed in the world' and told a correspondent: 'Don't you see what this could mean – the first concrete *proof!* I am completely convinced that the boys saw Adamski's saucer and that it intended it should be seen. I also feel it highly likely that it may return.'

Flying Saucerers



Desmond Leslie addressing the British Flying Saucer Bureau in 1954. (Photo supplied by Dennis Plunkett)

In March 1954 Desmond arranged for Stephen to speak to a gathering of enthusiasts at Caxton Hall in London which included Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding. At the meeting he and other experts scrutinized enlargements of Stephen's photographs. Recalling the scene in 2001, Stephen told us 'it all got rather hysterical and one chap leapt up and said he could see a face in a porthole.' Soon the saucerers were overjoyed when *another* striking confirmation of their beliefs was provided from someone who used the scientific method to prove his case. Agnes Bernelle describes how:

... I was very much shaken when a young man in a shabby raincoat arrived on our doorstep one night out of nowhere and showed us how it could be proved that two objects photographed thousands of miles apart in different countries were of identical dimensions. The young man, a Mr Crump [sic], had used a method called orthographic projection, nowadays widely used to measure different shapes, and he certainly managed to convince me scientifically of the identical dimensions of the saucers photographed by George Adamski in California and by Steven Derbyshire [sic] in the Lake District.

(Bernelle 1996: 141).

'Mr Crump' was a young aeronautical engineer and hovercraft designer, Leonard G. Cramp, who wrote a book, *Space Gravity and the Flying Saucer* explaining his theory that flying saucers used gravity fields for their propulsion system (Cramp 1954). On 4 December 1956 Cramp joined Stephen Darbishire, Desmond Leslie, Lord Dowding and other saucerers at the BBC's Lime Grove studios where they argued their case in front of an audience of millions on the *First Hand* programme. Leading the 'anti-saucer' contingent was the astronomer Patrick Moore who had interviewed Desmond earlier that year for the BBC's *Panorama* news programme. Moore stepped in after other 'top names' had declined the opportunity to face the 'believers' live on television. Desmond scripted the show and while he and Lord Dowding argued for the existence of flying saucers he persuaded Moore, who was then a virtual unknown, to argue the case against. Despite their on-screen disagreements the pair had much in common. Both had flown with the RAF during the war and shared a

The saucerer's apprentice

*Inventor and flying saucerer
Leonard G. Cramp who died in
2006. (copyright Isle of Wight
County Press)*



quirky sense of humour. Despite their apparent differences they were regarded by the BBC as 'a safe double act' and the two men became lifelong friends.

'Flying Saucers: Do they Exist?' was watched by an estimated eighteen percent of the British public and the BBC was pleased with the positive reaction from their Viewing Panel. Many believed that Desmond's arguments for the reality of saucers were stronger than those of the astronomers against. One wrote: 'Their objections were the age-old ones of scientists to anything outside their own proved rules – egotistical and negative.' (BBC 1956). Viewers said they were impressed by Cramp's diagrams comparing the Adamski and Darbishire photos that were displayed on the programme. Agnes Bernelle said it was Cramp's work that changed her view of flying saucers and those who believed in them. She concluded: 'If both these people had been able to take pictures of identical objects, there must be objects, whatever they may be or wherever they come from.'

'... the world of sympathetic magic'

Many thousands of people read *Flying Saucers Have Landed* and a significant proportion were swayed by the apparent confirmation provided by young Stephen Darbishire's photos and Cramp's work comparing the two images. Desmond embarked on a lecture tour of Britain to promote the book armed with a set of plaster casts of the footprints left by the Venusian in the Californian desert and a fragment of metal supposedly from the scout ship. Bolstered by the success of the book and tour, in the spring of 1954 Desmond journeyed to America to meet Adamski and visit the famous landing site.

Desmond later complained bitterly to Adamski that 'no spacemen came to visit me and no scout ships came gliding down to satisfy my yearning curiosity.' But this later account is contradicted by the contents of his private correspondence where he describes having met 'the space people' while in the company of Adamski (Peter Horsley, personal communication, 2000). The same story emerges in a letter he sent to his wife Agnes in 1954. One cable from California, reproduced by Agnes in an article she wrote for the *Daily Mail's* weekend magazine, reads: 'SAUCER SCORE NOW 12.' This news sent a shiver down her spine, she wrote, for she knew that

Flying Saucerers

Desmond 'would never exaggerate.' In a subsequent letter he intimated that events were building up to a massed landing of saucers, adding: 'If all goes well there will be flying saucer landings in England next year.' This account was apparently written from the lookout point that he, Adamski and their friends had set up in the desert near Mount Palomar: 'Coming into San Diego we saw a beautiful, golden ship in the sunset, but brighter than the sunset,' he continued. 'I had ten-power binoculars with me and was able to study it for half a minute from the halted car. It slowly faded out, the way they do.'

Further missives reassured her they had nothing to fear from the saucer pilots. Both he and Adamski had been in close contact with them and were able to communicate via 'little discs which can pick up our thoughts, and others which translate our vibrations and tones into their own language.' He told his incredulous wife how they had 'learned many of their secrets... we have been given their simple philosophy. It runs parallel to the original teachings of Jesus. If attacked, they would prefer to let themselves be destroyed rather than kill,' he explained. During his stay in California Desmond was introduced to other American 'contactees' who had by now received messages from the space people. One of these was 'Dr' George Hunt Williamson, who happened to be one of the 'independent witnesses' to Adamski's initial contact in the desert. In her article, Agnes said her husband wrote again excitedly on 4 July to make even more far-fetched claims:

The first one I saw was oval with a dome on top. We now have plans and blueprints of the interior layouts of four or five different types of craft. And we have details of the landing arrangements which, believe me, are out of this world! Everything the spacemen say is so very true. Their description of events is beyond our wildest science fiction.

(Bernelle 1954)

Agnes told readers of the *Mail* that Desmond's letters were full of facts which had shaken her out of her initial disbelief. She had come to share his conviction that the space people were mankind's only means of salvation from the Cold War. She wrote: 'For Desmond is convinced that the atom and hydrogen bomb warfare may not only end our earth's existence but could throw the whole universe off balance.' (Bernelle 1954) Given these revelations, it is odd that Desmond Leslie never publicly mentioned these 'contacts' again.

Following his visit to the USA he continued his hectic schedule when he returned to England. Although he did not have the proof his wife had promised readers of the *Mail* he now set out to put big-screen fictional flesh on the bones of Adamski's wilder claims. The screenplay that he produced for the British-made film *Stranger from Venus* must have been written many months before its cinema release in 1954. Some may have thought it ironic that the storyline mirrored that of *Flying Saucers Have Landed* in that it featured a man from Venus who arrives on Earth to warn of the danger posed by nuclear weapons. In terms of genre *Stranger* was modeled upon the success of its 1951 predecessor, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and even featured the female star of that film, Patricia Neal, as its heroine.

The saucerer's apprentice

Desmond Leslie's ventures into literature and film were in addition to his musical compositions and frequent magazine articles. These included numerous contributions to *Flying Saucer Review*, a magazine which he helped to found in 1955. Looking upon this period in her own memoirs, Agnes Bernelle described how her husband had by now become a household name with the lunatic fringe.

We received letters and phone calls from the strangest of people, including ladies who wanted Desmond to father their children, to create the perfect man. Mediums with messages from Mars were not uncommon. Invitations for Desmond to lecture arrived in large numbers.

(Bernelle 1996)

This attention eventually began to wear thin and Agnes came to believe her husband was going through 'what can only be described as an "esoteric orgy" with more and more UFO nuts and mediums occupying his time.' Tensions came to a head when a transfiguration medium transformed himself into a 'Chinaman' on the carpet of the couple's flat in St John's Wood. From this point onwards she began to distance herself from the weird goings on in Desmond's social circle and the pair eventually divorced. A snapshot of their lifestyle was provided by a special correspondent of *The Times* who visited the couple's flat to interview the man who by 1958 had become 'the world authority on flying saucers.' Desmond had by then collected more than one hundred stories of contacts with Venusians and Martians. Of these he thought only ten or twenty were 'genuine' but his distinctive humour continued to shine through in the article:

... reports of flying saucers are absolutely genuine – apart from the crooks and fakes... Nor is he, he gives you to understand, susceptible to superstition: he describes himself, at 36, as a Roman Catholic, with theosophical tendencies.... Wandering around and admiring his period furniture and chinoiserie one comes upon relevant bric-a-brac: a plaster cast of one of the footprints left in the desert by one of Mr Adamski's visitors (elegantly displayed in an antique showcase); also, of course, lots of photographs, some endorsed: 'Venusian Scout Hovering, December 13, 1952, 9 a.m.' and the like.

(*The Times* 10 April 1958)

Questioned about Adamski's 1956 sequel, *Inside the Spaceships*, which purported to describe his visits to inhabited parts of the Moon, Venus and Saturn, Desmond was less forthcoming. 'It had quite a few understandable mistakes,' he replied. Privately, both Desmond and Stephen Darbishire suspected the charismatic contactee's erratic behaviour may have been explained by schizophrenia. Others suspected that the 'space people' he claimed to have contacted were, given his background in theosophy, more spiritual than flesh and blood creatures and the contactee had undergone some form of psychic experience. When challenged by Desmond on the physical nature of his 'visitors' Adamski retorted: 'They were not goddam spooks!' (Leslie 1970: 250)

Flying Saucerers

In public at least, Desmond continued to defend his former co-author but he fell short of providing a full endorsement of his former partner's intergalactic sojourns. Instead he fell back upon the validity of the original account he endorsed in *Flying Saucers Have Landed*: 'To assess the validity of his claims is still difficult,' he admitted, adding:

I am personally completely satisfied that his photos and early contacts are completely authentic and will in time be proven by later events. Some of his claims take a lot of swallowing. But just when you had decided to write him off as a babblers, something turns up to substantiate them. For instance when I first visited him in 1954 he spoke of the Van Allen Belts and the 'fireflies in space' as later seen by the cosmonauts. Neither of these was known at the time.

(Leslie 1970: 242–3)

Although Leslie remained a potent force in the flying saucer subculture, the 1960s saw him taking a back seat from the fame and publicity. Even then he was never completely out of the public eye. In 1963 he achieved considerable notoriety when, appalled by Bernard Levin's damning review of his wife's solo show *Savagery and Delight*, he punched the broadcaster on the nose during a live transmission of *That Was The Week That Was*. That year also saw him return to Ireland to take charge of the family seat at Glaslough. This move took up much of his time but as usual he turned it to his advantage. Instead of settling down as landed gentry Leslie was soon ruffling local sensibilities when he opened a trendy nightclub in the grounds of Castle Leslie called Annabel's On the Bog, in a parody of the world famous Annabel's of London. Despite patronage by fashionable celebrities such as Mick Jagger, Marianne Faithful and Beatle Paul McCartney (whose links with the Leslie's led him back to Glaslough for his marriage to Heather Mills in 2002) the local clergy were outraged and petitioned for the club to be closed down.

Undeterred, and now under the spell of flower power, Leslie belatedly returned to flying saucers for inspiration and in 1967 organised the first ever UFO conference in Britain held on nearby Lusty Beg island (see Chapter 11). George Adamski died in 1965. By 2001, when Desmond Leslie passed away, he had become 'a legendary witness to the birth of UFOlogy.' (Hoare 2001)

Chapter four

The great and good

I think that the existence of these vehicles must convince every open-minded enquirer. I believe that the occupants come from outer space... but I do not know why they persist in buzzing about in our atmosphere and make so little attempt to contact the many people who would receive them properly.

(Air Chief Marshal Lord Hugh Dowding, 5 November 1960 to Paul Inglesby, personal communication 2005)

Interest today in the supernatural is so widespread that declarations by celebrities and other public figures of personal belief in and experience of aliens, ghosts or angels is relatively commonplace. Half a century ago the situation was very different. Although the 1954 opinion poll suggested nearly a fifth of the British population believed in flying saucers, the subject was still considered very outré. People on the receiving end of ridicule tended to keep their views to themselves or share them only with like-minded friends. Nevertheless, from the earliest days a number of leading establishment figures and celebrities from the military to politics and the world of entertainment defied the disapproval of their peers to express what they believed.

The most publicly visible of these pioneers were Members of Parliament. Flying saucers were the subject of questions in the House of Commons for the first time in November 1953 when a group of concerned MPs questioned the Under Secretary of State for Air, Nigel Birch, about a sighting made by RAF aircrew which had made the front page of the *Daily Express*. Then in May 1955 Major Patrick Wall, Tory MP for Haltemprice, quizzed Birch's successor, George Ward, over the existence of a mysterious Air Ministry report on flying saucers (*Sunday Dispatch*, 30 April 1955). After receiving an unsatisfactory reply, Wall's interest was piqued. He would continue to pose questions on UFOs both privately and in the Commons over the course of his thirty-year career as an MP. As a former soldier and military advisor to NATO during the Cold War, Wall had the ear of the military elite, but nevertheless

shortly before his death he said he was never able to get 'a sensible answer' from the authorities.

Those who believed in a government cover-up took the silence as evidence for a conspiracy to hide 'the truth' (of alien visits). In reality it appears the government could provide no answers simply because they knew little more than anyone else. While 'top people' certainly stood out from the crowd, they had no more access to secret information about the saucers than the average person in the street. In fact, household names became UFO believers in much the same way as ordinary people, by reading books and newspapers and tuning in to the grapevine. While their level of knowledge varied, their public statements had a massive impact on public opinion and the future development of 'the UFO movement'.

In the high echelons of British society, sceptics dominated discourse on the topic. Although the distinguished scientist Sir Henry Tizard persuaded the government to establish a Working Party on Flying Saucers in 1950, this reached negative conclusions and Tizard's views were sidelined (Clarke and Roberts 2002). Highly-placed saucer 'believers' tended to be politicians or retired military men rather than scientists. One example was the Secretary of State for Air and former wartime pilot, George Ward. Desmond Leslie claimed that Lord Ward (1907–88) was never allowed to express his views publicly and when he challenged his friend to account for inadequate explanations offered by the Air Ministry, he replied:

What am I to say? I know it wasn't a balloon. You know it wasn't a balloon. But until I've got a saucer on the ground in Hyde Park and can charge the public 6d a go to enter, it must be balloons, otherwise the Government would fall and I would lose my job.

(Leslie 1963: 9)

Ward's views were shared to some extent by Defence Minister Duncan Sandys, the son-in-law of Winston Churchill, who told an official 'he believed, or said he believed some of the evidence' while on a visit to Chequers in 1955. And, although the old man himself once famously quizzed his advisors on the saucers, his Private Secretary Anthony Montague-Browne summed up his interest as 'ephemeral... he wanted to know the facts in case he was questioned in Parliament. That's all.' (personal communication, 2000) This view is supported by an anecdote from 1954 when artist Bernard Hailstone was painting a portrait of Churchill in the grounds of the Prime Minister's Westerham home. During the proceedings the conversation turned to the subject of flying saucers and space travel. Churchill's response was: 'I think that we should treat other planets with the contempt they deserve.' (*Daily Telegraph* 26 January 1965)

Flying saucers were the latest addition to a list of unconventional interests for a number of retired military figures who found refuge in 'fringe' beliefs during their retirement. Bored by the austerity of post-war Britain, they sought excitement and spiritual fulfilment by escaping into the world of spiritualism, flying saucers and space people. Their beliefs may have been unusual but their influence and the respect they commanded, both among their peers and the public at large, cannot be

underestimated. By the mid-50s as the Cold War reached its height and fears of a nuclear confrontation increased, a number of this discreet 'gentleman's club' had become convinced Earth was under observation by friendly aliens.

Mountbatten

Lord Mountbatten of Burma is probably the best-known establishment figure who publicly expressed his fascination with flying saucers. His involvement reached its peak at the height of public interest between 1950 and 1955. These years coincided with the period of his life between leaving his post as Viceroy of India and taking up the highest positions in the British military. Mountbatten avidly consumed the early literature on the subject. As we have noted, it was originally through Mountbatten's insistence that in 1950 his friend Charles Eade, editor of the London *Sunday Dispatch*, launched the saucers across the breakfast tables of the nation. Philip Zeigler's biography notes that Mountbatten was an atheist who rejected the supernatural and only accepted flying saucers in terms of them being phenomena that were open to rational study and explanation. His theories about the origin of UFOs were clearly stated in letters to Eade, where he writes of his conviction they were not manmade but 'from some heavenly body, probably a planet.' (Ziegler 1985: 494)

A graphic account of how far Mountbatten's fascination with saucers had grown by 1954 was given to us by his youngest daughter, Lady Pamela Hicks. She revealed her father was fond of posing the question 'Do you believe?' during his visits to royal courts and capitals across Europe. Drawing directly upon notes from her diary, she told us of a visit they made to Libya when Mountbatten was Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces in the Mediterranean. During lunch with King Idris the party was joined by the British Ambassador, Sir Alec Kirkbride and Sir John Glubb, the Commander of the Arab Legion.

After the usual pleasantries there was quite a long silence and [my father] decided to break it by asking what for him was the burning question: 'Will you ask his Majesty if he believes in flying saucers?' There was this frightful pause... and the King thought his leg was being pulled. But when it was established that it was a genuine question, he said "Well of course he believed in them." He said he had seen two of them himself and added that the Prophet recorded how a close companion of his had seen one of the fiery sphere type – as had his camel... and then Glubb Pasha said he had seen one, and then Kirkbride joined in and said he had too.'

(Lady Hicks, personal communication 2002)

Mountbatten's papers document his evolving opinions that were typical of the more rational, scientific minds drawn to the study of UFOs. Initially he was overwhelmed and impressed by what appeared to be an irrefutable mountain of evidence from 'credible witnesses'. But that certainty was replaced by doubt when the reliability of both the 'evidence' and the testimony upon which it was based upon was called into doubt. More directly, Mountbatten became alarmed by the growing numbers of



Air Marshal Sir Peter Horsley, who advised Prince Philip on flying saucers

charlatans and publicity seekers who had gravitated towards the subject. They wished to use his name and that of his nephew, Prince Philip, to further their own agenda. As the possibility of public exposure of their interest grew, so did their fear of ridicule. When in October 1954 Mountbatten became First Sea Lord he instructed his secretary at the Admiralty to downplay his interest in UFOs to anyone who inquired about it. This change of mind is clear from a note he wrote to Prince Philip's equerry, Squadron Leader Peter Horsley, in 1955 which says he was now being 'very careful about expressing any views on flying saucers outside a very intimate circle.' (Sir Peter Horsley, personal communication 2000)

The turning point for Mountbatten came when he found himself caught up in a flying saucer landing on his own doorstep. On 23 February 1955 a bricklayer on his way to work in the grounds of Broadlands, Mountbatten's residence at Romsey in Hampshire, claimed he had been startled by the appearance of a flying saucer. According to a signed statement preserved in Mountbatten's papers, the bricklayer, Frederick Briggs, said the UFO was shaped like a child's humming top, and was 20 to 30 feet in diameter, aluminium in colour, like a saucepan but with portholes in its side. Briggs said he had dismounted from his bicycle as the saucer hovered and was amazed to see a tube descend from its centre. A platform appeared in the tube, containing a man. He was wearing a dark suit or overalls and a close-fitting helmet. As he watched Briggs was suddenly overcome by an 'unseen force' which caused

The great and good

him to fall to the ground with his bicycle. The tube retracted into the flying saucer, which suddenly shot straight up into the sky and disappeared.

Mountbatten records how he interviewed Briggs before visiting the scene of the sighting with his foreman and younger daughter Pamela. Although they found marks in the snow consistent with Briggs' account of his movements, there was no physical evidence of the flying saucer and none of the bricklayer's colleagues working in and around the house or in the town saw or heard anything unusual. His employees were fully aware of Mountbatten's interest in UFOs. As Pamela, now Lady Hicks, recalled it quickly became apparent that Briggs story was a truly inspired excuse for being late for work, 'a "may I go to my grandmother's funeral" type story' as she delicately put it. In the years that followed Desmond Leslie and other UFOlogists wrote to Mountbatten asking for permission to publish the story. Suddenly he found himself in a dilemma, being forced to both confirm the story and at the same time downplay its significance. In a letter to one persistent correspondent he wrote that he could not imagine how Desmond Leslie could claim that he had confirmed its factual basis: '... I did not express any belief whatever in the story, which remains completely unproven.' (letter to Leslie Otley dated 19 July 1961 in the Broadlands Archive)

By the time of Mountbatten's appointment in 1959 as Chief of Defence Staff, the most senior military post in the British Government, his disillusionment with UFOlogy was almost complete but there was one final significant moment. In June 1962 Mountbatten read an article by Waveney Girvan, of the *Flying Saucer Review* and plucked up courage to raise the topic with his close friend, the MoD's Chief Scientific Advisor, Sir Solly Zuckerman. In an 'off-the-record' exchange he confessed to having 'long been fascinated by flying saucers' and asked if the subject should be investigated further. Zuckerman's reply was typically pragmatic: 'I do not know how one would set about investigating the subject,' he said, adding that the 'evidence' for UFOs was similar to that for ghosts and ESP. Mountbatten mentioned this exchange in a letter to a UFOlogist in 1965:

It is true I used to take an interest in UFOs but I am afraid I have gradually lost interest, after our Chief Scientific Adviser in the MoD, Sir Solly Zuckerman, drew a parallel with the existence of ghosts. He said there were as many attested cases of ghosts being seen as of UFOs and so I am afraid I don't intend to continue to take an interest in what used to fascinate me in the old days.

(Inglesby 1994: 28)

The royal family

Despite his declining interest, there is no doubt that Mountbatten shared his early fascination for flying saucers with his nephew Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh. Both men were subscribers to *Flying Saucer Review* and according to Gordon Creighton since its inception copies of the magazine have been sent to Buckingham Palace. Sir Peter Horsley, who was equerry to the Duke from 1952–5 wrote that during this period:

Flying Saucerers

Prince Philip was open to the immense possibilities of new technology leading to space exploration, while at the same time not discounting that, just as we were on the fringe of breaking out into space, so other older civilisations in the universe might already have done so.

(Horsley 1997: 172)

Horsley's autobiography reveals how reports of flying saucers were enthusiastically discussed at Buckingham Palace throughout his time as equerry. He recalls that Prince Philip 'agreed that I could investigate the more credible reports [of flying saucers] provided I kept it all in perspective and did not involve his office in any kind of publicity or sponsorship.' As a result of his position in the RAF, Horsley was given 'carte blanche to read any reports and interview pilots.' He was also able to draw upon the experience and contacts of colleagues in Fighter Command and the civilian airlines by virtue of his 'unofficial' capacity as royal UFO investigator.

Perhaps the strangest outcome of Prince Philip's interest was Peter Horsley's role in inviting a number of flying saucer witnesses to discuss their experiences at Buckingham Palace. These included the captain of a BOAC airliner, James Howard, who had reported, along with other crew members and passengers, a formation of UFOs while flying over the North Atlantic in June 1954. Another visitor was schoolboy Stephen Darbishire who had taken two photographs of a 'saucer' above Coniston in February of that year. When we interviewed Sir Peter Horsley, shortly before his death in 2001, he explained his reason for inviting UFO witnesses to the Palace was partly to 'put them on the spot' and test their honesty in the presence of royalty, a method as effective as any truth serum. Sir Peter told us the sincerity of the witnesses he interviewed was evident and this led him to conclude that UFOs were a reality. Like Mountbatten, however, he was less impressed by the saucer movement and by what he described as 'the growing body of people promoting sightings for mercenary reasons or self-advertisement.'

Among these less than objective influences he included Desmond Leslie, who was on friendly terms with General Sir Frederick 'Boy' Browning. The General, who was the husband of author Daphne du Maurier, led the British airborne forces during the disastrous Operation Market Garden in 1943. In retirement Browning became a private secretary to the Queen and like other former military officers became fascinated by flying saucers. But Browning went further than any other establishment figure by taking seriously the claims of those who said they had met the space people. This situation came to a head in 1959 when a plot was hatched to engineer a meeting between the royals and George Adamski. In April of that year Adamski embarked on a European lecture tour which included an audience with the Dutch royal family. Shortly before the 68-year-old contactee arrived in London Desmond Leslie wrote to both Browning and the Duke, enclosing a personal invitation for them to meet Adamski, in strict secrecy if necessary. The Duke immediately realised the

Opposite: Lord Dowding declares his faith in flying saucers in 1954. (By permission of the British Library)

An Article By One Of Britain's Great War Leaders

I Believe In Flying Saucers

By

**Air Chief Marshal
LORD DOWDING,**
*Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief
Fighter Command In The
Battle of Britain*



I HAVE never seen a "Flying Saucer," and yet I believe that they exist. I have never seen Australia, and yet I believe that Australia also exists. My belief in both cases is based upon cumulative evidence in such quantity that, for me at any rate, it brings complete conviction.

More than 10,000 sightings have been reported, the majority of which cannot be accounted for by any "scientific" explanation, e.g., that they are hallucinations, the effects of light refraction, meteors, wheels falling from aeroplanes, and the like.

Best Evidence

THE best available evidence, perhaps, is contained in Major Donald Keyhoe's recent book, "Flying Saucers From Outer Space."

I say this because most of the incidents which he records have been checked by the Intelligence Branch of the United States Air Force. They endorse the accuracy of the evidence, but they put forward no explanation. The critics who deny the existence of these objects must produce some alternative theory which will account for the observed facts.

In a brief article I cannot deal at length with the suggestion that they are new types of aircraft under development by Russia or the U.S. They have been tracked on radar screens in America—on one occasion by three screens simultaneously—and the observed speed has been as great as 9,000 miles an hour.

No earthly materials that we know of could be forced through the air at such a speed without getting too hot to allow human occupants to exist. The accelerations which they develop in starting, changing course, and stopping would also

make human life as we know it, impossible.

I say then that I am convinced that these objects do exist and that they are not manufactured by any nation on earth. I am therefore not an alternative to accepting the theory that they come from some extra-terrestrial source.

And why should this be considered to be such a ridiculous idea? In ten



This is the outstanding picture in the Flying Saucer debate.

years' time we shall probably have shot a rocket to the moon. In a hundred years we may have made the return trip with a manned projectile. In 500 years we may have reached the nearer planets. Are we so arrogant as to maintain that the inhabitants of no planet are as much as 500 years ahead of us in scientific development?

Principal Questions

PLEASE do not tell me that scientists affirm that life is not possible on other planets. They assume that "life" must necessarily exist in earth-type bodies. But it is only reasonable to suppose that bodies would be conditioned to the physical conditions existing on each planet.

Now that is as far as my "convictions" take me: beyond this my ideas are frankly speculative. The principal questions which arise are: Where do these objects come from? And what are the motives of the

occupants in visiting the Earth's atmosphere?

I think that we must resist the tendency to assume that they all come from the same planet, or that they are all actuated by similar motives. It might be that visitors from one planet wished to help us in our evolution from the cubs of a higher level to which they had attained.

Another planet might send an expedition to ascertain what have been these terrible explosions which they have observed, and to prevent us from discriminating other people besides ourselves by the new toys with which we are so light-heartedly playing.

Other visitors might have come bent solely on scientific discovery, and might regard us with the dispassionate aloofness with which we might regard insects found beneath an upturned stone.

A Warning

IF I say that I believe that the majority of our visitors are actuated by friendly and helpful motives, I cannot produce the same volume of evidence in support of my opinion as I have done for the physical reality of the Saucers; but the fragmentary and uncorroborated evidence which I have is reinforced by the reasonability, if not the probability, of the idea that if the inhabitants of other planets are so far ahead of us in making use of the (to us) unknown forces of nature, they may well be equally far ahead of us in spiritual evolution, and may have better methods of spreading their wisdom than by killing those who disagree with them.

But this hypothesis is not universally accepted, particularly in the U.S., where fighters sent up to intercept the visitors have sometimes had unpleasant experiences. In the case of Captain Mantel, who was sent to investigate a "huge round glowing

object," his machine disintegrated in mid-air and his body was found among the wreckage.

This brings me to the most important thing which I have to say. It is to give a warning against attempts to

open a fire either with guns or airplanes on these objects. Looked at from the purely selfish aspect, such gratuitous folly might well turn neutral curiosity into active hostility, and it may be assumed that those who visit us from outer space can well look after themselves and will have the means of making us sorry that we compelled them to defend themselves.

But it is not on this note that I wish to finish. It seems possible that the first time in recorded history intelligible communication on the physical level may become possible between the earth and other planets of the solar system.

Such a prospect is epoch-making in the literal sense of the word, and we should be guilty of criminal folly if we were to do anything to hinder a contact which may well bring untold blessings to a distraught humanity.

danger this would place him in and he annotated Leslie's letter with the words 'Not on your Nellie!' And in a note to Browning he added: 'He may not be a crank but he's a bit too fanciful for me!' (Sir Peter Horsley, personal communication 2000).

Nevertheless both General Browning and Peter Horsley met Leslie and Adamski during his visit at a private address in London. Horsley told us was not impressed by either. He felt that Desmond Leslie was 'probably sincere but gullible, sucked into the saucer cult by people who hoped to profit from it such as Adamski' and he warned Browning against having any further contact with them. The Netherlands' Queen Juliana and Prince Bernhard also met Adamski and at a press conference in The Hague on 20 May he made the bold claim that the British royal family were keen to meet him and that 'Prince Philip so far has been the most interested.'

The RAF's finest

Mountbatten and Prince Philip's interest in flying saucers appears to have been an offshoot of their fascination with space travel and the possibility of life on other worlds. Neither man showed any inclination to dabble with spiritualism and the occult in their search for answers, unlike Lord Dowding whose conversion to the contactee faction of saucery was a natural progression of his faith in the spirit world.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding (1882–1970) was head of Fighter Command in 1940 and is remembered as the cool-headed mastermind of the RAF's victory over the Luftwaffe during the Battle of Britain. Despite his achievements he was not liked by colleagues who conspired to remove him from power. In retirement from 1942 he devoted himself to spiritualism and became a member of the Theosophical Society. Dowding soon became a regular speaker on the occult circuit where he acquired, in his own words, some 'very unfashionable interests.' His biographer Basil Collier notes that Dowding based his faith not on personal experiences but on what he read in books. Like Conan Doyle before him, he was impressed by the sincerity of psychic mediums he consulted and found great significance in messages from the spirit world. In the summer of 1943 some of these messages, allegedly received from RAF crew killed in action, were published in the *Sunday Pictorial*. One critic described them as 'the usual vague and superficial chatter that mediums and automatic scribes have been turning out for years.' (Collier 1957: 243) Such comments did not discourage Dowding, who believed the evidence 'would convince a judge and jury', a phrase he and others would later use in the context of flying saucers. The retired Air Chief Marshal married his second wife, Muriel Albino, in 1951. She shared his interest in spiritualism and theosophy but was also fascinated by flying saucers and encouraged him to speak out.

Dowding's first public statement on flying saucers came at meeting of the Kent Federation of Spiritualists in May 1954. According to the spiritualist newspaper *The Two Worlds*, he said: 'I believe that the objects appearing in our atmosphere do not all come from one source, not even all from the solar system.' He added: 'These objects are real, and a considerable number of them are occupied by people who desire to help us.' (*The Two Worlds* 22 May 1954). It was Dowding's belief that the explosion of the hydrogen bombs had caused 'a tremendous amount of harm to the

etheric atmosphere' not only of the Earth, but of other planets. As a result a number of space people were working to help save the world. In expressing these views in 1954 Dowding was not far removed from the philosophy of the Aetherius Society. Indeed, as his interest developed he made it plain in his lectures that he was interested not in sightings of saucers but in the stories of those who claimed to have made contact with their occupants. This reflected the influence of theosophy whose teachings led him to accept the stories told by George Adamski and an assortment of American contactees.

Curiously, in July 1954 when the *Sunday Dispatch* broke the news of Dowding's conversion they omitted any mention of the link between his interest in saucers and his spiritualist faith. In the article Dowding was given the opportunity to expound his belief that the saucer occupants were peace loving, echoing the saucers as salvation message believed by hundreds of thousands of people. He railed against the idea that our air force should attempt to shoot them down saying, 'we should be guilty of criminal folly if we were to do anything to hinder a contact which may well bring untold blessings to a distraught humanity.' (*Sunday Dispatch* 11 July 1954)

Dowding's belief in the reality of flying saucers and their occupants was shared by one of his contemporaries who decided to speak openly. Air Marshal Sir Victor Goddard (1897–1987) shared Dowding's interests in spiritualism but arrived at his conclusions as a result of personal experiences. Goddard saw service in both world wars and in 1935 became the Air Ministry's first Deputy Director of Intelligence, a post that would – under his successors in the 1950s – become directly responsible for the investigation (and some believe, the cover-up) of UFO reports. At this time he was a sceptic and when in Washington in 1947 he did his best to persuade the US Air Force to stop their inquiries into saucer sightings which he believed were hoaxes.

Following retirement in 1951 Goddard did a U-turn, seemingly as a result of his interest in parapsychology. During the 1960s his work for the New Age Wrekin Trust founded by Sir George Trevelyan led to 'a deep conviction of the reality of the world of the spirit.' During the UFO wave of 1967 Goddard joined an informal group of establishment enthusiasts who met to discuss the subject. He was encouraged by Brinsley le Poer Trench to deliver a lecture at Caxton Hall in May 1969. This presentation shocked many in the audience who expected Goddard to endorse the idea that saucers were craft from other worlds. Instead, the RAF veteran announced that only a tiny percentage of reported sightings were 'unidentifiable' and many of these could only be perceived by those with 'second sight.' UFOs and their occupants, Goddard said, were not necessarily extraterrestrial but more 'paraphysical', the products of what he called 'the astral world of illusion.' The messages passed on by denizens of this world to UFO contactees could be sincere but in other cases their intentions were to 'astonish and disturb the gullible for the devil of it.' (Goddard 1969)

In stating these beliefs Goddard was drawing upon his own psychic experiences and the UFOlogical zeitgeist of the period. For many newcomers these ideas seemed like a breath of fresh air which gelled with the New Age religions of the late 1960s. However, for the 'nuts and bolts' saucerers Goddard's mixing of UFOs with the

occult was moving too far in the direction of the contactees. For his part, Goddard regarded his 1969 lecture as his 'final word' and although he returned to UFOlogy again in the late 1970s he did not add anything new to his conviction that UFOs were directly intertwined with psychic phenomena.

Science and the UFOs

One begins to wonder what is behind the Flying Saucers when men of Arthur C. Clarke's reputation appear to be determined to decry them at all costs. Professional jealousy, perhaps?

Letter published in *Flying Saucer News* 1953–4

In stark contrast to the eccentric views of assorted establishment figures were the forces of reason, represented by the scientific establishment. As the flying saucer mystery grew during the 1950s the media naturally turned to scientists – and specifically to astronomers – for immediate and definitive opinions. Usually, but not always, the response was to dismiss reports as misperceptions of stars or weather balloons and to debunk the idea that any UFOs were alien spacecraft. Nevertheless, institutionalised debunking failed to have much impact on popular belief in alien visitations, particularly when official explanations for sightings later turned out to be wrong. A particularly good example was the US Air Force's explanation for the Mantell incident discussed in Chapter 1. Those who 'wanted to believe' regarded this type of ill-informed debunking as further confirmation of a conspiracy to conceal the truth about alien visitors.

Throughout this period scientists, at least publicly, tended to regard the UFO phenomenon as an irrelevance. They failed to share the faith of UFOlogists in the power of evidence accrued from witness testimony alone. The conclusions of the Colorado University study in 1969 simply added to the widespread perception that studying UFO reports was a waste of time and money. As sociologist Ron Westrum remarked: 'Why should a researcher devote effort to an area so unlikely to pay off, and one in which he will, in addition, earn the scorn of his colleagues?' (Westrum 1977: 284) Perceptions of the scientific community among UFOlogists are equally negative. Sociologist Shirley Mclver conducted a survey of views held by more than two hundred members of the British UFO Research Association (BUFORA) towards science and scientists in 1981. She found that 'at the heart of the UFO research culture... lies a mistrust of science' which stood in contrast with serious UFOlogists' commitment to study phenomenon within a scientific framework. This contradiction was compounded by fact that the UFO movement was largely made up mainly of non-scientists who lacked the necessary training or experience in the use of an established methodology: 'The lack of training means that virtually anyone can become a researcher and there is no clear role model for them to follow,' she wrote. 'All this results in low standards and confusion.' (Mclver 1983 :63)

In response to their rejection by the scientific community, UFOlogists have in turn accused scientists of ignoring data which threatens their claim to hold a monopoly of knowledge. A prime example is the belief widely held in the scientific community during the eighteenth century that meteors never fell to the ground. It took a ten-year

The great and good

Scientist and intelligence expert Professor R.V. Jones. (copyright Robert Jones)



battle by a French lawyer and scientist, Ernst Chladni, before the establishment of the day would accept that meteorite falls were a genuine phenomenon. Those who believed some UFOs may be alien spacecraft argued that scientists who say interstellar travel is impossible or at least impractical could be equally wrong. It was this example that was used to open an essay by one of the most influential British scientists to have taken an interest in UFOs. In his 1968 paper 'The Natural Philosophy of Flying Saucers' Professor Reginald Victor Jones (1911–97) said he could empathise with Chladni's experience:

... for as an intelligence officer I had often to investigate the evidence of witnesses when it conflicted with established 'science', and sometimes it was the 'science' that was wrong.

(Jones 1968: 225)

Uniquely amongst his contemporaries Jones was interested in UFOs as a result of his dual role as both a physicist and intelligence officer. His official duties brought him into contact with the subject even before the first 'flying saucer' flaps. As a young wartime scientist Jones's achievements in unpicking German advances in radar navigation and radio communications earned him a key scientific post at the British Air Ministry. His brilliance in predicting the capabilities of the V-weapons, among other deductions, quickly led to his promotion as Head of Scientific Intelligence. During this time he also served as scientific adviser to MI6 and continued his intelligence links for the remainder of his life. The year 1946 first brought Jones into contact with UFOs as his duties in air intelligence coincided with the post-war flap of ghost-rockets over Norway and Sweden. In his memoirs Jones recounts how many of his colleagues in Air Intelligence were privately convinced the phantom rockets were advanced V-weapons developed by the Soviets. The Russians had seized the Nazi rocket plant at Peenemunde in the closing stage of the war and believed the rockets fired over Scandinavia were an attempt by the Russians to intimidate the West by a demonstration of their technological prowess. Jones refused to accept this

Flying Saucerers

theory because he knew that during the war even the German's most advanced weapons had a ten-percent failure rate (Jones 1978: 510). He felt it was inconceivable that no wreckage of a rocket had been recovered, despite thousands of sightings reported to the Swedish armed forces.

Events eventually proved Jones was correct and the idea that Russia was responsible for the phantom rockets was quickly forgotten. When in 1952 he was persuaded to leave his academic post in Edinburgh for a spell as the MoD's Director of Scientific Intelligence he was immediately confronted by what he called 'a secondary scare', the flying saucers. Faced with a similar dilemma Jones was forced to carefully weigh the evidence for UFOs against two variables: the lessons he learned from his wartime intelligence work and the experience of Chladni. The difference was that 'at least the French Academy had some actual meteorites to examine.' His solution to the conundrum was to turn to a scientific principle often used in the context of anomalies: Occam's Razor, 'hypotheses are not to be multiplied without necessity.' For his logical mind, this meant that for all the possible explanations for UFOs, 'the one with the minimum of supposition should be accepted, until it is proved wrong.' Applying the razor to the saucers, Jones believed the balance of evidence was heavily against them being alien spacecraft. In the absence of any tangible evidence, such as might be left behind by a crash landing, Jones felt science was left with the problem of trying to prove that something didn't exist. This, he said, was one of the most difficult tasks, as no matter how thorough official investigations were 'the flying saucer exponents will always be able to conjure new hypotheses that have not been considered.'

Despite his scepticism Jones continued his interest in UFOs and other anomalous phenomena until his death in 1997. In his final words on the subject he said that as a scientist he was tempted to be cautious when dismissing UFOs as fantasy 'because if you turn out to be wrong in denying their existence the error will be blazoned in the history of science.' He added:

... if at any time [during my career] I had had to take a vital decision one way or the other according to whether I thought that flying saucers were fact or fantasy, Russian or extraterrestrial, I would have taken that decision on the assumption that they were either a fantasy or an incorrect identification of a rare and unrecognised phenomenon.

(Jones 1968: 230)

Jones was typical of physical scientists in demanding evidence of UFOs that could be examined, replicated and tested in the laboratory. All the UFOlogists could offer him was masses of eyewitness testimony that, however 'credible', was always vulnerable to other interpretations due to the limitations of human perception and the possibility of misperception. As a result many informed thinkers began to realise that UFOs fell more into the domain covered by the social rather than the physical sciences. The most influential of these was the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung who published his book dealing with the mythic and symbolic significance of flying saucers in 1958. Jung interpreted flying saucers and their occupants as 'technological angels',

Astronomer Dr J. Allen Hynek who acted as consultant to Project Blue Book. (Photo supplied by Mary Evans Picture Library)



heavenly saviours for an age that no longer believed in traditional supernatural beings (Jung 1959). Despite his intervention the 'soft sciences' were equally slow and reluctant to exploit the rich mine of material which the UFO phenomenon presented to them.

One remaining category of physical scientist who might be expected to take an interest in UFOs were astronomers. The public and the media have long regarded them as 'experts' on UFOs. It is assumed that if UFOs are 'real' then astronomers should see them because their careers are dedicated to observing the sky. Paradoxically, despite this perception, one survey found they ranked themselves third in professional competence to deal with UFOs below meteorologists and psychologists (Greenwell 1980: 29). One distinct group of astronomers do not regularly view the heavens but concentrate their studies upon specific stars and galaxies via remote instruments such as radio telescopes. However, the vast majority regularly view the open sky with the naked eye, particularly during meteor showers and forecasted satellite re-entries. Most are extremely knowledgeable about a range of phenomena occurring in the earth's atmosphere and this group is swelled by a large number of experienced amateurs. While a number have observed 'UFOs', in some cases whilst going about their daily lives, they are more aware than the average person of how easy it is to misperceive both natural and man-made phenomena.

One of the first astronomers who became deeply interested UFOs was an American, Donald Menzel (1901–76). He published three books on the subject and was uncompromising in his belief that all sightings could be adequately explained. His first book, *Flying Saucers*, published in 1953, established his reputation as a debunker and he rapidly became a figure of hate for UFO proponents because of his opinion that UFOs were 'the greatest nonsense of the twentieth century.' (Greenwell 1980: 230) Menzel became convinced that misidentifications of a host of natural and man-made phenomena could account for the majority of UFO reports, while others were hoaxes or the results of mass hysteria. Unfortunately, while some colleagues were convinced by his explanations others felt they were more far-fetched than the idea we were being visited by spacecraft.

Flying Saucerers

Another American astronomer, Dr J. Allen Hynek (1901–86) followed a completely different trajectory. Hynek began his career as a UFO sceptic while acting as adviser to the USAF's Project Blue Book. Unlike Menzel his work on the project led him to believe some UFOs could be of alien or supernatural origin and, after its closure, he devoted the remainder of his life to promoting UFOlogy as a legitimate area for study. It was Hynek who coined the famous classification system of UFO reports which included close encounters of the first, second and third kind made famous by the Steven Spielberg movie. Hynek was also responsible for one of the earliest informal polls of views held by astronomers towards UFOs. In 1952 he quizzed 45 of the leading American astronomers and found 11 percent had seen a UFO and 23 percent thought UFOs 'were a much more serious problem than recognised.' (Greenwell 1980: 29) None, however, expressed the belief that UFOs were spaceships.

As far as we are aware no comparable survey has ever been carried out in Britain where astronomers have, in public at least, remained unanimously dismissive of UFOs. The most notorious statement on the topic was that made by a jet-lagged Professor Richard Woolley on the day in January 1956 when he stepped off an aeroplane from Australia to take up his appointment of Astronomer Royal. Quizzed during an 'off-the-record' moment by newsmen about his views on interplanetary travel Woolley ignored the lessons of the meteorite controversy and famously replied the idea was 'utter bilge.' In the following year the Russians launched the first satellite, Sputnik, into Earth orbit. Woolley complained that newspapers had quoted him out of context, explaining that his statement referred to interplanetary, as opposed to space travel. Referring to the latter he said: 'Technically it's not impossible but it would cost an enormous sum of money, out of all proportion to any possible value' (*The Times* 3 January 1956)

In the same interview Woolley was equally uncompromising on the topic of flying saucers. He declared he did not believe in them and offered newsmen an amusing story: 'I was awakened about 3 a.m. by the RAF, no less, who asked about an object at 3,000 ft due west. I hopped out of bed and had a look, and then I missed my chance. I should have said: "Take off boys, it's the Russians." Instead I had to tell them it was the planet Mars.' Woolley's predecessor as Astronomer Royal, Sir Harold Spencer Jones (1890–1960), was vehemently anti-flying saucer. His views hardened after reading *Flying Saucers Have Landed*. In November of 1953 he wrote an article 'Bury these flying saucers!' that was widely syndicated. Jones followed Menzel by explaining saucer reports as misperceptions of balloons and rare natural phenomena such as bright fireballs, peculiar clouds and planets. What he could say 'with absolute assurance' was that none were spacecraft from another planet or secret weapons made by the Russians. He concluded:

It is high time that the flying saucers should be allowed to lapse into obscurity, as the Loch Ness monster has done. Let us be finished with them, for there is nothing mysterious about them.

(London *Evening Standard*, 25 November 1953)

The great and good

The attitude displayed by senior officials at the Royal Greenwich Observatory was typical of astronomers from the older generation. They were more resistant to ideas and concepts that challenged traditional theories about the nature of the universe. More recent opinion surveys have found that the younger generation of astronomers and cosmologists, particularly those who are involved in the radio signal-based Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) are more receptive to speculation about the origins of UFOs since ET contact is their goal. Professor Paul Davies, born in 1946, was for a time in his twenties a UFO proponent whilst studying for his doctorate at University College London. Now a theoretical physicist, he rejects belief in UFOs as a modern myth but feels 'the jury is still out' on the possibility of life existing elsewhere in the universe (Davies 1995). We asked amateur astronomer Gary Anthony, who has been interested in UFOs for twenty years, for his opinion on why astronomers have been so reticent on the subject:

They are not just put off by contactee and ET visitation claims at the extreme end of the topic but perceive that the people involved in all aspects of UFOs are unreasonable and easily influenced towards ET explanations and estimate rightly or wrongly that some are possibly mad. They think the influence comes generally through the proliferation of science fiction into culture through the mediums of television, film and the internet... They have remarked how belief in aliens is like religious faith.

(Gary Anthony, personal communication 2006).

At the giant radio telescope Jodrell Bank in Cheshire, one distinguished British scientist, Nuffield Professor of Radio Astronomy Sir Bernard Lovell, has tried to bridge the gap between the contradictory responsibilities his position presented. Professor Lovell was first drawn into the UFO controversy during 1953 when he favourably reviewed Donald Menzel's first book for *The Listener* (Lovell 1953). With his high profile role as director of Jodrell Bank journalists regularly turned to Lovell or his staff for expert comment on UFO sightings. In 1979 Sir Bernard said that Jodrell Bank had received 'thousands of reports of sightings' over three decades, but that whenever it had been possible to make an investigation 'they have been found to be natural phenomena, or in some instances pure myth.' He said despite the giant radio telescope surveying the heavens night and day for thirty years neither he nor his staff had ever seen 'anything which could not be explained by known causes.'

In a letter to Ron Westrum, Sir Bernard said the letters he received on UFOs could be divided into two categories. The first were from members of the public reporting sightings. The others were written following the occasions he was quoted in the press or on radio as debunking the idea that UFOs were spacecraft. 'These are almost always rather insulting,' he wrote, '... generally along the lines of having a "closed mind"... and often extrapolating to an accusation that I did not believe that life exists elsewhere in the universe.' This, he said, 'is an entirely different matter.' (12 March 1979: Jodrell Bank Archive). In private correspondence with the authors, Sir Bernard explained that he feels in hindsight that the persistent public interest in alien visitors was a direct by-product of astronomers' publicly-stated belief in the existence of life

Flying Saucerers

in outer space. His view is that UFOs would not go away because interest in extra-terrestrial life was constantly stimulated by many responsible scientists who were involved in the SETI programme.

Sir Bernard's considered views can be compared with those of two other household names in astronomy and space exploration, Sir Patrick Moore and Sir Arthur C. Clarke. Patrick Moore's interest in UFOlogy can be traced back to 1950s when he interviewed Desmond Leslie and George Adamski for the BBC programme *Panorama*. In his autobiography Moore credited his appearance on a BBC television programme 'Flying Saucers – do they exist?' in 1956 as the launch pad for his career as Britain's favourite TV astronomer:

I have often been asked how I managed to break into it [television], and the answer is that I made no conscious effort at all; the idea came from the BBC... so far as I was concerned the whole chain of events began with flying saucers.

(Moore 2003: 25)

In 1979 he co-presented an edition of *The Sky at Night* with his friend and former Goon Michael Bentine which aimed to answer the vexed question 'UFOs: fact or fantasy?' In the programme Moore declared he was 'the most complete sceptic about the idea that flying saucers are spaceships coming from other worlds' while Bentine – who had a sighting of his own in 1958 – described himself as 'a hopeful agnostic.' During the programme Moore revealed that during the 1950s he 'played a hoax' by sending a phoney sighting to his local newspaper in Sussex: '... I said where it was and what it looked like and so on and this came out in the local paper and... over twenty people wrote in to confirm it.'

This demonstrated to his satisfaction that 'people really see what they want to see.' When he was not making fun out of the subject, Moore's considered views on UFOs were similar to those of Menzel and Lovell. He had seen a range of unusual natural phenomena whilst observing the sky and believed there were adequate explanations for flying saucers without turning to alien visitors. In a 1977 article published in *Radio Times*, he wrote with characteristic humour:

There is nothing I would like better than to meet a Martian, a Venusian, a Saturnian or even a Sirian and my immediate instinct would be to invite him to join me in a *Sky at Night* programme.

(Moore 1977)

Sir Arthur C. Clarke's attitude towards UFOs is less flippant but no less sceptical. Indeed, it was a viewing of his ITV series *Mysterious World* which helped to stimulate the teenage interest of one of the authors and set him on the path to write this book! Clarke's views on UFOs have hardened since his first television broadcast 'Are there Flying Saucers?' in December 1953. In his *Greetings, Carbon-based Biped!* he recalls the broadcast:

*Astronomer and broadcaster
Sir Patrick Moore.*

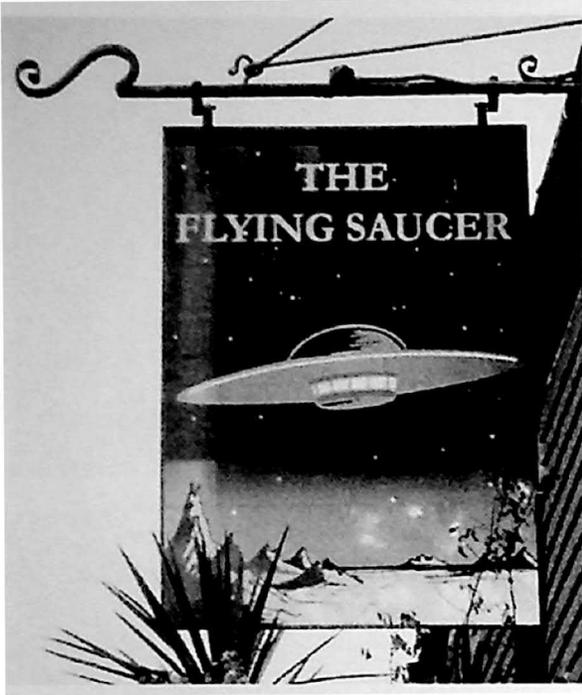


My main target was a fraudulent book by George Adamski, now deceased, that contained what purported to be photographs of UFOs. With a little help from Scotland Yard (which preferred not to take any credit) I was able to refake Adamski's pictures – and to show that at least one of his saucers must have been inside the tube of his telescope.

(Clarke 1999: 114)

Writing in an academic journal shortly afterwards Clarke said that prior to a trip to the USA in 1952 he 'believed that flying saucers probably did not exist, but if they did, they were spaceships.' However, after meeting witnesses and experts whose 'integrity and scientific standing could not be doubted' he had little doubt that what he now called UAO's (Unidentified Airborne Objects) did exist. Like Harold Spencer-Jones he was persuaded by Donald Menzel's argument that the more puzzling reports were examples of rare natural phenomena. As an example he described his own sighting of 'a brilliant light' that appeared to follow an aircraft in which he was a passenger 10,000 feet over Ohio. The UAO appeared to pace the plane several thousand feet below, appearing and disappearing through breaks in the cloud. Clarke said its appearance agreed with the descriptions of flying saucers and it took several minutes before he discovered the correct explanation. Rather than being close by, as he originally believed, it was simply sunlight reflected from a roof or window on the ground ten or twenty miles below, 'yet another example of the total impossibility of judging the size and distance of an unfamiliar object.' (Clarke 1953: 97)

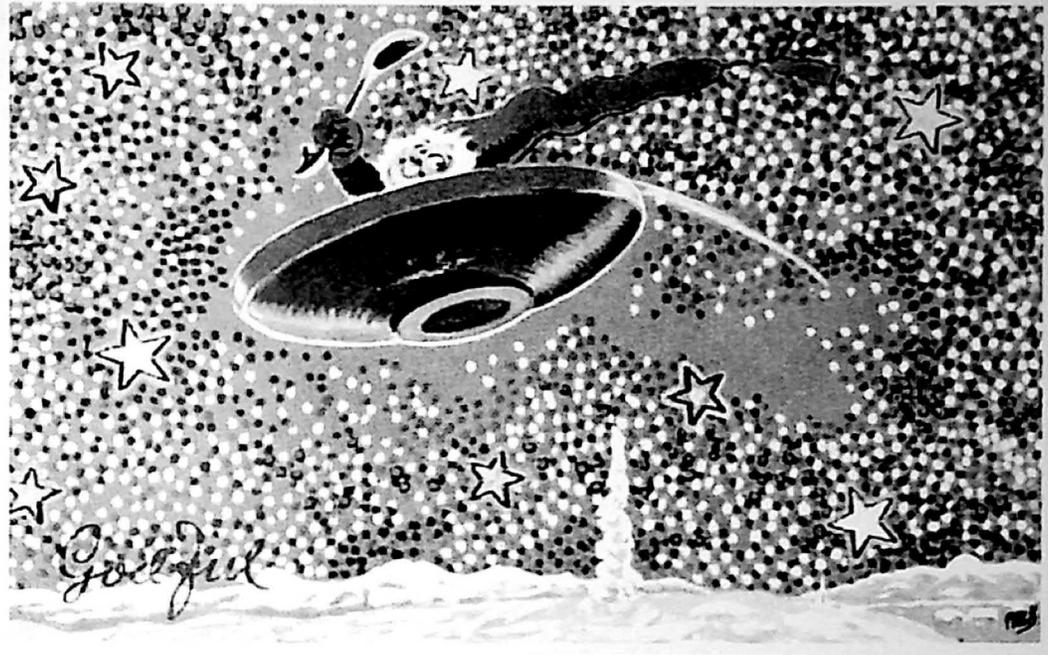
Unlike many of his other ideas, 'UAOs' never quite caught on. Nevertheless, Clarke insisted that despite such frequent explanations it remained essential 'to maintain an open mind until the evidence is overwhelming, one way or another.' At that time he considered it quite possible, though unlikely, that some UFOs might turn out to be 'of intelligent, extra-terrestrial origin.' In his 'last word on UFOs' written two decades later he says the only definitive thing he is reasonably sure about the subject is: 'they're not spaceships.' His views on the subject changed following more sightings,



*Flying Saucer pub sign,
Gillingham, Kent. (Photo
supplied by Joe McGonagle)*

some of which initially puzzled him, but which always turned out to have explanations. In 1980 he said if you have not seen a UFO you are either 'unobservant or live in a cloudy area.' He added: 'I have now observed so many UFOs that the subject bores me to tears and I wouldn't cross the street to see another.' (Welfare and Fairley 1980: 264)

Clarke's disinterest in the subject was perhaps a little over-stated. Of the half-dozen UFO sightings he claims to have made, the most dramatic was the one he saw with film legend Stanley Kubrick. This happened on the night the pair were planning how to make the film *2001: A Space Odyssey* which ironically dealt with the discovery of extraterrestrial life. On a clear moonlit night in May 1964 the two men were standing on the porch of Kubrick's penthouse in New York when they saw a brilliant light moving across the night sky above them. Afterwards Kubrick pressed Clarke for an explanation of the sighting but checks with published lists of satellites drew a blank. Eventually Clarke contacted the Pentagon and the pair were given UFO forms to fill out. Eventually friends at the Hayden Planetarium came to his rescue. They identified the UFO as the Echo 1 communications satellite which had been launched in 1960. Made of aluminized Mylar plastic and 30 metres in diameter, it circled the earth every 90 minutes and could be seen for a few minutes before it disappeared below the horizon at night. According to Kubrick's biographer, Vincent LoBrutto, Clarke was so unnerved by the coincidence that he told his friend: 'This is too much of a coincidence, they are out to stop us making this movie.' (LoBrutto 1997: 262). Another account describes how the pair took the sighting as 'a good omen at the time' and Clarke himself has commented that: 'Stanley and I were in somewhat exalted mood, and perhaps not as critical as we should have been' when the satellite appeared (Clarke 1999: 513).



Flying saucer Christmas card.

This curious episode led UFOlogist Andreas Ohlsson to note the delicious irony that Sir Arthur C. Clarke, who has been called the father of satellite communication, was able to misinterpret his own creation as something extraordinary. He points out that 'it seems not even scientists are perfect witnesses when it comes to sightings of strange things in the skies. Indeed, is anyone?' (Ohlsson 2004).

Chapter five

King of the saucers?

George King and the Aetherius Society

May I now, with a humble gladness in my heart, introduce you to a Master from the Interplanetary System, whom we have called – Aetherius.

(King 1961: 67)

During the 1950s the spiritualist movement in Britain flirted heavily with flying saucers and the two subject areas briefly overlapped but never really meshed. The spiritualist establishment often treated those individuals who claimed to be receiving messages from space with great scepticism. Of the two main spiritualist publications at the time, *Psychic News* was the most sceptical, while *Two Worlds* was more open to the new belief system. Although the spiritualist press regularly featured news items about flying saucers and contactees throughout the 1950s, they were rarely positive and many spiritualist writers sought to expose the saucerers as charlatans in the same way that physical mediums were exposed throughout the early twentieth century. Indeed, it may be seen as a rich irony that those who believed the spirits of the dead were in contact with the living were resistant to the idea that extraterrestrials existed and could contact the corporeal world. Perhaps the spiritualists were hedging their bets, waiting to see if the contactees were *really* getting their messages from the same source because, during the 1950s at least, there were very close links between the spiritualism and the UFO contactee movement.

George King was one of the first, and certainly the most influential of the British contactees. The Aetherius Society, the religious organisation he founded, continues to this day. This makes it the oldest surviving flying saucer based religion in the world. Very little is certain about King's life before he took on the role of cosmic avatar. His birth certificate states that he was born in Wellington, Shropshire on 23 January 1919, son of George and Mary King. At that time his father was serving as a corporal in the Royal Army Medical Corps, presumably having volunteered for the

King of the saucers?

First World War, as his other occupation is given as schoolmaster. King's mother was rumoured to be a noted clairvoyant and healer.

King's early life is undocumented but he moved to London at some point prior to the Second World War. There, his pacifistic tendencies led him to become a conscientious objector and to serve as a section leader with the National Fire Service at the height of the Blitz. He remained in London after the war, initially becoming a taxi driver. King's parents moved to Combe Martin in north Devon, where he visited them frequently throughout the 1950s. The Kings were not affluent and people in the village donated blankets and furniture to help them settle into their cottage. Their son's interest in extraterrestrials was well known to the locals prior to him achieving notoriety through the Aetherius Society, and during one of his visits to his parents' house a Combe Martin resident recalls seeing, 'something hanging from an upstairs window, so that the 'Martians' would find him...' Significantly, the nearby hill of Holdstone Down would later play a major role in the development of the Aetherius Society's philosophy and spiritual practice.

There was nothing outwardly unusual about George King. He was one of many thousands of British citizens who held pacifist beliefs and was interested in alternate philosophies, in his case yoga. The 1950s was a period when many were experimenting with a variety of burgeoning new age philosophies. Nevertheless, how did the unassuming George King make the transition from pacifist taxi driver with an interest in yoga and Vedantic philosophy to the dark-suited deliverer of messages from space?

All religions have their creation myth. This is the story that narrates the defining moment in the formation of a belief system, when 'the truth' is revealed to the 'chosen one' whose mission becomes to spread this truth to humanity. According to King himself, following several years of yoga and esoteric study, that moment came on the morning of 8 May 1954 as he was washing up in his Maida Vale flat, when he heard a disembodied voice announce, 'Prepare yourself! You are to become the voice of Interplanetary Parliament'. King immediately understood the message's importance, confident it could not have been his imagination playing tricks on him. 'I had been a student of Yoga for too long to consider that I was a victim of my own imagination,' he said later. King spent the next few days discussing the experience with friends and meditating on its meaning. (King, 1961: 19)

A week passed and the following Sunday, while meditating behind locked doors, a 'great Yogi Adept' materialised in his room. Any doubts King may have had about his suitability to become a spiritual leader were dispelled by the swami who reassured his unspoken fears, saying, 'It is not for you to judge whether you are ready to be chosen, my son.' (King 1961: 21) The swami told King the problems besetting the world were caused by '... the unfeeling march of science into the realms of the atom on one hand, and the wrong thought and action by the masses on the other...' He made it clear that a major universal conflict was taking place between the 'materialistic scientist, who has arrived at his conclusions by the cold application of mathematics and the occult scientist who has arrived at his conclusions through the recognition that God is all.' (King, 1961: 22)

The swami also told King that he would soon attract a group of willing followers to 'help in the coming campaign.' After delivering this life changing message to King the swami bowed, 'with the politeness of a race which enjoyed an advanced culture when ancient Britons still painted themselves with woad,' and departed by walking straight through the locked door of King's flat. King realised this had been a metaphysical call to arms and plunged himself with renewed vigour into his yogic studies. Shortly after his close encounter he found he was able to pick up telepathic messages and a channelled message from Venus, the first of hundreds, was recorded on tape recorder.

That, of course, is George King's own version of how the Aetherius Society was formed. There were, as is invariably the case, no witnesses to the genesis of this new religion and over the years people have been highly critical of King's sudden conversion from spiritually-inclined taxi driver to religious leader. There is at least one other, much less flattering but witnessed, account of how the Aetherius Society came into being.

On a cold, rainy Sunday evening during the winter of early 1954, Laurens Otter was at one of his usual haunts, the Malatesta Club, listening to a talk by Arthur Uloth. The Malatesta, situated on Percy Street, Soho, was the home of the London Anarchist club, and meetings espousing various fringe political views were held there every night of the week. Otter remembers with clarity a drunken taxi driver entering the club and asking for another cabbie, Sammy Cash. Cash, who had recently founded a taxi-drivers union, was not there, but was expected later so the tired and emotional taxi driver lay down across some chairs and promptly fell asleep.

At the end of Uloth's talk the chairperson, Arthur Robinson asked, 'Before we move to discussion, are there any questions?' This was the usual request for questions to the speaker about the talk, and Otter was somewhat surprised when the taxi driver suddenly woke, asking, 'How do I make a million pounds?' Robinson took the question in good humour and speculated the best way to make a fortune was to found a fake religion. A discussion about how best to do this ensued with Otter opining that a much better idea would be to get in on the flying saucer craze. Robinson concurred, suggesting that the two ideas could be combined for best effect. As this good humoured discussion unfolded, another taxi driver arrived and mentioned he had seen Sammy Cash somewhere else, and the drunken taxi driver who wanted to know how to make a million went off to locate him. A few years later Cash told Otter that the drunken taxi driver, whose name was George King, had taken his advice about melding religion with flying saucers, and it had worked. The rest, as they say, is history (Laurens Otter, personal communication 2005).

Of course the present administration at the Aetherius Society vehemently deny Otter's version of events, commenting, 'I would strongly advise you not to give it too much credibility – not least because to use such an unsustainable, tenuous tale as "research" could surely damage your own reputation' (personal communication, Richard Lawrence of Aetherius Society, 2006). This is understandable. No religion wants to have its genesis in an idea dimly grasped through an alcoholic haze. But Otter's account is intriguing, echoing as it does the alleged formation of other new

King of the saucers?

*Conference flyer for John
Foster-Forbes.*

Flying Saucers

and other Space Craft

**THEIR TRUE NATURE AND
PURPOSE in this ATOMIC AGE**

Mr. J. FOSTER FORBES

will speak
on the above subject

at

WIGMORE HALL WIGMORE STREET, W.1

on

Tuesday June 29 at 7.30 p.m.

TICKETS (including Tax): RESERVED 5/- UNRESERVED 2/6
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age religions such as Scientology. Science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard founded Scientology, more properly Dianetics, in 1950. Scientology, like the Aetherius Society has always tried to exercise a tight grip on accounts of how it was created. Nevertheless, American science fiction writer Lloyd Eshbach, in his 1983 autobiography recalls meeting Hubbard in the late 1940s and hearing him say 'I'd like to start a religion,' Eshbach recalls Hubbard saying 'That's where the money is.' (Eshbach, 1983: 245)

Varying accounts and doubts about how King received the idea to form the Aetherius Society notwithstanding nothing much happened after King's contact with the swami. He diligently practised his yoga exercises and became a frequent attendee at philosophical lectures at London's Wigmore Hall. It was from an acquaintance struck up at one of those meetings that he first came into the public eye.

Flying Saucer Pilgrimage

On the 19 September 1954 a coach load of assorted spiritualists, archaeologists and students of psychic philosophies set out from London on a pilgrimage to the ancient Neolithic stone circle at Avebury in Wiltshire. This field trip, which combined the quest for contact with flying saucers with an interest in prehistoric stones, was the first of its kind. In the 1960s, as we will see when we discuss the Warminster phenomenon in Chapter 9, outdoor gatherings of saucer spotters, known as sky-watches, would play a key role in the development of UFOlogy.

Flying Saucerers

The group was led by archaeologist and nascent earth mysteries researcher John Foster-Forbes, whose lecture about flying saucers at Wigmore Hall on 29 June had inspired the outing. Foster-Forbes' lecture was billed as 'Flying Saucers and other space craft: Their true nature and purpose in this atomic age'. The title alone gave away the fears and concerns which surrounded the subject of flying saucers. Foster-Forbes amplified these fears on the reverse of the advertising flyer:

The title of this talk would hardly seem to convey the full expression of all that is implied: the incidence of the phenomena known as 'Flying Saucers' is not only an established fact but their incursion within reasonable distance of the earth's surface comes as a grave warning for the safety of the earth and her people. There is danger so long as mankind continues to act out of concert to the laws of the universe – laws cosmic and spiritual... It should be known, moreover, that visitants who have come to this earth by way of space craft have no hostile or aggressive purposes; they are greatly concerned as to the safety not only of this earth but of the system to which we belong.

(Foster-Forbes 1954)

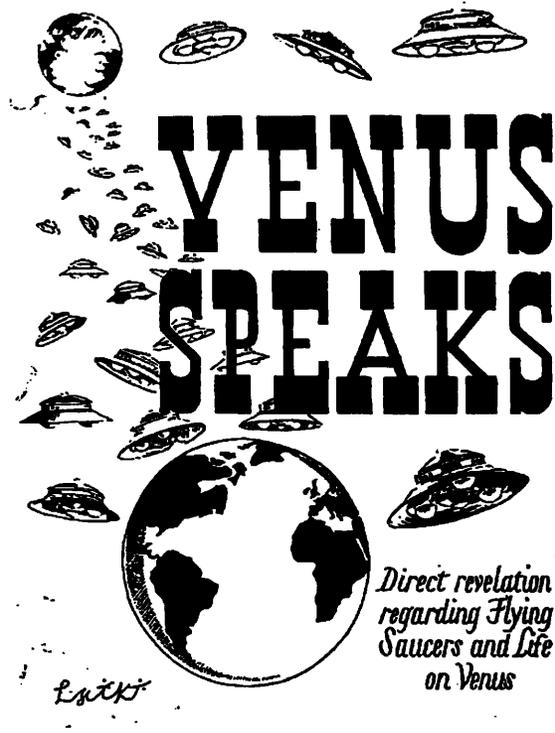
Foster-Forbes is now just a minor footnote in new age history, but was a crucial figure in the melange of fringe philosophies that were brewing in the early 1950s. Born into minor Scottish aristocracy in the late nineteenth century he soon discovered a fascination for prehistory and occult belief, combining the two. Like many others with unusual beliefs he soon became a member of a mystical order, in Foster Forbes' case the Order of the Cross. Throwing himself enthusiastically into the orders' beliefs, he began to write about an antediluvian 'golden age' that he believed existed in prehistoric Britain and which was linked with Atlantis. Foster-Forbes' information about this rosy-hued past was often obtained directly at ancient sites, through psychometric readings by noted psychics such as Olive Pixley and Iris Campbell.

Author Pat Benham, who knew Foster-Forbes in the later years of his life recalls, 'With the advent of the flying saucer phenomenon soon after the war he immediately made a connection between ancient sites and extraterrestrial visitations in the past. The wise ones from other worlds were returning.' (Pat Benham, personal communication 2005). These ideas surfaced repeatedly throughout the twentieth century, hovering on the fringes of flying saucer culture and, through the agency of author John Michell becoming crucial in the counter-culture's interpretation of the flying saucer myth.

Foster-Forbes was also friendly with the people who put out the book, *Venus Speaks*. This was a book of mediumship, purporting to be information from a Venusian scientist, and yet another example of how spiritualism both abutted and flirted with interest in flying saucers (discussed further in Chapter 7). Pat Benham was once present in Foster-Forbes' flat when the authors of *Venus Speaks* communicated telepathically with a saucer they claimed was overhead.

King of the saucers?

The first book written by a British contactee, Venus Speaks, published in 1954.



Foster-Forbes was impressed with George Adamski's tales of saucer pilots as saviours and with Desmond Leslie's ideas; ultimately his ideas about saucers and their occupants were apocalyptic. He firmly believed, as did thousands of other spiritually disaffected individuals in the fifties, that Earth was heading for some form of catastrophe and that a 'selected few' – effectively chosen ones – should prepare themselves to be rescued by the aliens. This idea runs through all fringe and evangelical religions and is held by factions within UFOlogy to this day.

Foster-Forbes' stated aim for their Avebury excursion was to make contact with flying saucers, and on arrival at the stones the day-trippers split into two groups. Foster-Forbes, leading one group, said, 'It was felt that closer contact with space craft might be possible in open country.' George King led the other group and, leading them to a hill overlooking the ancient landscape. He breathed deeply, settled into a yogic meditation position, and fell into a trance. A gaggle of young people gathered expectantly around him, posing questions such as, 'What are the chances of making contact with spacecraft today?' The replies soon came, not from the crew of a nearby hovering saucer, but from Grey Fox, King's discarnate Indian guide who responded by saying that contact wouldn't be possible, due to 'the diversity of opinion and the subconscious fear in the mind of some of those present.' (*Daily Sketch*, 20 September 1954)

The majority of saucer-seekers, with the exception of nine-year-old John House, greeted this news sagely. 'I thought I was going to see a man from Mars or a couple

FLYING SAUCER DIDN'T KEEP THE 'APPOINTMENT WITH VENUS'

TWO DOZENS of men and women spent an hour in a windswept field yesterday waiting for a flying saucer.

They were trying to get in touch with one by telepathy. And they all concentrated their thoughts on the planet Venus.

But no visitors from outer space joined the party, who had driven from London to the field near the Williams and Sons of Archers.

The trip was the result of a suggestion made at a London lecture by Mr. Peter Forbes.

Mr. Forbes is white, grey and bow tie.

'DAILY MIRROR' REPORTER

Mr. King said: "In earlier communications with Venusians, they have told me they are not out to hurt us."

"But they want to help because they are frightened at the damage we may do to ourselves with atomic research."

Some of you would be frightened if we came today. There is too much difference of opinion here.

Mr. Kenneth Kellar, of Stoneydown-avenue, Walthamstow, said: "I heard the voice using Mr. King quite plainly."

"It seems there were too many of us and conditions were not suitable."

"The Venusians will not come from his lips."

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come apparently if anyone is going to be frightened of them.

"There must be complete friendship between us and the visitors. Just quiet space."

Mr. King said: "In earlier communications with Venusians, they have told me they are not out to hurt us."

"But they want to help because they are frightened at the damage we may do to ourselves with atomic research."

These Boys

A disappointed woman in the party said: "Of course a flying saucer didn't come."

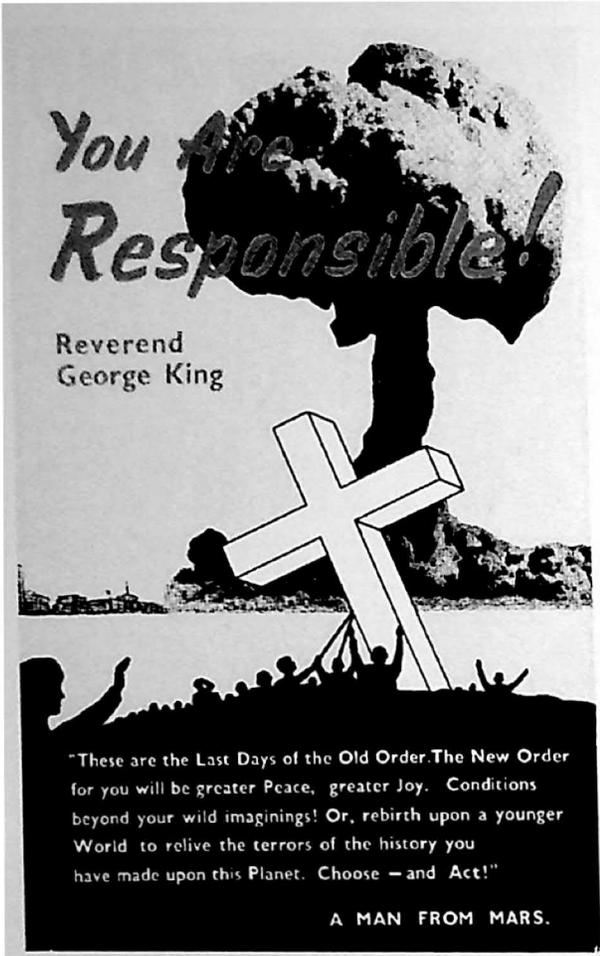
"If some people will bring their dogs, how can we possibly protect our thoughts into space?"

"Just think what harm a few rapping dogs would do to such an experiment."

THREE WHO WATCHED



Three of the party watching, waiting . . . but no flying saucer appeared.



George King's first book published in 1961. Note the apocalyptic imagery.

who prefers His true identity to be hidden by the name of Aetherius'. The Master Aetherius was King's main telepathic contact during his life, speaking through King on a regular basis and effectively dictating the beliefs of the Aetherius Society.

The tenets of the Aetherius Society are quite convoluted but can be reduced to the following elements:

- Service to mankind is at the core of all action
- Jesus, Buddha and other religious leaders were of extraterrestrial origin
- The teachings of all world religions are essentially the same and there should be inter-faith tolerance
- There is advanced and intelligent life on other planets
- Some UFOs are structured craft piloted by benign aliens who are here to help mankind become part of the Interplanetary Parliament

It was in the latter months of 1954, in the Tudor Room of London's Caxton Hall, that the Master Aetherius, channelled through the body of Mr George King, gave his first

King of the saucers?

public audience. Caxton Hall, along with the Wigmore Hall, was one of the engine rooms of fringe intellectual thought and belief throughout the 1950s and one could attend lectures about anything from spiritualism to yoga, diet, the occult and now flying saucers. In a format that would remain largely unchanged in all his public appearances King, wearing dark glasses, settled into a chair and began to intone messages from elsewhere. These messages were delivered in a slightly stilted, imperious military fashion and often featured long, dramatic pauses, with the audience addressed as 'My dear friends.'

Something about King's apocalyptic warnings caught the audience's attention and the word began to spread. Soon his lectures were attended by hundreds of truth seekers, all eager to see King enter a trance and to listen to his warnings of ecological disaster, giant spaceships and more. Some may have thought it slightly arrogant of King to claim he was in touch with the 'Master Jesus' but if they subscribed to the Aetherian tenet that all religious leaders were extraterrestrials this doubt would soon pass.

In the editorial of Volume 1 of *Cosmic Voice*, the Aetherius Society's journal, published in June 1955, King clarified exactly who the Master Aetherius was: 'He is a Being who was born on the Planet Venus – 3456 years ago!'. Aetherius was, apparently, a physical body who could change his metabolism to fit in with whatever planetary conditions he experienced. Early Aetherius Society meetings mixed messages from the space people, warnings of the apocalypse, homespun philosophy together with unusual health tips. One such was the suggestion that drinking water which had been left to soak up 'energies' from the sun was efficacious. Did it work? Well-known saucerer Harold Mattam believed it did, testifying that, 'I have faithfully practised the water-drinking since I first heard of it, and can say to any person – honestly – that I feel a completely different man.' Sun-drenched water notwithstanding, the overt message expressed by the Aetherius Society was essentially communist in nature.

George King and the Special Branch

Members of the Aetherius Society distrusted existing political and scientific establishments. They wanted to see the end of all wars and believed that by challenging the status quo a utopia could be realised. This was not what middle England, now in the post-war economic boom, really wanted to hear. In a decade as politically and socially paranoid as the 1950s, it was only a matter of time before King's activities would come to the attention of the intelligence services. Sure enough, that time came on 26 May 1957, heralded by a headline in one of the major newspapers of the day, *The Empire News*. The paper's headline read 'Flying Saucer Clubs Probe: Peace Messages "from outer space". The article was uncompromising, opening with:

'Warnings' from space against Britain's H-bomb tests published in a flying saucer magazine take a similar line to Moscow-inspired propaganda. The 'warning' – in a special issue of the magazine – is being scrutinised by Scotland Yard's Special Branch. It is suspected

Flying Saucerers

that a number of flying saucer clubs – and some spiritualists as well – are unwittingly being used by the Communists.

The idea that anyone involved in a group which held marginalised beliefs, whether political or occult, could be manipulated by communists was widely held. In the staid, materialistic culture of post-war Britain, anyone who held even mildly eccentric views was treated with suspicion and newspapers representing middle England could not understand why young people wanted more from the 'you've never had it so good' 1950s. Flying saucers and unusual health kicks were bad enough but any suggestion of appeasement or agreement with the Soviets was beyond the pale. Yet this is exactly what the Aetherians were suggesting. The unnamed *Empire News* reporter went on to quote from *Cosmic Voice*:

Have not the latest peace moves come from Russia. You in the West blame Russia and say it is necessary to make these weapons to protect yourselves from them. YOU IN BRITAIN ARE IN A FAVOURABLE POSITION TO SHOW THE LARGER COUNTRIES THE WAY.

It is easy to see why this message – ostensibly from 'Mars Sector 6', and voiced by King in a trance – was seen as barely-concealed communist propaganda. King was incensed when he read what he saw as an attack on his personal freedom and immediately dashed off a letter of complaint to New Scotland Yard, demanding to know what sort of scrutiny the Aetherians were under, and why. His letter was brief but indignant. In it King states that he is unaware of any scrutiny by Special Branch and states the Aetherius Society is not a club but a 'Religious and occult society, which has contact with Intelligences on certain of the other Planets. We are non-political and non-sectarian.' (George King, letter dated 26 May 1957, Special Branch files) King requested a prompt reply, following this up four days later when his secretary, Grace Abercrombie telephoned Scotland Yard asking when they would hear from the police.

It would be tempting to believe, in view of the prevailing Cold War tensions, that Special Branch had been monitoring King and his disciples since he went public with his beliefs, but this does not appear to be the case. A Metropolitan Police telegram dated 27 May 1957, recording Ms Abercrombie's phone call notes, 'No trace Aetherius Society' and 'Unable to identify George King in S. B. Records'. Internal Special Branch documents indicate that the Aetherius Society first came to their attention two days prior to the *Empire News* article, on 24 May, when a member of the newspaper's editorial team brought a copy of *Cosmic Voice* to Scotland Yard and complained it showed a 'bias to communism.' In a classic example of media disingenuity they then used this contrived situation to claim Special Branch was conducting an investigation of the society!

Of course, the *Empire News* had a stake in trying to 'expose' the Aetherius Society, as it was a notorious right-wing paper. In keeping with other media in the fifties, it may also have had people on its payroll that had contacts with police or the intelligence community. Whatever its underlying motives in 'exposing' the Aetherius

King of the saucers?

Society the newspaper saw them as people with different ideas about reality and about how individuals should live and worship, and it did not like them one bit.

Following King's complaint an inspector from Special Branch, under instructions from the Chief Superintendent, was sent to interview King at his Fulham home on 31 May. In what must have been a surreal meeting for both parties the Special Branch officer firstly took King to task for complaining the Aetherians were being studied by Special Branch when in fact the *Empire News* had merely stated the 'warning' in *Cosmic Voice* was being scrutinised by them. King apologised, but requested written assurance from the Commissioner of Police to the effect that they were not being scrutinised by Special Branch.

The Special Branch officer put King at ease telling him that he had '... been instructed to inform him that the Aetherius Society was not being investigated by this department.' The interview then proceeded amicably, although King did not seem to grasp that by even being interviewed he, and the Aetherius Society, were effectively being investigated. During the lengthy interview King claimed that the Aetherius Society had about one hundred members worldwide and that issues of *Cosmic Voice* were sent to the Prime Minister, Buckingham Palace, President Eisenhower and many other politicians and religious authorities. (Metropolitan Police memo, 1 June 1957)

The Special Branch report opined that King was '... obsessed with his work on behalf of the society and is the guiding force behind it. He appears to be sincere in his beliefs but a brief perusal of his writings can leave no doubt that he is a crank, albeit a harmless one.' Special Branch may have been initially satisfied that King and his acolytes posed no threat in 1957 but the Aetherius Society now had a profile and Special Branch officers began to collect newspaper clippings referring to the society, highlighting any references to their anti-nuclear warfare stance.

In January 1958 the Aetherians once more had a run in with the forces of law and order. Three senior police officers visited an Aetherius Society meeting at Caxton Hall and bought several blue glass bottles for one shilling (5p). 'These, it is claimed, if filled with tap water and exposed to the sun can bring "benefit and relief" to sufferers of various ailments from nervous debility to swollen ankles.' King's claim that his bottles could transmute sunlight into a healing liquid might have been a little close to the idea of changing water into wine for Scotland Yard's tastes, and statements were taken from a number of the attendees. George King was unconcerned about the police interest, saying, 'So far as I'm concerned the whole of Scotland Yard can come and visit me. I simply have nothing to hide.' Besides removing the mysterious blue bottles, the police also took a keen interest in gramophone records, on sale for twenty-five shillings (£1.25), purporting to contain recorded messages from Jesus and St Paul. Once again, King was unconcerned, saying: 'I have received many messages from Jesus and the saints. It is correct that a message from St Peter through my voice is on sale... I have sold quite a number,' before circumspectly adding, 'The label states quite clearly that it was received while I was in a Yogic trance. I do not claim direct voice.' (*Daily Mail*, 28 January 1958)

Flying Saucerers

Irked though Scotland Yard must have been at King's ability to sell what were effectively 'magic bottles' and messages from long-dead historical and mythological figures, he was not actually breaking any laws and the police did not pursue the matter. However, the Aetherius Society was by now very firmly on the establishment's radar and in May 1958 they once again came to the attention of Special Branch, 'during recent activities into communist activities in the Fulham area'. This brief report noted that the Aetherius Society was still '... active in its campaign against nuclear weapon tests, and in this respect its policy is closely allied with that of the Communist Party.' Yet another investigation took place but once again Special Branch could find '... no evidence of open Communist association with the Society.' (Metropolitan Police memo, 7 May 1958)

Special Branch now had the Aetherius Society firmly in its sights and when George King announced a demonstration in London's Trafalgar Square on 23 August 1958 they immediately decided to monitor the event. The demonstration was intended to explain the reason why the British government were, according to the Aetherians, "suppressing" information about flying saucers'. Aetherius Society members with placards started out from Speakers Corner at Marble Arch, then paraded through the West End of London before congregating in Trafalgar Square at 3.00 p.m. Although Special Branch claimed that only twenty Aetherius Society members were present, several hundred passers-by took an interest in the event. Several speakers addressed the crowd, regaling them with tales of saucer sightings and the afternoon concluded with a tape recording from Interplanetary Intelligence, Mars Sector Six. Unfortunately, the ponderous tones of the 'intelligence', allied with a collection for donations, drove most of the crowd away. George King however was not disheartened, saying: 'I am satisfied with this as a start. Most great movements begin gradually.' (*Reynolds News*, 24 August 1958) The Special Branch report concluded that 'the general atmosphere was of quiet, amused tolerance' and gave a detailed if cynical, outline of the major beliefs of the Aetherians noting:

A point of some significance was that all speakers were careful to point out that Christ, Buddha, Mahomet [sic], and other 'great men' were all Venusians. Elijah did not ascend to Heaven in a chariot – he was taken to Venus in a 'Flying Saucer'.

The Special Branch operatives also noted that:

... it can thus be seen that the Aetherius society is moulding its preposterous claims to conform with the popular concepts of religion... There is a possibility that all this high-sounding talk of 'Karma' and 'Cosmic Parliaments' is simply a system of financial gain for certain individuals and George King in particular.

(Metropolitan Police report, 23 August 1958)

King may have enjoyed being the centre of what was as much a cult of personality as it was a flying saucer religion but while King did effectively make a living from the Aetherius Society, he lived a relatively modest lifestyle until his death in 1997.

King of the saucers?

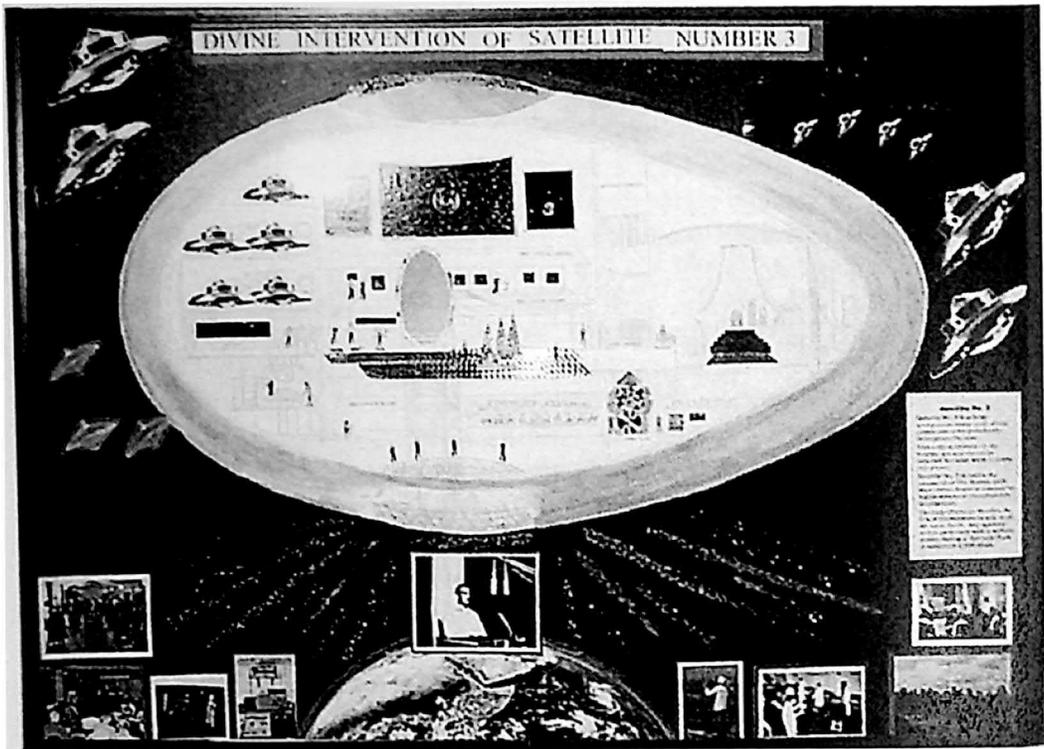
Another Aetherius Society demonstration took place in London during August 1959, which Special Branch also attended. This time the demands for world governments to reveal their knowledge of flying saucers and to work together to prevent the coming nuclear conflagration were made to about two hundred people. Amplified tape recordings of one of King's extraterrestrial contacts, Mars Sector Six, were played and a petition calling for the British government to make an official statement about flying saucers was circulated.

As the 1950s faded into the 1960s, Special Branch began to lose interest in the Aetherius Society. Their investigations had showed that, although they shared many fundamental ideas, neither the organisation nor any individuals within it were overtly communist. Documents reveal an underlying disdain for King and the Aetherians, one of the final memos stating 'The Aetherius Society is a crank, pseudo-religious, pacifist society... founded by George King who claims to be a spiritualist medium... ' For his part, King remained aloof and did not let the Special Branch investigations hinder the development of the Aetherius Society. King and his members, however naïve their beliefs, were sincere and greater things were afoot.

The Master Aetherius

During the period Special Branch were sizing up the Aetherians as a possible security threat a major breakthrough had been made with the Space Brothers, one which would have a major impact on the Aetherius Society lasting to the present day. On 10 July 1958, during one of King's regular communications with the Master Aetherius, in which King is somewhat immodestly referred to as 'Mental Channel No. 1', he was instructed to go to Devon on 23 July when he was to '... go to the crossroads along the lane where he was previously contacted by an intelligence from Mars.' (King 1994: 17) King duly travelled to Devon, to the village of Combe Martin, near his parents' home, and on 22 July familiarised himself with the spot, a crossroad, where earlier, he had been in telepathic contact with a Martian intelligence. Once again King's experience of contact with otherworldly beings strikes a chord with that of other religious traditions. Meeting ghosts, spirits and the Devil at crossroads is a major theme in the folklore of many countries and the notion that if you meet such an entity you may be granted special powers is a popular one. For example, Robert Johnson, the blues singer who heavily influenced the development of rock music, was reputed to have met the Devil at a crossroads and been given the secret of how to play guitar in a way that audiences could not ignore.

After waiting some time at the crossroads, King was once again contacted by the 'Adept from Mars', who told him to go to a nearby 'high place'. This was Holdstone Down, a 330-metre hill above Combe Martin and overlooking the Bristol Channel. Once on the summit King prayed for peace on Earth, noticing a blue sphere that hovered over the channel. Minutes passed and then, 'I knew instantly that the God-Man who stood silently looking down upon me was Jesus.' This, according to King, was no psychic or astral vision – this was a physical manifestation. Jesus was clad in a glowing robe with many jewels and carried a wand topped with a five-pointed crystal. Waves of energy passed between the entity and King who was plunged into



*An example of the Aetherius Society's display at a public meeting in 2000.
(Photo supplied by Joe McGonagle)*

a religious rapture before 'Jesus' stepped into a beam of light and vanished. King realised that Holdstone Down was now charged, a spiritual power battery whose energies were inexhaustible. (King, 1994: 19)

A few days later King received another message from the Jesus entity, telling him that other mountains in Britain were holy and needed charging. Operation Starlight was born and between 1958 and 1961 nineteen mountains were charged. King and his followers endured considerable physical and mental privations during this operation, often climbing in dangerous conditions, barely equipped with either the skills or equipment needed for the task. Operation Starlight was a physical demonstration of the Aetherians' dedication and commitment and visiting these charged peaks has become a pilgrimage for Aetherius Society members ever since. It is through Operation Starlight that most people are aware of the Aetherians, as film of their meetings is often shown on television shows about religious cults.

A typical Aetherius Society gathering on one of their holy mountains takes the form of a group of pilgrims standing in a circle around an object mounted on a tripod. This is a 'spiritual battery', charged by the Aetherians approaching it one by one and imbuing it with prayer. To an outside observer this can appear somewhat bizarre as a variety of individuals approach the battery, in what often in what looks like a martial arts stance, whilst dramatically intoning a prayer such as 'Blessed are the chosen ones'. Yet this is no less a religious ceremony to the Aetherius Society members as taking communion is to a practising Christian.

Symbol on Kinder Scout marking where George King charged the mountain in 1959.



Since King and the Aetherians had emerged in the public gaze in 1955, the spiritualist establishment had kept a watching brief on them. The reasons for the hostility from spiritualism towards the Aetherius Society, channelled through *Psychic News*, have never been satisfactorily explained. It may possibly have come about because the spiritualists perceived that King and his followers were in some way rivals to the spiritualist movement. Or it may have been that even among the beliefs held by fringe religious groups King's claims of being 'chosen', to travel both physically and astrally in flying saucers and to be able to channel the wisdom of Jesus was too much – even for those who believed they were in touch with the dead!

The final split between King, the Aetherius Society and the spiritualist establishment came in October 1959 when the editor of *Psychic News* delivered a tirade against King and the Aetherians commenting:

... the earth people may not be very intelligent but most of them – thank their lucky stars! – are too intelligent to swallow all this pretentious highfalutin nonsense. A few who are not are being kidded somewhere along the line of transmission. And, although George King does not claim to be a Spiritualist, these meetings become associated with Spiritualism in the minds of many people. *So let me recommend... that you take Mr King on a nice long space trip. The more space between him and sane spiritualism the better.*

Psychic News, 26 October 1959

The article was accompanied by a photograph of King doing a yogic shoulder stand pose, with the witty caption, 'Mars... Mars... Please put him the right way up.' In the following year, the contactee movement in the United States was enjoying huge success and King, perhaps sensing that his philosophies were not going to overthrow the social or political order in Britain, decanted to America. There he developed the Aetherius Society into a worldwide organisation that exists to the present day. Little has changed throughout the Aetherians' history; the tone of Aetherius Society meetings and publications never varies. Humanity is always just on the brink of both earthly disaster and cosmic intervention, the Aetherius Society practices are the only way to prevent the former and usher in the latter. If only humanity would listen...



Aetherius Society members on spiritual pilgrimage to Kinder Scout, June 2006.

The Aetherius Society has survived decades of ridicule at the hands of the press and marginalisation by mainstream UFO buffs yet they have survived. Many of George King's more bizarre beliefs and experiences have been expunged from Aetherius Society literature while flying saucers, although still at the core of the society's beliefs, are barely mentioned on their Web site or in their promotional literature. The society have been successful in moving with the times while retaining its original essence of being a flying saucer religion open to anyone with the will to believe.

The Aetherius Society were never a huge organisation, indeed their numbers rarely totalled more than one thousand members worldwide. UFO commentators have mostly ignored them and it is currently fashionable to deride groups such as the Aetherians as being peripheral to UFOlogy as a whole. This view is erroneous. The Aetherians, although small in number were for many years firmly in the public eye and often featured in the media. Their meetings and literature were often the first introduction to the subject of UFOs in a spiritual context. The Aetherius Society was not for everyone but, for those seekers who wanted or needed a spiritual dimension to their saucer beliefs, they provided a philosophy, structure and a network of sincere like-minded souls.

On a hot Saturday in late June 2006, a group of seven walkers emerge onto the ridge of Kinder Scout, a 636-metre hill in Derbyshire's Peak District. This is the monthly pilgrimage made by the Derby branch of the Aetherius Society. Breathless, they congregate amongst group of rocks marked by a white-painted cross and the initials 'GK'. George King himself stood here on 31 January 1959, making it the eighth

King of the saucers?

Aetherius Society medallion.



mountain to be charged in Operation Starlight. Ignoring the many hill walkers the group of six men and a woman stand at the edge of the rocks facing the Cheshire plain. Their eyes are closed, their palms face forward as they begin to chant. For them and others in the modern Aetherius Society George King's message is as vital now as it was in the 1950s.

Chapter six

Whispers from space?

Cosmic contactees and cults

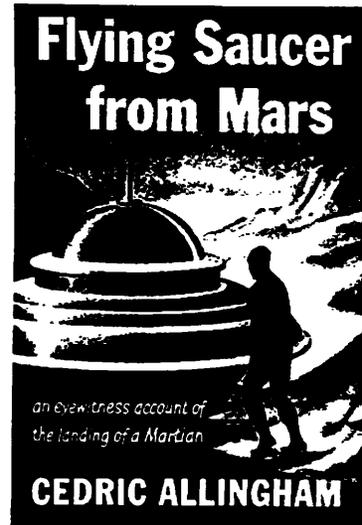
Here is power – divine power – harmoniously and properly used.
One day, maybe not all that distant, when we have ceased to fight
against the Law of Love, that power will be ours too.

(Leslie 1970: 278)

By the mid-1950s George Adamski had become a household name in America and was rapidly becoming well-known in Britain. Adamski's November 1952 contacts with the space brothers in the Californian desert, and the books he wrote with Desmond Leslie captured the imagination of thousands around the world. His book *Flying Saucers Have Landed* was a bestseller and people flocked to his sold out lectures. Adamski was a contactee, someone who claimed to have had physical and mental contact with the space people. Contactees differed radically from the abductees of the 1980s onwards in that the abductee experience is involuntary, whereas contactees enjoyed a consensual relationship with the space people.

George Adamski's account of meeting and photographing flying saucers forms the original contactee story in flying saucer history. As with many other people who became entangled in the flying saucer subject Adamski had an earlier involvement with other forms of supernatural belief. In the 1930s, he had been an occultist, the self-styled head of the Royal Order of Tibet, and in 1949 he turned his hand to science fiction, writing *Pioneers of Space: A Trip to the Moon, Mars and Venus*. His 1952 flying saucer contactee experiences extended to traveling round the solar system with the space brothers and being shown life on other planets. Adamski's space brothers were technologically advanced but espoused peace, love and spiritual advancement. Their aim was to convince the people and governments of earth to stop experimenting with nuclear power which they believed would bring ecological disaster, upsetting the balance of the solar system.

Cover of *Flying Saucer From Mars*. (Supplied by Mary Evans Picture Library)



Not surprisingly, in an America saturated with sci-fi imagery and obsessed with technological advances, Adamski's accounts became hugely popular. As with all cultural fashions, Britain soon had its own crop of contactees. The contactees occupied a unique position in Britain's early flying saucer mythology. They ranged across a wide spectrum of belief but essentially occupied the middle ground between those who believed saucers were solid craft and the outré beliefs held by the new age saucerers who drew on spiritualism and theosophy. In many ways, the contactee experience resembled those of individuals who had claimed contact with fairies and angels. This is an important comparison, placing contactees firmly within the tradition of contact with supernatural intelligences.

Because the claims made by contactees are so bizarre they, more than any other area of UFOlogy, have been open to allegations of outright hoax. Nonetheless, these accounts fascinated the British public and the media never tired of printing stories about individuals who claimed to have met the space people. In this way, elements of the contactees' experiences fed back into society and into the flying saucer subculture, one feeding the other in an unwitting symbiotic relationship. Britain had over thirty known flying saucer contactees who were active between 1954 and 1970. Although small in number, the impact they made on the development of ideas within UFOlogy cannot be underestimated. As with all areas of British UFOlogy, the contactee story is a multi-faceted one and the first contactee case from Britain raises the possibility that one of the Britain's best-loved TV personalities conspired to hoax the nation.

Cedric Allingham

In October 1954 London publisher Frederick Muller released *Flying Saucer from Mars* by an unknown author called Cedric Allingham. Besides being one of the earliest flying saucer books published in Britain it is one of the few written by a contactee. The book's uncompromising opening line sets the scene: 'On February 18

Flying Saucerers

1954, I met a man from another world'. Allingham goes on to recount how, whilst holidaying in Scotland and walking on the coast, he heard a 'swishing noise'. He looked up and saw a speck in the sky that quickly resolved itself into the shape of a classic flying saucer, which he managed to photograph before it disappeared. He saw it again a few hours later and took more photographs as it came in to land, a short distance away from him. Allingham's description and photographs of the craft show it to be almost identical to those seen and photographed by George Adamski. A tall humanoid disembarked and Britain's first recorded encounter with a space man took place.

By using drawings, sign language, and the entity's limited vocal ability, Allingham determined he was from Mars. Once he realized it was possible, Allingham continued the conversation by telepathy, the Martian answering his many questions about life on the red planet. Before they parted Allingham managed to photograph the humanoid and the picture, reproduced in his book, shows a conveniently blurred figure. As he walked away, puzzled at what had just taken place, Allingham met a lone fisherman on the shore who had seen the saucer take off and agreed to sign a witness statement.

On the surface Allingham's story seems to be either a genuine account of a meeting with a space man, or a direct rip-off of Adamski's recently published book, *Flying Saucers Have Landed*. One of the founders of *Flying Saucer Review*, Waveney Girvan, devoted a chapter of his book *Flying Saucers and Commonsense* to the Allingham case (Girvan 1955a). Girvan's broad acceptance of the story helped establish Allingham's place in the rapidly growing British saucer literature. However, parts of the story did not add up. No one on the flying saucer scene or in the media knew who Allingham was. He made only one public appearance to promote the book, at the Tunbridge Wells Flying Saucer Club, to which he was accompanied by an up and coming astronomer. Nor could James Duncan, the Scottish witness to the interplanetary meeting, be traced. Somewhat mysteriously, Allingham's publishers put out a statement saying he had died in a Swiss sanatorium. Yet interest in the case remained high and in 1969, science journalist Robert Chapman decided to look into the matter again. He concluded that the Allingham contact and book was 'probably the biggest UFO leg-pull ever perpetrated in Britain.' (Chapman 1969: 137) But perpetrated by whom?

During the 1980s sceptical UFOlogists Chris Allan and Steuart Campbell made a breakthrough. They discovered narrative and factual similarities between Allingham's text and those of a famous British TV personality. The similarities were inconclusive, so they wrote to Allingham's publishers for more information. The letter was forwarded to journalist Peter Davies who, when contacted by the saucer sleuths, admitted his involvement in the book. Davies revealed he had been commissioned to rewrite *Flying Saucer from Mars* to disguise the original author's style. Furthermore, he claimed he was the figure pictured standing beside the telescope in the book's frontispiece, the caption for which stated, 'An informal photograph of Mr Cedric Allingham, with his 10-inch reflecting telescope'.

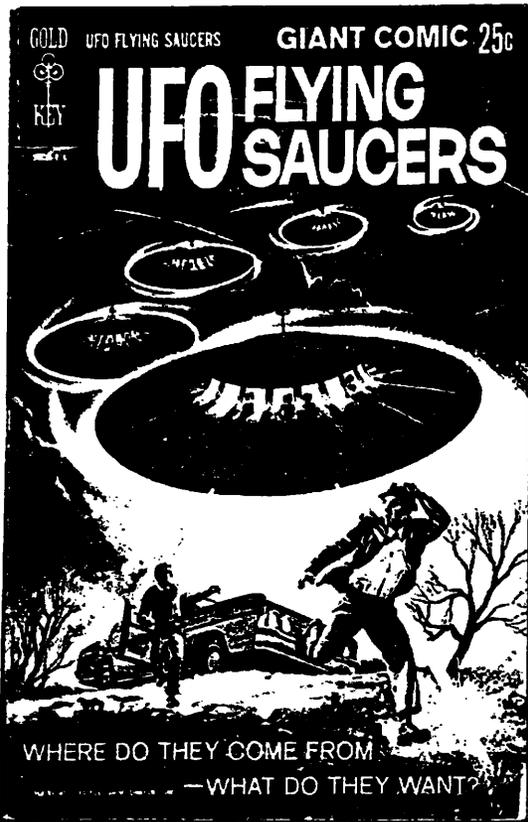
Allan and Campbell went public with their theory in a 1986 article where they exposed the book's real author as being none other than Britain's most popular astronomer, Sir Patrick Moore (Allan and Campbell 1986). Their textual analysis, coupled with Davies' confession and the fact that Moore was an old friend, revealed that he was most likely the author. Further investigation revealed that the telescope and bushes were identical to those in Moore's garden at Selsey Bill. If that were not enough to connect Moore with Allingham, the fact that Moore was the person who accompanied Allingham to his Tunbridge Wells lecture seemed to clinch the unraveling of the hoax.

In his astronomy books and TV appearances Moore, ever the establishment sceptic, often refers to flying saucers in a disparaging manner. He frequently refers to the Allingham case, which is largely unknown to the public, almost as though he is taunting UFOlogists with a hidden secret. Interviewed by the authors in 2005 about his role Moore said: 'It was not me.' This was tempered in the same interview by a suggestion that it 'may have been a spoof.' However, Moore did claim to have met Cedric Allingham at his only public appearance in Tunbridge Wells, adding: 'I don't remember what he said, it was a half a century ago.'

If indeed Moore was the Allingham hoaxer, as Allan and Campbell claim, clearly George Adamski's experiences had influenced not only flying saucer believers, but also the scientific establishment as well. By disbelieving flying saucer contact stories and by writing a book hoaxing one, Moore had become as much a part of the phenomenon as the contactees himself. Perhaps, as with many of the other claims of faked photographs such as those of Gordon Faulkner (see page 148) and Stephen Darbishire, what started as a practical joke went too far.

Within months of the publication of Allingham's book, George King announced his space contacts and founded the Aetherius Society. The floodgates were now open and over the next decade contactees were in the news and a hot topic of conversation among UFOlogists. The media was extremely keen to bring any contactees to the public's attention. News reports of the coming of the flying saucers in the early 1950s had dominated many of Britain's newspapers and almost any saucer story would receive a few column inches, many stories making the front page. Therefore, when people began to claim personal contact with the space people the news hounds pricked up their ears and sensed a new round of headlines.

Contactees were a new phenomenon, contemporary with the Cold War and the beginnings of the space race. The idea that ordinary people may be in contact with extraterrestrials came at exactly the right moment. By the mid-50s, space was the place and this type of story was exactly what the media and public wanted to hear. More thoughtful commentators suggested that the contactees might simply be spiritualists who were receiving their messages from the same sources, albeit under a different guise. Spiritualists freely cross-pollinated their ideas with flying saucer buffs and the public yearning for messages from beyond – any beyond – was as strong in the 1950s as it had been after the human losses of the First World War when tens of thousands flocked to spiritualists for comfort.



Flying saucer comic cover.
(Supplied by Mary Evans
Picture Library)

James Cooke goes to Zomdic

James Cooke from Runcorn in Cheshire is one of the least known British contactees. Nevertheless, he exemplifies the point at which spiritualism and belief in flying saucers coalesces to create a contactee. In 1957, at the height of flying saucer fever in Britain, the front page of Cooke's local paper announced 'Spiritualist insists he was first in outer space.' Cooke related how his mother had told him as a child that he was a 'chosen one', and he always held the belief that space people would contact him one day. Cooke's account of being taken by saucer to the planet Zomdic was pure sci-fi hokum, but it fascinated people. He was feted in the media and interviewed on television. There he told of how he had been befriended by the Zomdicians who told him, 'Your scientists don't know this planet exists,' which neatly avoided the problem of him having to prove their factual existence. Cooke's space friends travelled in flying saucers identical to those used by Adamski. The Zomdicians were tall, similar to Adamski's Venusians, and lived a life of peace and harmony (*Runcorn Weekly News* 10 October 1957).

In contrast to the cold, unfeeling 'grey' aliens which were reported from 1980 onwards, the space people in the 1950s were seemingly all calm, peaceful, healthy spiritual beings. From a psychological perspective, this can be seen as a reaction to

Whispers from space?

the harsh realities of life during the Cold War. The political uncertainties of the time jibed with the rampant materialism that was sweeping the free world. The personal and political stresses were huge and space, especially contact with space people, was the perfect escapism. People would prefer to imagine that rapid advances in technology were focused on rockets rather than bombs, and a convenient way to reinterpret the threat of communism was to dwell on its harmonious aspects. Put those together in the imagination and you have peace loving, ecologically aware and technologically advanced space people. Once imagined it was only a matter of time before contact must surely take place.

Cooke quickly attracted a small cult following that met in a converted shop. They called themselves the Church of Aquarius and, while their image was space age, their practice was essentially spiritualism. Church members would sit round a luminous plate in a darkened room, after which 'visions' would occur. Although undoubtedly sincere in his beliefs, it seems that Cooke just took the trappings of the space age and attached them to his spiritualist beliefs, moving with the times and substituting space people for discarnate entities.

As the 1960s progressed and interest in contactees and flying saucers waned, Cooke and his followers modified their beliefs. He still insisted his trips to other planets courtesy of the space brothers had taken place. But he had now taken a step further. Religion had taken over from saucers and he now declared himself the Most Illustrious Brother, the Reverend James Cooke, A.Ph. What's more, he proclaimed himself head of the Aquarian Church.

Having originally claimed experiences similar to those of Adamski, Cooke now appeared to be apeing George King of the Aetherius Society, setting himself up as a leader, the chosen one, just as his mother had said. But even a chosen one has to make a living and in 1966 *The News of the World* discovered Cooke and his disciples on a boating holiday in the Norfolk Broads. There they were taking collections in pubs and selling pseudo-religious tracts and disc-shaped brooches which, they claimed, would bestow 'mystical power' on the wearer. 'Crackpots in dog collars' was another newspaper's verdict on Cooke's latest antics (*The Sunday People* 17 July 1966). The media had both made and broken Cooke's popularity. Not long after his public exposure, he faded from view, later dying in obscurity.

This seemed to be the fate of many contactees. Their star burned brightly for a while, during which time they made outrageous claims of alien contact, which was encouraged by the interest of the media. Then, after becoming disillusioned with how they were treated or when their prophecies failed to materialize, they melted back into the background, keeping their beliefs to themselves or following other philosophies.

Cynthia Appleton and the space baby

One case that contains almost every element of the contactees' flirtation with the media, the space people and prophecy involves another barely known name, Cynthia Appleton. Her contactee claims could have changed the world, yet instead

Flying Saucerers

87 Fentham Road, Aston – where the ‘space baby’ was born.



they changed her, driving her briefly from obscurity before throwing her back again, her dreams shattered.

If he is still alive, Matthew Appleton may yet be ignorant that he is also a ‘space baby’, born of a human via the agency of a being from Venus. His destiny was predicted long before his birth, when Venusians told his mother that Matthew would become a ‘leader of men’. To understand how this strange state of affairs came about we must again return to the 1950s and the heyday of the British enthusiasm for flying saucers. Fentham Road stands in the once-prosperous area of Aston, a suburb of Birmingham, in the industrial heartland of England’s West Midlands. Now it is an unexceptional street with nothing to identify it as the location of a series of bizarre encounters between a housewife and emissaries from the planet Venus.

Cynthia Appleton (formerly Spencer) was 27 years old in 1957. After leaving the Woman’s Royal Voluntary Service she had married Ronald Appleton and they settled at 87 Fentham Road. Until 1957 the Appletons lived unremarkable lives. Ronald worked as a metalworker, providing for Cynthia who bore him two children – Susan in 1955 and Janice in 1957. To all intents and purposes they were the perfect nuclear family in an imperfect post-nuclear world.

Cynthia Appleton went about her domestic routines on 19 November 1957, which started as an ordinary winter’s day. Then, shortly after lunchtime, her worldview was transformed. Less than two months later, in her local paper, Cynthia gave the first public account of what had taken place:

It was early afternoon. My children were having a rest and I went into the lounge where the baby was asleep in her pram. There, just a few feet away, stood this slender white-skinned man. He had blond hair. He was the same as any human being, except that he wore a kind of dome over his head and a tight-fitting all-in-one suit of a grey

Whispers from space?

metallic colour. I was rooted to the spot – and terrified – until he spoke. He said we were going about space flight the wrong way and that men of his world – which he did not name – would come to Earth before we reached theirs.

(Birmingham Evening Dispatch 8 January 1958)

This was just the bare outline of Appleton's experiences, which developed over the next four years. UFO researcher Dr John Dale interviewed Cynthia many times during this period. His notes reveal that events had actually begun three days previously, on 16 November, when she had suffered a blackout while doing the housework. This, her visitors later informed her, was a 'failed attempt at contact'. According to Dr Dale, the 19 November contact began when Cynthia 'became aware of an atmosphere. It seemed like a rosy coloured darkness materialised outside. The light did not seem to penetrate into the living room.' The entity then appeared in the room from nowhere, and the light returned to normal. Cynthia described how the entity 'spoke to me into my mind, saying, "Do not be afraid".'

Through telepathic communication the entity told Cynthia he was from another world and that the space people wanted to live in harmony with Earth people but could not until 'you stop all wars.' The visitor went on to state that he knew space flight experiments 'to get to us' were taking place, but the methods being used were fundamentally wrong: 'Your scientists are pulling against the greatest force of gravity by going straight up – you should travel with a sideways attitude.' And with that Zen-like suggestion, the being slowly opened his arms and a 'TV set' appeared in the space between them. This appeared to be a holographic image, unknown in the 1950s, in three dimensions and full colour. The 'living image' as Cynthia called it, showed a classic flying saucer with flat rim and transparent dome. On its underside there were three half-spheres. It was exactly like the spaceships seen and photographed by George Adamski (Jenny Randles personal communication, 2001).

Cynthia commented: 'These spaceships were like nothing I have ever seen in my life before. They seemed to take off and hovered in space for two or three seconds, went off to the left, then they went very quickly to the right.' Cynthia's crash course in saucer technology included being shown the saucer's power source, which she drew for Dr Dale. Her sketch depicted a central hub with a series of curved arms, like spokes that rotated and 'collected power' from the atmosphere. She was told 'your greatest power is under the sea. It is there in great quantity just for the taking.' The entity revealed that he was from Gharnasvarn, which Earth people called Venus, and that he would return.

The holographic TV set then blinked out and, along with the entity, vanished. Cynthia told Dr Dale that her visitor 'did not seem like a vision, because there was a three-dimensional depth and you could not see through him. He did actually seem to be there.' After he had disappeared, Cynthia noticed the entity had been standing on a sheet of discarded newspaper that now had a scorch mark on it. Dale later saw this and noted that it looked like the result of a 'lightning strike or small electrical discharge'. Unfortunately, this potentially vital piece of physical evidence was

borrowed by journalists and no more was heard of it (Jenny Randles, personal communication, 2001).

Gordon Creighton, the future editor of *Flying Saucer Review*, also spoke at length to Cynthia about her experiences. She told him more about what the Venusians' had said about their mission: 'We have to visit your world to obtain something of which we are running short. It is at the bottom of the sea.' Cynthia received the impression this substance was called 'tanium'. When she asked her metalworking husband he told her they must mean titanium. Cynthia also revealed to Creighton that the Venusians were concerned that 'the bearers of the hammer and sickle were on the point of perfecting a gun which could disintegrate matter without actually firing a shell.' The Russians, in other words, were developing some form of death-ray (Bowen 1969: 17–18).

Soon after her initial contact, Cynthia was approached by a local clergyman, Rev Tiley, vicar of Powick, near Worcester. Tiley must have surprised his congregation when he made Cynthia's experiences the focus of a Sunday sermon in January 1958. That a member of the clergy was confident enough to speak about claims of alien contact to a packed church, admitting that he also believed, speaks volumes about attitudes to the possibility of genuine contact with space people.

Mrs Appleton had several visits from the Venusians in 1958. On one occasion her visitor brought along another entity, which he described as his superior. Neither wore helmets, and Cynthia could see her first visitor wore his blond hair at shoulder length whilst his superior had shorter, brown, curly hair. They explained that 'special brainwaves' were what enabled their contacts with her, and that their appearances were not physical but were a 'projection'. Subsequent visits saw the spacemen discarding their archetypal space apparel in preference to black business suits and homburg hats. They also eschewed the drama of materialisation in favour of a more conventional means of transport, arriving by car – a large black one with tinted windows. Shades of the 'Men in Black'! On each of the six or so visits Cynthia received during 1958 her Venusian confidants revealed further information:

She was advised time did not exist. It was a philosophical invention by mankind. We failed to understand that all life was connected at some deep inner level, not separate as we assumed. Detailed scientific facts about the nature of atoms were then conveyed to her. She was told this was the basis to understand how to cure cancer and a complex cure was explained to her which involved changing the vibrational rate of atoms at a sub-atomic level, but Cynthia struggled to remember the terms used when she tried to describe this to Dr Dale.

(Jenny Randles personal communication, 2001)

Nuclear physics and the sub-atomic world clearly held a special fascination for the Venusians and many conversations revolved around the subject. To the Venusians, science and religion appeared to be synonymous, and they were keen to share their version of the secret of the Universe, telling Cynthia: 'The deity itself dwells at the

Whispers from space?

Advertising flyer for George Adamski's 1959 British tour.

FLYING SAUCERS

FACT not FICTION

HEAR

George Adamski

from America

LECTURE OF

Personal experiences & contacts

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heart and core of the atom.' This was heady stuff for a Birmingham housewife. Cynthia told them it was pointless revealing this type of detailed technical and philosophical knowledge to her, because she simply did not understand. The entities disregarded her pleas of ignorance and continued to give her complicated information.

Although the entities told Cynthia they were not appearing to her in physical form, on one visit the Venusian said he had burned his hand and asked her to bathe it in boiling water, which she did. After he had left, she noticed a piece of skin at the bottom of the bowl. Portions of the skin were later distributed to various UFOlogists, with one piece being tested by scientists at Birmingham University. The tests were inconclusive. The best that could be determined was that the skin was not human, but the scientists could not say it was extraterrestrial. The best guess was that it was animal in nature, possibly from a pig. Just why a university science department could not determine correctly what kind of animal the skin was from is not clear. But as with many artifacts alleged to be from space – or fairyland – what appeared to be one thing was, in fact, another entirely. Patrick Kent, a reporter for the *Sunday People*, asked Cynthia's four-year-old daughter Susan if she remembered any of the Venusian's visits. 'Yes,' she replied, 'I remember Mummy bathing the hand of a man with funny long hair and a fur collar.'

Flying Saucer Review editor Brinsley le Poer Trench (Lord Clancarty) was certain Mrs Appleton's claims were genuine: 'The woman's story ties up in many respects with what we have learned in the last 10 years from others who have had contact with

Flying Saucerers



Left: *George Adamski. The first contactee of the flying saucer era. (Photo supplied by Bill Davison)*

Opposite: *Headline from Sunday People 10 May 1959.*

men from other worlds.' Indeed, it did. Throughout the 1950s, US contactees had been telling their own tales of meeting, talking to, and even taking flights with spacemen from planets within our solar system, often Venus and Mars. Like Cynthia's visitors, they were tall, humanoid, communicated by telepathy and traveled in classic, dome-shaped flying saucers and espoused a philosophy similar to that explained to Cynthia Appleton.

These Venusian values were essentially socialist in nature, tinged with elements now familiar from many New Age philosophies – beliefs quite at odds with the 'you've never had it so good' capitalism of the 1950s. Contactees were repeatedly told by their mentors that to save Earth from certain disaster, mankind should stop tampering with nuclear forces and live in peace and harmony. Only then would we be included in the Intergalactic Parliament, taking our place among the stars with other highly evolved civilisations. The 'space brothers' often illustrated their concerns by showing contactees visions of nuclear and ecological disasters. Cynthia Appleton was shown a vision of two asteroids colliding and causing widespread panic and devastation on Earth. This, she was told, was going to happen soon.

Cynthia's visitors looked almost identical to George Adamski's. Both sets of Venusians also initially communicated by telepathy and subsequently by voice. The flying saucers they travelled in seemed identical and the message, that humans were in danger of annihilation by the atomic bomb, was the same in both cases. George Adamski toured Britain in April 1959 and Cynthia Appleton was in the audience at his lecture at Birmingham's Midland Institute. She commented '... so much of what Mr Adamski says tallies with my own experiences that I feel much happier now,' adding as if by way of corroborative evidence, 'My four-year-old daughter has seen my visitor, too, for she asks me when he is going to come back.' (*Birmingham Evening Dispatch* 30 April 1959)

By contactee standards, Cynthia Appleton's story was just another 'girl meets spaceman' romance. But when worlds collide, there is always the chance sparks might fly. Cynthia's tale took a bizarre turn in 1959 when the *Sunday People*

THE PEOPLE, SUNDAY, MAY 10, 1959

THIS IS THE BIGGEST CRACKPOT
STATEMENT A WOMAN
HAS EVER MADE . . .

'I'm going to
have a baby
from Venus'

*says Mrs. Cynthia Appleton, of 87, Fentham Road,
Aston, Birmingham*

**MRS. CYNTHIA
APPLETON** could be
anyone's next-door neigh-
bour. She lives an ordinary
life in an ordinary street.

But there was nothing ordinary about
the fantastic claim Mrs. Appleton made
to me last week. She said: "I'm going to
have the world's first SPACE CHILD."

She stroked her long blonde hair, tied
up in a ponytail, and went on: "Of
course, my husband is the baby's father
- but really the child will belong to a
race who live on the planet Venus."

And to that crackpot statement Mrs.
Appleton added: "A man from Venus
called one day while I was doing the wash-
ing and told me so."

No, don't laugh yet! . . . read on.
I suggested to Mrs. Appleton that perhaps
she was imagining things. "But it's TRUK,"
she said. "And my husband believes it too."

Twenty-nine-year-old Mrs.
Appleton lives at 87, Fentham
Road, Aston, Birmingham.

She and her husband, Ron,
a welder, have two children,
Susan, 4, and Jan ce, 2.

Their third baby—the one
with supposed links with outer
space—is expected to be born
this week. And Mrs Appleton
is convinced that it will be a
boy. Why?

The Man from Venus told
her.

According to Mrs. Appleton

headline screamed, "'I'm going to have a baby from Venus", says Mrs Cynthia Appleton'. The sub-heading opined, 'This is the biggest crackpot statement a woman has ever made.' The *People* reporter cut to the chase and suggested that Cynthia might have been imagining things, to which Mrs Appleton retorted, 'but it's true, and my husband believes it too.' She explained how the man from Venus had given her other predictions about her pregnancy (*Sunday People* 10 May 1959).

The Venusian had called again in September 1958, informing Cynthia that she was 'in the state of being with child.' It was news to her, but he was adamant, telling her she would give birth in late May 1959. The child would be a boy and would weigh exactly 7lb 3oz. He would be a 'leader of men' at the age of 14 and he must be called Matthew. Shortly after the Venusian's visit, Cynthia was pronounced pregnant and, with the spaceman's predictions ringing in her ears, settled down to enjoy her pregnancy (*Sunday People* 10 May 1959).

The Venusians were not far off the mark with their prophecy. On 1 June 1959, Cynthia Appleton entered her cosmic confinement, and at two minutes after midnight on 2 June, gave birth. As foretold, the child was a boy with blond hair, weighing just a little more than predicted. The Appletons were delighted and called him – what else – Matthew (*Birmingham Sunday Mercury* 7 June 1959).

Nothing more was heard from the Appletons for over a year. Shortly after Matthew's first birthday the *Empire News* ran the headline 'The 'Venus' baby is so normal', reporting that 13-month-old Matthew was doing well, although Mrs Appleton was still at a loss to know what to make of it all. As yet there was no sign of Matthew becoming a leader of men, but Mrs Appleton was keeping a close eye on him. 'I don't know what I expected but I haven't noticed the slightest thing that could be taken as a sign,' she said. She was also concerned that, since Matthew's birth, contact with the Venusians had been somewhat sparse. 'He used to pop in quite regularly every seven or eight weeks,' she said. 'When he left, after forecasting Matthew's birth, he said he would be looking in again soon. But he never returned. I just can't make it out.' (*Empire News* 17 July 1960)

And there, in July 1960, the trail goes cold. Newspapers never again mentioned Mrs Appleton or her 'Venus baby' and there was no major collision between two asteroids, which the spacemen had predicted. Matthew would have turned 14 on 1 June 1973, the year when the prophesy indicated he would become a 'leader of men'. History shows that, as yet, he appears not to have taken up this challenge.

The Venus baby story raises as many questions as answers. Not just for Cynthia Appleton's experiences but for those of all the contactees. Any discussion of the Appleton case must address the possibility that Cynthia made the whole story up. A widely-held opinion among historians of flying saucer culture is that many, if not all, the contactees including Adamski, simply invented their stories. This may be the case, but it in no way diminishes the effect these narratives had on individual and collective belief about the nature of flying saucers, their occupants, their science and philosophy and their origins. Even if they were hoaxes, the meaning of a hoax is the effect it has. These 'hoaxes' had far-reaching effects on society. Discarding the stories

on the grounds they may be hoaxes is a simplistic way of dismissing their influence. If a small and disparate group of people, aided by the media, can convince others to believe that contact with space people was taking place, then something significant is taking place in society. At the very least it demonstrates the power of belief and the ease with which people are prepared to accept claims of supernatural intervention.

What could have been Cynthia Appleton's motivation for a hoax? Hoaxes are usually one-off events. Hers spanned several years. At that time, there was scant financial reward in selling your story to the newspapers, and television chat shows had yet to be invented. Sceptics may be tempted to suggest that Cynthia had been conducting an extramarital affair and concocted the story as a cover for her dalliance. If that were the case, her cuckolded husband Ron fell for it completely. He told the *Sunday People* reporter:

Cynthia is the best wife any man could have and of course *I believe her completely*. I'm only sorry I haven't been around to meet our friend too. I'm not worried about being the father of a child inspired by a man from space.

(*Sunday People* 14 June 1959)

Sputnik – 'The Space Age is here'

In conversation with Gordon Creighton, Cynthia had claimed that prior to her first Venusian contact she had no knowledge of flying saucers. This is somewhat disingenuous. During the 1950s any adult in Britain must have known about flying saucers. The media was full of them, and a number of highly unusual and well-publicised UFO events had taken place throughout 1957, when Cynthia revealed her first contacts. Besides the glut of saucer sightings, 1957 was also the year that man first broke free of the Earth's atmosphere. On 4 October 1957 the Russians launched the first manmade object into space. Sputnik had breached the final frontier and was sending the 'deep beep-beep' signal in A-flat, audible from every continent. The Sputnik connection cannot be overlooked, as the Venusians had specifically mentioned it to Cynthia Appleton on their first visit. She had then discussed the matter with Rev Tiley, who commented:

I understand they do not regard the Sputniks as weapons, but as scientific instruments, adding... if any aggressive sort of missile is sent out into space they intend to confiscate it.

(*Birmingham Evening Dispatch* 13 January 1958).

Was Sputnik the trigger that brought the Venusians to Birmingham? Or was Sputnik the epoch-shattering event that allowed Appleton to believe in aliens? We do not know, but Sputnik certainly impacted on public consciousness and had a dramatic effect on UFO sightings. Spiritualist James Cooke announced his contact with space people just a few days after Sputnik was launched. Can all this be just a coincidence? Or are deeper cultural factors at work? Paul Dickson, author of *Sputnik: Shock of the Century*, suggests that:

Flying Saucers

Sputnik provoked a whole new phase of the UFO phenomenon, which involved harvesting sperm and other genetic samples from humans for what was reputedly the creation of hybrid space babies. A large cohort came to believe that the Sputniks served as a mating call to abductors and that no lonely, isolated human has been safe from interplanetary molestation ever since.

(Dickson 2001: 67)

Within days of the October 1957 Sputnik launch a Brazilian farmer, Antonio Villas Boas, claimed he was abducted by the occupants of UFO and forced to impregnate one of his captors (see Chapter 10). Perhaps, in some strange, metaphorical way, the penetration of space by man had an equal and opposite reaction in the penetration of Earth by entities from space.

So, even if Cynthia Appleton's amazing tales were hoaxed, their significance is that they were triggered and generated by popular flying saucer culture and held a personal reality for her. This is as remarkable as the possibility of a genuine contact with Venusians. If, on the other hand, we believe that her experiences were genuine anomalous events – whatever their origin – other avenues of speculation remain open. This dichotomy between the reality or falsehood of alien contact claims powered the UFO controversy through the twentieth century. Post-war Westernised society was obsessed by the scientific method and proof. Yet, as we have seen repeatedly in this book, there was a strong undercurrent of what amounted to superstitious belief at all levels.

Rev Tiley had been keen to stress that the existence of extraterrestrials did not detract from the Christian faith, but served to amplify it. 'If what they say is true, then it is the biggest thing that has hit our planet since the coming of Jesus. He came when the world was desperate.' Many commentators on flying saucer culture have suggested that belief in and claims of contact with space people is nothing less than the religious impulse. When viewed from this perspective Appleton's story is nothing less than a space age version of the Annunciation, the proclamation to Mary by the Angel Gabriel of the coming of Jesus. The teachings of the 'space brothers' were not so different from those of Jesus: live morally, be good to each other, and do not destroy nature. The intelligence services must have been panicking at this essentially religious message, with its pacifist and communist undertones, being preached by UFO contactees during a rapidly escalating Cold War.

Perhaps the simple dichotomy of hoax or physical reality is not the most productive way of looking at the Appleton case. It could be that Cynthia's story, and by extension those of the other contactees, was a contemporary manifestation of the long tradition of mystical experience. Such experiences, triggered and given specific shape by the percipient's culture and beliefs, tend to overturn the mundane world and demand communication with others. Of this type of experience, William Dalrymple writes:

Throughout history, the British have produced far more than their fair share of ecstasies and wild-eyed mystics – from St Cuthbert to

Whispers from space?

Guthlac of Crowland, from Julian of Norwich to William Blake – people to whom the divine was imminent, ever present, and for whom a conversation with angels and saints was as everyday an occurrence as chatting to the postman.

(The Guardian 24 November 2003)

In one instance, directly relevant to Cynthia Appleton, the eighteenth-century prophetess Joanna Southcott believed that she received daily dictation from the Godhead, and that, aged 64, she had been impregnated by the spirit in order to give birth to a new messiah called Shiloh. These people may have been hoaxers too, but their positions within accepted religious dogma, art or literature, assure their place in history. Whether or not their experiences were genuine or hoaxed, how different are they, really, from those of Cynthia Appleton, and why should her claims be treated with any less respect or curiosity?

Such events can happen to anyone at any time, although some people appear to have a predisposition for visionary experience. These are often individuals for whom the veil between consensus and visionary reality is thin. Orthodox psychiatry, rightly or wrongly, would diagnose many of the symptoms exhibited by visionaries throughout the ages as evidence of a mental health problem. In view of this, perhaps there is a clue in that Cynthia Appleton was discharged from the Women's Royal Voluntary Service at the age of 21 following a nervous breakdown.

Whether you see contactees as visionaries, mentally ill or the latest manifestation of an existential mystery constantly seeking new expression, they were a cultural phenomenon with far reaching effect. Besides envisioning the technologies of our future, such as travel to other planets and holograms, the contactees were some of the earliest proponents of what we know call the ecology movement. All the contactees preached messages of disarmament and concern for the Earth long before the 1960s counter-culture took the philosophy to its heart.

Perhaps the closest historical analogy to the contactees in Britain is of those individuals who claimed to have met fairies. Like the contactees, those who visited fairyland were shown a different way of life, a different social and political system that existed in parallel to ours. Visitors to fairyland were often given and shown secret information or granted special gifts. Occasionally fairy children were born to Earth people in situations similar to those of Cynthia Appleton. However, and in direct comparison with the contactees, visitors to fairyland never brought any physical artifacts back. In fact, just like the contactees, they had no proof whatsoever that their experiences were any more real than a midsummer night's dream.

Whatever the reality, the contactee movement was short lived, enjoying its heyday in Britain between 1954 and 1970. After that time, the main players disappeared or became subsumed into areas of new age belief where they would be subject to less scepticism. One of the main reasons contactees vanished was due simply to them being overtaken by the march of science. As the exploration of space progressed and revealed that the 'space brothers' did not, at least physically, inhabit our solar system, the contactees faded away, becoming a footnote in flying saucer history.

Chapter seven

The old straight track to the new age

Saucers, psychics and free thinkers

I think most of us realise that the phenomena of UFOs and prehistoric alignments are in some way related.

John Michel (Screeton 1977: 150)

The term 'new age' is a familiar one, but to what does it refer? The new age movement has no creation myth, no overarching creed, and is in a state of constant flux, varying with the mystic fashions of the day. We take the term to indicate that nexus of belief that includes anything and everything from crystal healing to speaking with dolphins, by way of shamanic drumming groups and unusual dietary practices. Most new age beliefs can be defined as being based on opinion and aspiration rather than possessing, or requiring, any basis in fact. In the past fifty years, the new age movement has grown exponentially by accreting a steady stream of fringe belief that has been co-opted under its banner. Unsurprisingly, flying saucers are one of those beliefs.

Mainstream UFOlogical belief in the fifties and sixties, the kind most often seen proclaimed in the media of the period, held that the source and nature of flying saucers was straightforward. They were physical, structured, 'nuts and bolts' objects of unknown origin, almost certainly from outer space or beyond. World governments knew all about them and sooner or later 'the truth' about flying saucers would be revealed. Opinion as to their purpose was less clear and at this point new age ideas began to seep into the subject, through the ideas of the contactees, organisations such as the Aetherius Society, or those who believed that saucers were demonic in origin. We will meet these groups and others with similar outré agendas in later chapters. Any discussion of how rapidly UFOlogical belief has broadened to take in aspects of other belief systems must include a discussion of how new age ideas influenced and interacted with the subject.

The old straight track to the new age

Outer Space Review magazine cover. A typical British UFO magazine cover from the 1960s.



New age ideas offered an alternate way of thinking for those people interested in flying saucers but who rejected as too simplistic the belief they were purely physical creations of other civilisations. As with most other areas of UFO interest the new age elements within it were not discrete units and many of the key figures in UFOlogy moved effortlessly between different aspects of the subject, their lives an ever-changing pick'n'mix of belief. The new age vision of flying saucers was often acceptance of telepathic contact, salvation from space, and validity of alleged supernatural experience over scientific proof.

The new age movement's involvement with flying saucers did not suddenly appear in the 1950s. Its roots lie deeply embedded in theosophy and spiritualism, both of which held that there were other layers to reality, worlds of experience other than those of everyday existence. Spiritualist and theosophical beliefs have embedded within them all the elements which formed the basis of new age thought in the mid-to-late twentieth century. Theosophy contended that the divine or the 'other' could be experienced directly without mediation from priest or dogma, while spiritualism is based on the belief that the soul survives after death and can interact with the living. The concept of spiritual and mental salvation was a core belief in both movements, as was the notion of other intelligences operating independently of humankind. These ideas recur time after time in reworked ways throughout the history of UFOlogy and clearly many with a broad spiritualist or theosophist background were attracted to the study of flying saucers, or sought to integrate saucers into their pantheon of beliefs.

As already discussed in Chapter 5, the spiritualist movement in Britain was somewhat perplexed when reports of flying saucers appeared in media during the late-40s and early-50s. Although some psychics and spiritualists dismissed them immediately, a number of spiritualist mediums believed they had made contact with flying saucers. An example occurs in a 1954 *Psychic News* article, which reported:

Speaking through the well known medium Ralph Watson, his control Tabiti answered questions by experts about Flying Saucers during a trance sitting in Hastings... For two hours the sceptics bombarded the medium with questions, but his control was ready with the answers. He replied in technical language to questions about the makers of Flying Saucers.

(*Psychic News* 27 March 1954)

This low-level interest from the spiritualist community bubbled under throughout the 1950s. But although individuals with spiritualist beliefs toyed with the idea of contact with saucers, the spiritualist establishment was too clearly defined and dogmatic to accept the multiplicity of possibilities that came attached to the subject. Whilst UFOlogists in Britain wrote several books on the flying saucers during the 1950s, spiritualists could only come up with one. As already described in Chapter 5, *Venus Speaks: Direct Revelation Regarding Flying Saucers and Life on Venus* (published in 1954) consisted of communications purporting to be from 'The Chief Scientists of Venus' received while the sitter, 'M.T.', was in trance. The cover illustrations were clearly based on the flying saucers allegedly seen and photographed by George Adamski, and the text was a barely intelligible stew of pseudo-technical information. Most of it was about the propulsion systems that powered the saucers, mixed with the usual contactee message about how humans were causing ecological disaster, topped off with a healthy dose of paranoia about diet and healthy living (Richardson 1954).

Although unable to provide tangible evidence to support their own beliefs the spiritualist establishment, through their main publication *Psychic News*, mostly frowned on the upstart belief system of flying saucers. By the time saucer contactee George King was encroaching on their territory spiritualism had lost patience completely with the saucer movement and flying saucers rarely featured in the spiritualist press after 1960. Yet there were many people, some linked to the spiritualist movement, who believed that mental contact with extraterrestrials was possible. This notion also fed into the flying saucer contactee movement, and was a direct result of the groundwork laid by spiritualism. The combination of saucers and spiritualism led to some bizarre, if not unintentionally hilarious, scenarios being played out among small groups of flying saucerers throughout the British Isles.

Sir Victor Goddard and the Attingham Group

One such faction, which straddled the line between spiritualism and saucer belief, was a disparate collection of individuals known as the Attingham Group. They were so called because they had met or had connections with the new age centre based at Attingham Park in Shropshire. From the 1950s onwards, under the auspices of Sir

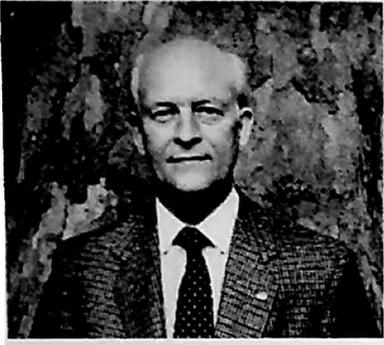
Robert Ogilvie Crombie, Peter Caddy and Sir George Trevelyan at Attingham Park in the mid-60s. (Photo supplied by Attingham Park)



George Trevelyan (1906–96), Attingham Park became a focus for all things new age. By the mid-60s Attingham had become a melting pot of new age ideas, each week seeing new age courses on topics such as ‘The Dark’ and ‘The Light’ taking place. Many new agers who attended Attingham courses were also interested in flying saucers and like-minded souls were able to discuss their deeper meaning in isolation from the strictures of mainstream UFOlogy and its emphasis on nuts and bolts craft. Trevelyan himself was only mildly interested in saucers but there was a small pressure group of Attingham regulars who were working to persuade him to set up a UFO study group. This would essentially be a saucer study group for the new age and had the Attingham Group been successfully formed and publicised it would have provided a viable opposition to the idea that saucers were merely physical craft. That the group barely got past the discussion stage was largely a result of the naïve reasoning behind it.

The embryonic study group included some very interesting and well-placed society names and establishment figures. Air Marshal Sir Victor Goddard was the key player. In 1967, he wrote to several distinguished pillars of the scientific establishment in an attempt to get them involved in flying saucer research by way of the Attingham Group. One of his targets was astronomer Sir Bernard Lovell who ran the Jodrell Bank radio telescope in Cheshire. Goddard should have known better than to approach Lovell who was well-known for being an objective and sceptical scientist. His somewhat brusque response to Goddard’s entreaties was to the point: ‘I ought to say then straight away that I find the whole of this business most alarming.’ He continued in the same tone with ‘I have repeatedly gone on record in the past to the effect that there is not the slightest piece of real scientific evidence to support a belief in the UFO phenomena.’ (Bernard Lovell, personal communication, Jodrell Bank archive, 7 August 1967)

Undaunted, Goddard pursued his attempts to set up a new age saucer study group and tried to involve the well-known Buddhist and judge Christmas Humphries, and spiritualist and property developer Instone Bloomfield. Other new age aficionados who hovered on the fringes of Goddard’s would-be Attingham Group included Michael Parker, a key member of Prince Philip’s staff, former MoD scientist Frank Houghton-Bentley, and Brinsley le Poer Trench (later Lord Clancarty). Dutch UFO enthusiast Johann Quanjer was also heavily involved. One of Quanjer’s establishment friends, Lady Cynthia Sandys, a psychic medium, exemplified the often-ludicrous results of mixing new age beliefs. During the course of his correspondence with Sir Bernard Lovell, Sir Victor Goddard tried to impress the pragmatic astronomer. He did so, not by demonstrating his scientific knowledge, but



Dutch UFOlogist Johann Quanjer. (Copyright James Traeger)

by claiming that Lady Sandys was channelling messages from American contactee George Adamski, who had died in 1965. Adamski was something of a hero to the new age saucerers and Lady Sandys claimed she had made contact with his spirit on several occasions. 'I was told that he was working all over the Solar system, sometimes in Venus, Saturn and so on,' being a typical example of her communications. Adamski, speaking through Lady Sandys, also stated: 'Oh, I like that fellow at Jodrell Bank, we think alongside each other, but he must go further,' and: 'Science talk is interplanetary, so to your group who are waiting to meet the saucers, I would say collect your scientists first. Lovell I should like to name, but he must be given proof first.'

Such vapid psychic messages from Adamski prompted Goddard to write to Sir Bernard Lovell, suggesting he help the putative Attingham Group. Goddard was so confident that Lovell would be keen to support his cause that he booked a roof table at the Royal Garden Hotel for 18 July 1967 so they could meet to discuss matters further. Goddard had drastically misjudged Lovell. Besides his letter displaying a scepticism in the subject of UFOs generally Lovell had a few sharp words about Adamski: 'As for Adamski, I have never met that gentleman but I did attempt to read his book, and I must say that judging by any standard which you and I would normally apply to such works it really was the most unutterable rubbish.' If that were not enough to get the message across to Goddard, Lovell hammered his feelings home, writing, 'I am sure there is no need for me to say more to make you realise my personal attitude to these so-called phenomena, and to the people who believe in them.' (Bernard Lovell, 7 August 1967)

With tactics such as those employed by Sir Victor Goddard, unsurprisingly the Attingham Group never made an impact on the public UFO scene. The Attingham Group disintegrated before it had really formed. In any case, Trevelyan's new age interests were much too eclectic for him to be mired in a new age UFO group. Although the Attingham Group foundered and Trevelyan himself would never go public with his interest, Attingham Park had played its role in the new age saucer scene, acting as an introduction point for those people whose beliefs were too unusual for the mainstream.

Peter Caddy and Findhorn

One of those who used Attingham as a touchstone was Peter Caddy, who gatecrashed a conference of new age leaders held at Attingham Park in the summer

The old straight track to the new age

of 1965. Caddy's place in the new age saucer nexus is crucial. His name may sound unfamiliar but the location from which he made his name almost certainly will not be. Ask anyone with an interest in the new age about Scotland's Findhorn Community and you will receive a nod of recognition. Ask what they know, and you will be told a half-remarkable story of a spiritual centre where people live in harmony, communicating with the spirits of nature. The community has been dubbed 'The Vatican of the New Age' and includes among its patrons such diverse personalities as Prince Philip, Shirley Maclaine and Mike Scott from the rock group The Waterboys. Findhorn is worth over several million pounds a year to the area yet still strongly polarises opinion. Some believe that the community attracts vitally needed employment and tourism. Others are more cynical, one neighbour commenting, 'If they were any good to anyone they wouldn't be at the Findhorn Foundation,' another noting that members of the community are often seen hugging when they meet – 'It's just not our way.'

Yet whatever its detractors may say the community is embedded in the spiritual psyche of the British Isles and one of its founders, the late Eileen Caddy, was awarded the MBE for 'service to spiritual enquiry'. According to the community's Web site, 'Eileen chose to hand the medal to God.' What God thought of the award was not recorded, but it may have been more pertinent to ask 'What did the aliens think?' Yes, aliens. The official Findhorn Web site states: 'The Findhorn Community was begun in 1962 by Peter and Eileen Caddy and Dorothy Maclean. All three had followed disciplined spiritual paths for many years and had been specifically trained to follow God's will.' However, 1962 was merely when the trio moved to Findhorn. The community's true origins lie in the 1950s, in the maelstrom of post-war fringe ideas and philosophies that eventually coalesced into what we now call the new age.

Central to Findhorn's origins is a secret that the current leaders of the community would very much like to play down – flying saucers. One of the core beliefs held by Findhorn's founders was that flying saucers existed, and their occupants were in psychic contact with them. It was also an article of faith that physical contact with the saucers was not only possible, it was certain. Findhorn's principle mover and shaker was Peter Caddy (1917–94) together with a close-knit circle of partners and spiritual travellers such as Eileen Caddy and Dorothy MacLean. All were heavily involved in the flying saucer contactee belief system, but Caddy's story binds them together.

As with many spiritual leaders, Caddy evolved through a series of religious, philosophical and occult beliefs of which flying saucers were just one aspect. Caddy married Nora Medling in 1941 and after a 'good war' Caddy's life became a whirlwind of meetings with remarkable men and women. He soon realised the limitations of his marriage to Nora when he met another spiritual seeker, Sheena Gowan. Their spiritually intense meetings soon turned into a physical relationship and Sheena received 'guidance', by way of what we now call channelling from God, leading to Caddy being instructed to end his marriage to Nora.

The post war 'spiritual' milieu they existed in might be seen as merely a justification for extramarital relationships. Indeed, reading Caddy's autobiography, the post war

spiritual scene is seemingly a hot bed of partner swapping, a sort of *Confessions of a New Age Disciple*. By his death in 1994, Caddy had been married five times and had numerous 'special friends' during his voyage through the spiritual, but fecund, waters of the new age. A chance meeting in the Philippines with Anne Edwards, also known as Naomi, spun Caddy off on a new series of adventures. Naomi was a channeller and the first 'sensitive' Caddy met who claimed contact with aliens. He said 'Naomi had received many messages from beings in space, concerning their space ships, their purpose and mission.' Naomi remained in the Philippines while Caddy, Sheena and Eileen settled in Scotland.

By 1954 Caddy, via Naomi, had amassed numerous telepathically channelled messages from what he termed the 'space brothers'. In line with others who were receiving channelled communications during the 1950s, such as George King of the Aetherius Society, the message coming through Naomi was that extraterrestrials were fearful about the state of planet Earth, and warned of impending ecological disaster if humanity did not change its ways. Caddy received an 'inner prompting' to compile a report on the nature of these messages, called *An Introduction to the Nature and Purpose of Unidentified Flying Objects*, which would clearly define who and what lay behind the increasing numbers of UFO sightings.

Once the 8,000-word report was completed, the problem was how to distribute it to the twenty-six people Eileen's guidance had decreed. Former Prime Minister Clement Atlee was handed his copy by his aunt! Lord Dowding, already an outspoken proponent of flying saucers and spiritualism, received his copy at his London club. After reading it Dowding wrote to Caddy saying:

I am personally convinced of the existence of spaceships, and I think it highly probable that they are manned by extraterrestrial crews... I think that the government ought to take the subject of spaceships very seriously, and to let some senior and responsible official take on the task of collecting evidence as a preliminary step to formulating an opinion, and perhaps a course of action.

(Caddy 1998: 117)

Caddy's main target for the report was Prince Philip, who was known to have a keen interest in flying saucers. As described in Chapter 4, Prince Philip had tasked his equerry, Squadron Leader Peter Horsley, to investigate flying saucers on his behalf, a role he relished. Horsley was an old friend of Caddy's and together they hatched a plan to deliver the saucer report to the Prince during a north African stopover the royal pair made while returning from Australia. Through Horsley, Caddy's contact in the royal entourage was Commander Mike Parker, the Prince's naval equerry and another flying saucer aficionado. Parker immediately leapt at the chance to get the report into Prince Philip's hands, saying, 'Oh good! Anything to have a crack at the dome-headed boys,' meaning the scientific establishment, most of whom had no time for fanciful notions concerning UFOs and alien visitors (Caddy 1998: 118).

In March 1957 the Caddy's took over the Cluny Hill hotel in Forres, overlooking Findhorn Bay. Eileen had channelled guidance from God that they were to establish

The old straight track to the new age

a 'Centre of Light' there. As the Cold War tensions increased during the late-50s so did Caddy's interest in flying saucers and how their occupants could save Earth from the expected nuclear conflagration. Eileen Caddy had received the word 'Lukano' which appeared in her inner eye written in letters of fire. The Caddy's could find no meaning for this word and were prompted to ask their most powerful sensitive Naomi, who, Caddy claimed '... could be in instant telepathic contact with any name given to her...' Naomi tuned in and discovered that Lukano was the captain of a Venusian 'mother ship' who wanted to make contact with the group. Caddy wrote '...we were told the time had come to make that contact.' (Caddy 1998: 161)

From then on there was almost daily channelled contact between Dorothy, Lena, Eileen and Naomi (Caddy's 'sensitives') and the Venusians. Expectations were high that physical contact was imminent and Caddy's circle believed that the saucer folk would evacuate specially chosen Earthlings. Caddy and his coterie of female followers saw themselves as the chosen ones; Caddy and Lena would often go to a possible flying saucer landing site on the beach near Findhorn to await the sky saviours. As a measure of how serious this belief in physical contact with the saucers was, the otherwise ecologically-minded Caddy noted 'I had the trees cleared from the mound behind the hotel in preparation for the landing.' (*Sunday Pictorial* 23 September 1960)

The much longed for landing never came but the media found out about Caddy's activities and ran articles about the goings on at Cluny Hill Hotel. The front-page headline in the *Sunday Pictorial* screamed 'The Martians Are Coming, He Says.' The exposé trumpeted that Caddy believed 'great numbers' of flying saucers from Mars and Venus would be landing on Earth within the next few months to warn Earthlings that they were on the brink of disaster. 'The main thing is to be nice to them,' he said, 'They have to be met with friendship. They are trying to help us.' Caddy explained he had created the landing strip on Cluny Hill at the aliens' behest claiming: 'I was instructed to do so by a kind of telepathy from them,' and he went on to outline exactly what his belief in flying saucers meant:

I believe they will offer people on Earth a chance to leave this planet with them before the catastrophe. They are like us in many ways, but the chief difference is that they have no understanding of such emotions as hatred, greed, jealousy or spite. Their only emotions are love and friendship.

(*Sunday Pictorial* 20 September 1960)

The adverse publicity these media revelations caused the Cluny Hill Hotel almost got Caddy dismissed from his job as manager. The years 1961–2 saw relations between Russia and the West deteriorate to the point that there was widespread fear that nuclear war was imminent. Caddy's team of sensitives and channellers were again reassured that an extraterrestrial rescue plan to save the Earth was under way, and they were among the chosen ones to be saved. Eventually a message came through that seemed unambiguous: 'Each one of you should be in readiness, you will be given very little warning.'

Flying Saucerers

The extraterrestrials telepathically informed Caddy that they had tried twice to land on the Cluny Hill landing strip, once on Christmas Eve 1960 and again on New Year's Day 1961, but were foiled by a combination of climatic conditions and atomic bomb testing. Caddy and Lena mounted watch for several hours a night in the hope that the third attempt at a landing would be successful, but sadly, the aliens stayed away. In November 1962, the Caddys left Cluny Hill and parked their caravan at the Findhorn Bay Caravan Park and the beginnings of the Findhorn Community as we know it today were formed. Caddy decided they would become self-sufficient and they planted a huge variety of fruit and vegetables in the poor soil of the Moray coastline. Against all expectations the garden thrived, a fact that the Findhornians attributed to their daily meditations and contact with the nature spirits, or Devas.

Although the community was now working closely with nature spirits, Caddy's fascination with flying saucers continued unabated. He forged links with many fellow saucerers who shared his vision, including American contactee Dan Fry. During this period, Caddy also met with new age leader Sir George Trevelyan. Through Trevelyan Caddy met Brinsley le Poer Trench, Sir Victor Goddard and Johann Quanjer, along with many other dedicated flying saucerers. Through his connection with Caddy, Quanjer became aware of the flying saucer contacts and near-landings at Findhorn. Quanjer's belief in flying saucers was strong and in his autobiography he wrote:

... there is no doubt in my own mind that these extra-terrestrials and their saucers *do* exist and that they are seriously intending one day to make their presence known to people on earth.

(Quanjer 1997)

By the mid-60s, Caddy had set up a telephone contact system to alert a select group of people when the saucers were due to appear. Quanjer recalls:

One morning, in May 1966, an urgent phone message came through to me from Edinburgh, Scotland: 'The bells are ringing.' These four words, breathlessly sounded out for me on the trunk line, were apparently a 'code' for something like, 'Flying saucers might be landing on a previously indicated spot somewhere on the North Coast'.

(Quanjer 1997)

Although he had not yet visited Findhorn, Quanjer was sceptical about the claims of extraterrestrial contact, writing 'These saucers had thoughtfully planned to burst upon an astonished world during the Whit weekend of 27–30 June, so that everyone with a job (as I had) could attend without great inconvenience.' On arrival at Findhorn, Quanjer's reservations were proved correct: 'What I had been led to believe would be a bucolic paradise of new age initiates, was really a huddled mass of mild eccentrics...' Quanjer's view of Caddy was dim: '... here was their leader, a healthy middle-aged man who preferred to accept unemployment money and family benefits rather than a job to support himself and his family.' The Findhornians'

The old straight track to the new age

attempts at self-sufficiency did not impress Quanjer either and he referred to their '... small but luxuriant vegetable garden... ' as being '... perhaps their only visible hold on reality.' (Quanjer 1997)

After introductions to Peter Caddy, Robert Ogilvy Crombie (known as 'Roc') and the other invited guests, Quanjer was informed a channelled contact had sent instructions that a flying saucer was going to come in from the north-east, flying low over the North Sea to avoid being captured on radar at nearby RAF Lossiemouth. This was it! The landings had begun.

As darkness fell, the excited group of new agers drove to the beach where they waited eagerly for the saucer. For a while nothing happened and then: '... suddenly, the actor [Roc] with arms aloft, exclaimed that it had arrived. "Yes, it was here." No one else saw anything though it was concluded that our space guest must still be in another dimension.' Quanjer had, by now, had enough of the naïve pretensions of the Findhorn set and sent his own thoughts out '... much further and higher in silent prayer that they please not land here among this inauspicious human welcoming party.' (Quanjer 1997)

After the failed landing Eileen Caddy received a channelled message confirming contact had been almost made 'Let none of you have any feeling of disappointment regarding last night (the landing of our space brothers). All was in preparation for something far, far greater than any of you have ever contemplated.' The message went on to advise that what Caddy and his friends believed would be a flying saucer sent as part of the extraterrestrials' plan to evacuate their supporters, was in fact merely delivering a message that everything would be OK.

Findhorn's reputation as a new age community was now spreading rapidly, and not just within new age circles. A growing number of hippies, inspired by the idea of living simply and communally in harmony with God and nature, became aware of Findhorn. One such seeker was Neil Oram, a flamboyant character on the hippy scene who was deeply interested in the metaphysical aspects of flying saucers. Oram and his family arrived at Findhorn in 1968 and were immediately disappointed. 'It felt like Noddy land. Utterly *unreal*. Like ceramic pixies and gnomes cavorting in the garden. Phoney. "Croquet on the lawn" type of atmosphere.' (Neil Oram personal communication, 2004). There was an instant culture-clash between the two tribes, and the distrust was mutual. For all Caddy's protestations of unconditional love for the human race his first impressions of meeting Oram and family were '... to my dismay they were dirty, dishevelled hippies... They had to learn that dirty, torn and slovenly clothes were not acceptable at Findhorn, particularly in the Sanctuary.' (Caddy 1998: 286)

During this initial meeting, Oram recalls Caddy saying, 'You see the trouble is a lot of you hippies have been taken over by the sex drive and that's why you can't channel God, the angels, or our advanced space brothers.' The irony of this, considering Caddy's interwoven personal relationships as well as Oram's later claim that Caddy had been '... screwing the hippy chicks who started arriving. As usual all

being done behind Eileen's back' was decidedly rich! (Neil Oram personal communication, 2004)

Oram's hippie sensibilities grated with Caddy's ascetic leanings and tensions grew between the two men. This came to a head one evening when Caddy barged into a caravan ordering him: 'You're wanted in the Sanctuary!!!' Oram ignored Caddy, who repeated, 'I said you're wanted in the Sanctuary now!!!' Once again, he shouted, 'This is your last chance! Are you coming with me now or not?' Oram declined but was later berated by one of Caddy's sycophantic followers, 'What were you doing man? What were you doing refusing to come to the Sanctuary? You were meant to be a *channel*, man! A *channel* for our space brothers! The mother ship was *here!!!* Right above the Sanctuary man! Right *above...* and it was calling for *you!!!* And you let us *all down man!!!* You threw away the opportunity for *humanity* to evolve onto a *higher level!!!* You've let us *all down, man!!* You're a *betrayer* of our movement. A *Judas!!!*' The following day Oram and his family left Findhorn. (Neil Oram personal communication, 2004)

When Peter Caddy left Findhorn in the 1970s, the focus of the community changed. Channelled messages from the space brothers and belief in flying saucers were replaced by deeper work with the nature spirits and more direction from God. Alfresco flying saucer welcoming parties were out and spiritually earnest seminars and conferences were in. Prophecy turned to profit and Findhorn became a commercial venture, setting itself on the course that has brought it to financial fruition today. Their response now to questions about the part flying saucers paid in their development is simple but evasive: 'There's no "official" community line regarding UFOs and we have no policy on publicising the subject or otherwise.' (Findhorn PR communication, 2004)

To the vast majority of those who visit Findhorn this obfuscation will not matter, but the story of Findhorn and flying saucers is a crucial part in the history of UFOlogy in Britain. Findhorn could be thought of as an apocalyptic 1950s flying saucer cult that got savvy and moved with the times, dropping one of its original tenets and replacing it with others more in keeping with the mores of the new age market place. Others may believe, especially when considering Oram and Quanjer's comments, that Peter Caddy was a hypocrite, a con man using cod-spirituality for financial and physical gain, utilising and manipulating whatever elements of the supernatural was currently fashionable to attract adherents and money. More probably Caddy and his followers were a group of sincere but flawed human beings who were desperately seeking *something*. That something, like the goal of all spiritual seeking, was a desire for certainty, guidance and purpose in a chaotic universe. During the period between 1954 and 1970, flying saucers, or rather the *idea* of flying saucers, provided them with that something. Their shared belief in the impending apocalypse and the possibility of salvation from the skies enabled them to form strong relationships and to build a thriving community based on their communal philosophy and hopes. By their own account they were happy, and if belief in extraterrestrials provided them with that happiness, then that cannot have been a bad thing.

The Old Straight Track

New age beliefs about flying saucers did not always revolve around psychic contact with the craft or their occupants. Other strands of new age saucer belief drew on diverse ideas from the early twentieth century and made just as much, if not more, of an impact on UFOlogy.

One early freethinker whose ideas provide a direct route from the early twentieth century to the nascent new age saucer beliefs of the 1950s and beyond was Alfred Watkins (1855–1935). In June, 1921 Watkins, a successful Hereford businessman running a flour milling company, noticed that on his maps many locations in the landscape were apparently connected by straight lines. These lines, he believed, were real and formed by ancient track ways. Watkins' 1925 book *The Old Straight Track* expounded this theory and introduced a potent new phrase into the new age vocabulary when he named these lines of connectivity 'leys'. Watkins chose the term 'ley' because of the frequency with which the word appeared in place-names along the tracks. Many of the leys appeared to go directly through ancient sites such as stone circles, holy wells and churches.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, Watkins' ideas were appropriated by the new age and hippie movements. John Michell, whose writings on the connections between landscape, folklore and flying saucers became popular in the mid 1960s, seized on Watkins' notion of leys. Michell transformed Watkins' simple observation into a portentous vision:

The revelation took place when Watkins was 65 years old. Riding across the hills near Bredwardine... he pulled up his horse to look out over the landscape below. At that moment he became aware of a network of lines, standing out like glowing wires all over the surface of the country...

(Michell 1970: xv–xvi)

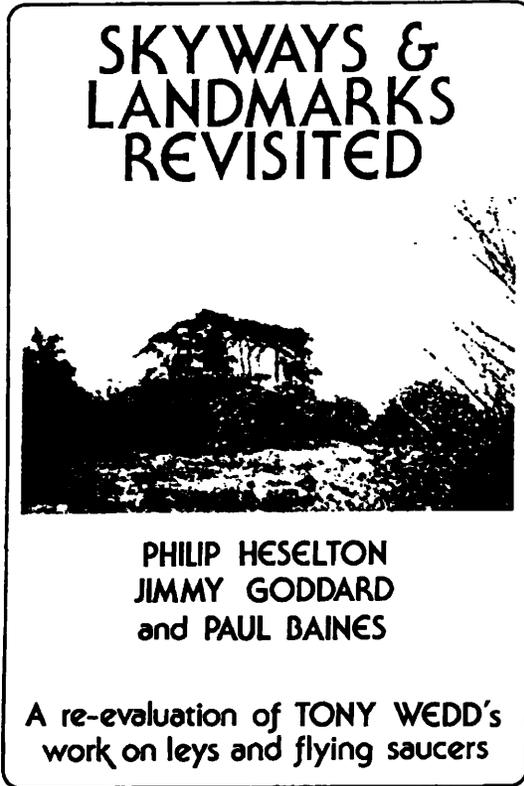
This romanticised interpretation of leys fitted in with hippie sensibilities and became attached to many of the beliefs we deal with elsewhere. However, the poet W.H. Auden summed up the essence of Watkins' vision in his 1956 poem, *The Old Man's Road*, one stanza of which reads:

By stiles, gates, hedgegaps it goes
Over ploughlands, woodlands, cow meadows
Past shrines to a cosmological myth
No heretic today would be caught dead with

(Auden 1956)

After the first flush of interest in ley lines the idea was dormant for about twenty years until the late 1950s when ex-RAF pilot Tony Wedd revived the concept. His 1941 sighting of an unidentified flying object followed by the surge of flying saucer sightings during the 1950s made him think deeply about the subject and to formulate theories about the mysterious sky craft. He had read Watkins' book in 1949 and had

Cover of Tony Wedd's *Skyways & Landmarks Revisited*.



started to interpret the landscape anew, noting that certain clumps of pine trees appeared to be in direct alignment with each other. Why, he did not know, but he believed he was onto something of great significance.

During the 1950s, Wedd attended meetings of the Tunbridge Wells Flying Saucer Club. This was one of the earliest flying saucer clubs and its president was Air Chief Marshal Lord Dowding. At a meeting in 1955, Wedd saw Desmond Leslie give a talk about the contactee George Adamski. After that, Wedd was hooked and read everything he could about flying saucers. He was keenly interested in the contactees and the messages given to them by the space people, especially information on energy and technology. This led him to invent a variety of unusual devices, many based on the idea of free energy.

The theories published by French UFOlogist Aime Michel intrigued Wedd. Michel's 1958 book *Flying Saucers and the Straight Line Mystery* argued that many of the UFO sightings in France's huge flap of 1954 were along straight lines. Later research has proved that Michel's theory was deeply flawed, but the idea sparked Wedd's imagination. He began thinking about the connection between flying saucers and the landscape. Wedd looked for straight lines connecting certain landscape features and read significance into place-names which included variations on the words 'mark' and 'ley'. Through his interest in the writings of Leslie and Adamski, Wedd also came

across speculation that saucers may have travelled by ‘... following certain definite magnetic paths now known to surround and interpenetrate the planet.’

Through his growing interest in flying saucers, Wedd met a contactee called Mary Long. She claimed to be in frequent telepathic communication with space people who were feeding her with pseudo-scientific information from their spaceship that remained in more or less permanent stationary orbit above the Pacific Ocean. Ideas of ley lines, earth energies, contact with extraterrestrials whirled like a kaleidoscope in Wedd’s mind and he eventually drew these unrelated new age strands together, forming a theory.

In August 1960, Wedd learned of two separate UFO sightings, one along a ley he believed existed which ran from a pinewood on Lyewood Common, and others seen at Keston Mark in Kent. Wedd connected the two events, noting ‘The conjunction of the two place names was too big a hint to miss – and I began to suppose from that date that the saucers’ crews knew about the leys.’ (Wedd 1970: 6) While this join-the-dots reasoning sounds utterly specious now, Wedd and many others took it to be gospel truth at the time. It is an excellent example, were one needed, of how UFOlogists often reach conclusions, using one unproven speculation (in this case leys) to justify a theory about another unproven speculation (flying saucers).

Wedd detailed his theories in *Skyways and Landmarks*, published in 1961. This booklet is significant for linking flying saucers and leys directly for the first time. Wedd’s somewhat woolly assumptions became the basis for many of the beliefs in flying saucers held by the hippie counter-culture and the new subject of ‘Earth Mysteries’. The UFOlogical establishment (which comprised of several local and regional groups soon to come under the umbrella of the British UFO Research Association) was intrigued by Wedd’s ideas. Nevertheless, they were regarded as essentially too new age in nature. In 1970, BUFORA organised a symposium on the subject which concluded there was not enough evidence to connect UFOs with ley lines. Wedd was unsurprised as, like many freethinkers, his ideas had already moved on from their origins, noting ‘a contactee informs me that navigation by the old leys is difficult nowadays for a flying saucer, because the leys are in poor shape.’

From worlds afar

Mollie Thompson had been one of the many visitors to Attingham Park and also spent some time at Findhorn where she was present at the ill-fated Whitsuntide attempt to contact the space people. Her experiences in new age UFOlogy are an excellent example of how one individual interacted with both the new age and flying saucer subjects, drawing on one to inform the other. Mollie became interested in UFOs in the early-50s after reading *Flying Saucers Have Landed*. ‘It spoke to me, it tweaked a nerve that I couldn’t resist,’ she told us. This remarkable book set her off on a journey of discovery and her interest in flying saucers rapidly grew; her insights into the problem of contact with aliens are thoughtful and ahead of much of the thinking of the era. She believed: ‘You can’t expect what will be a superior intelligence to be understandable to you. You expand yourself to meet whatever is to come.’ (Mollie Thompson personal communication, 2005) This point of view, which

Flying Saucerers



Mollie Thompson in the USA, 1967. (photo supplied by Mollie Thompson)

Mollie held from the start of her UFO studies, would eventually lead her away from the 'nuts and bolts' certainties of the 1950s into the wilder fringes of the flying saucer movement and beyond, into the burgeoning new age movements of the 1960s and 70s.

Mollie was soon experimenting with the ouija board, making it 'work', and contacting '... something that I thought was a space entity. It had a name, it called itself Ornoor [stress on the first and last r] and it later had a friend called Lon.' She soon realised these contacts were not space people but spirits, of a sort. These contacts were followed by others with an entity called Philemon, who allowed Mollie to ask questions and receive answers. At first she was confused as the answers did not seem to make sense, but she slowly realised she was being 'taught', after which she was happy to accept the teachings. A four-part series of her dialogues with Philemon appeared in an early flying saucer magazine.

These contacts left Mollie wondering just what people were contacting when they claimed to be in touch with space people. She freely told her friends in the Manchester UFO Society of these contacts and they, steeped in the nuts and bolts saucer lore of the 1950s, thought her a little odd. But as she says 'I was not trying to wean them away from nuts and bolts but trying to present a different picture they could take hold of if they wished.' (personal communication 2005)

When Mollie discovered George Adamski was visiting Britain in 1963 she engineered a meeting with him at Desmond Leslie's flat in London. Mollie was amazed when she was invited to visit Lord Mountbatten's Broadlands country estate with them, to interview Mountbatten's builder who had claimed to have witnessed a flying saucer landing (see Chapter 4). Mollie was even more thrilled when George Adamski asked her return to the United States to work for him. She declined, having recently started work as a teacher, but Adamski left her with the mysterious message: 'The Brothers have work for you.' Just what that work was would soon become clear to Mollie. Besides her interest in flying saucers Mollie was also a music lover and a guitarist. She recalls that in 1965:

... words and music dropped into my mind. At first I thought it was my imagination, but I did begin to write them down. They fit

The old straight track to the new age

Mollie Thompson singing her saucer songs. (photo supplied by Mollie Thompson)



together. I somehow knew they were going to be a song. And it was as a result of these thoughts that were coming into my head, because I thought I've got to do something, they're not just given to me to play with, I've got to use them somehow, but how?

(personal communication 2005).

One of the many to hear Mollie's songs at flying saucer meetings was Anthony Brooke. Brooke had been the last Raja of Sarawak and was closely involved in the new age and contactee side of the flying saucer movement in the 1960s. He crops up in several UFO books of the period, most notably Arthur Shuttlewood's *The Warminster Mystery* and, like Mollie herself, was a frequent visitor to the early Findhorn community.

Brooke decided that Mollie's songs needed a wider audience and arranged for her to make an LP on the Asteroid Records label, titled *From Worlds Afar*. The LP cover consisted of three Adamski-like saucers against an abstract backdrop of space. The rear of the sleeve had an introduction from Mollie plus brief notes for each of the ten songs. Some of the songs were about flying saucers, others had a more new age tinge. All were thoughtful, heartfelt tunes with just Mollie and her acoustic guitar as backing. One song, *The Cockeyed Ballad*, contained these lyrics:

Flying Saucerers

ASTEROID MOLLIE THOMPSON - from worlds afar

mono

*From Worlds Afar LP sleeve.
(authors' collection)*



**from
worlds
afar**

songs by
Mollie Thompson

Those flying saucers whisking through our skies
Must take some power to make the rise
But government departments just hide their eyes
And call them meteors

Got brothers on Venus and Saturn it seems,
fly their ships on magnetic beams
They wear one-piece suits and you can't see any seams
But apart from that they're just like us.

(Thompson 1966)

The LP was sold through the closeknit network of flying saucer conventions, clubs and magazines. A short video clip of her performing *The Cockeyed Ballad* at an American UFO conference exists and proves her to be an accomplished singer in the style adopted by Millicent Martin on the satirical TV show, *That Was The Week That Was*. Although Mollie mixed with the nuts and bolts saucer buffs this interpretation of the phenomenon did not really interest her. She was much attracted to the new age side of things and she became increasingly involved with psychic Liebe Pugh's Universal Link, based in the north-west of England. In one interview Mollie spoke of the channelled prophecies received by members of the Universal Link. Some of these were enshrined in her song *Three Wise Men*:

The third wise man is a baby, the future looks bright to his eyes
For his brothers will be from the planets, and his teachers will drop from the
skies?

(Thompson 1966)

*Mollie Thompson in June 2005
with her 1965 LP From Worlds
Afar.*



Mollie believed that 'something big' was going to happen soon. Universal Link teachings inferred that something was going to reveal itself via nuclear activity by Christmas Day 1967. Exactly what this revelation would be was unclear but it would be earth shattering. When she returned from a trip to the USA in January 1968 Mollie became disillusioned with flying saucers. There had been no major world upheaval and she began to slowly drift away from the saucer scene. Although 1967 was a significant year for UFOlogy, with the British Isles having possibly its biggest sighting wave ever, for Mollie active participation in UFOlogy was over. Instead she intensified her work with the Universal Link and since then has worked, 'behind the scenes' as she puts it, in a number of new age organisations, eschewing publicity for the simple joys of service.

In retrospect it is clear how new age beliefs and philosophy became absorbed into many areas of UFOlogy. For instance George King's Aetherius Society drew heavily on new age ideas, as did the hippie counter-culture. While the mainstream UFOlogists tried to keep the subject focused on physical, nuts and bolts craft and government cover-ups, those who comprised the new age saucer groups were quite different. They were accepting of any and all ideas about the saucers and hopeful for the future of humanity. Above all the various beliefs on the new age flying saucer spectrum stressed the idea of interaction; it was possible to meet and speak directly with space people and to use the latent powers of the mind to send and receive messages across the vast gulfs of space.

For the new agers, the saucers were not here to study or harm us. They were here to contact us, teach us and to help assist in humanity's often painful struggle to attain a state of physical and spiritual harmony. However, for every view of flying saucers there is an equal and opposite view and there was another group of dedicated saucerers who also believed that saucers were not physical. But rather than believing the saucer occupants were here to spiritually elevate humanity they believed the exact opposite. This group of people believed saucers were manifestations of the dark side, representing not salvation from above but damnation from below.

Chapter eight

Flying saucers from hell

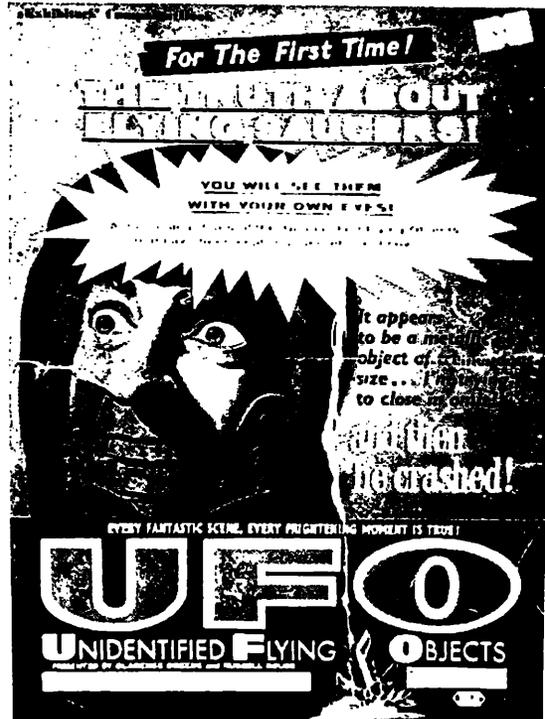
You'd better pray to the Lord when you see those flying saucers
It may be the coming of the judgement day...

Charles Green and Cy Cohen, 'When You See Those Flying Saucers',
recorded October 1947

At the opening of the UFO era the idea of flying saucers as craft piloted by creatures from other worlds was just one of a number of competing theories. The first Gallup poll in the US showed the 'extraterrestrial' hypothesis did not figure in responses to the question 'What do you think the saucers are?', but some individuals had very definite views about their supernatural origin. One woman '.... citing a Biblical text... said it was a sign of the world's end' and from earliest days some groups with fundamentalist and orthodox Christian convictions came to believe flying saucers were the 'signs and wonders' which the Bible prophesied would mark the End Times. Kenneth Arnold told how within days of his sighting he received a call from a preacher in Texas who told him the saucers were 'harbingers of doomsday' and the minister was getting his flock 'ready for the end of the world.' Similar apocalyptic warnings appear in a leaflet published and circulated by the British branch of the Laymen's Home Missionary Movement, an offshoot of the Jehovah's Witnesses, in 1953.

These reactions were just the latest manifestation of apocalyptic fears that have been produced by wondrous events in the skies. Throughout recorded history prodigies such as comets and eclipses have been interpreted by some religious groups as messages from the gods or omens of terrible disasters. Almost from the beginning of the UFO era, these prophecies have become a recurring theme in the beliefs of certain groups and individuals. The book *When Prophecy Fails* describes how Leon Festinger, a sociologist, infiltrated one flying saucer group in the American mid-west led by a charismatic contactee, Marian Keech. She acted as a channel for messages from the space people who predicted an imminent doomsday and promised the

Poster advertising the 1956 film UFO with the emphasis on hostile aliens.



chosen few would be rescued by a fleet of flying saucers. Members of the cult left their jobs and sold possessions before gathering at the chosen time, only to be disappointed when doomsday did not arrive. Festinger's study showed how disconfirmation could, paradoxically, lead to strengthened belief among some members of religious cults (Festinger 1956).

Since that time apocalyptic prophecies channelled from space to contactees have become common in the literature of the subject. In his trio of books on the Warminster mystery, Arthur Shuttlewood melded together aliens, the new age and the Christian Revelation into one apocalyptic and millenarian vision. Shuttlewood and wife Patricia were both practising Christians and she was so frightened on one visit to Cley Hill 'that she wanted to know if they [the UFOs] were from Satan.' (*The Observer* 16 September 1979) Inevitably, Shuttlewood saw the arrival of UFOs as a sign of the End Times and, like Mollie Thompson, the messages he received from space people hinted that the end of the world might arrive in 1967. In his second book, published in 1968, doomsday was confidently predicted in 1972. His third suggested 1977 (Dewey and Ries 2006: 138–9). Organised religious cults were more cautious. Many of the special prayer operations by members of the Aetherius Society from 1958 were aimed at fending off intergalactic cataclysms that George King blamed on attacks by hostile aliens. But King was careful never to give a specific date for the end of the world, although his channelled contacts gave 1999 as one strong 'possible' contender. When this did not come to pass the Aetherians had a ready-made answer – the prayer power they had generated had saved the planet.



Are UFO occupants angels sent by God to watch over us, as suggested by the Presbyterian minister Rev Barry Downing, author of the 1968 book The Bible and Flying Saucers.

The religious theme which permeated much of the early contactee literature was anathema to the 'serious UFOlogists' who claimed they took a scientific approach to the flying saucer sightings. Consequently, from the 1960s the mainstream UFO literature tended to sideline contactee stories along with the religious questions and dilemmas thrown up both by the close encounter and 'alien abduction' experiences. At the same time clergy and theologians, obvious experts on spiritual matters, had very little to say on the subject of contact with beings from other worlds. There is, for instance, no rigid Christian dogma on life in outer space or on the nature and origin of UFOs. Rumours of Vatican interest in flying saucers have circulated for years and one story claimed that in 1963 George Adamski was given a secret audience with the Pope during his visit to Europe. In 1952 newspapers published extracts from an article written by an Italian Jesuit priest, Fr Domenico Grasso who said the question of life on other worlds had been debated within the church as a result of 'the strange phenomenon of flying discs.' Fr Grasso said Roman Catholics were free to accept or deny the existence of aliens but on the question of ET life he passed the buck: 'The last word is up to experimental science. There is nothing else to do for the theologians but wait.' (*Daily Mail* 1 November 1952)

This reluctance to commit has infuriated some Christian groups, particularly those who promote extreme interpretations of the UFO phenomenon. On the one hand there is a group of evangelicals (including Dr Billy Graham) who have said the UFO occupants may be angels sent by God to watch over us. The best-known exponent of this idea is the Presbyterian minister Rev Barry Downing, author of *The Bible and Flying Saucers*. Downing is open-minded about aliens as part of God's creation and looks to the scriptures for evidence of contact with aliens in biblical times (Downing 1968).

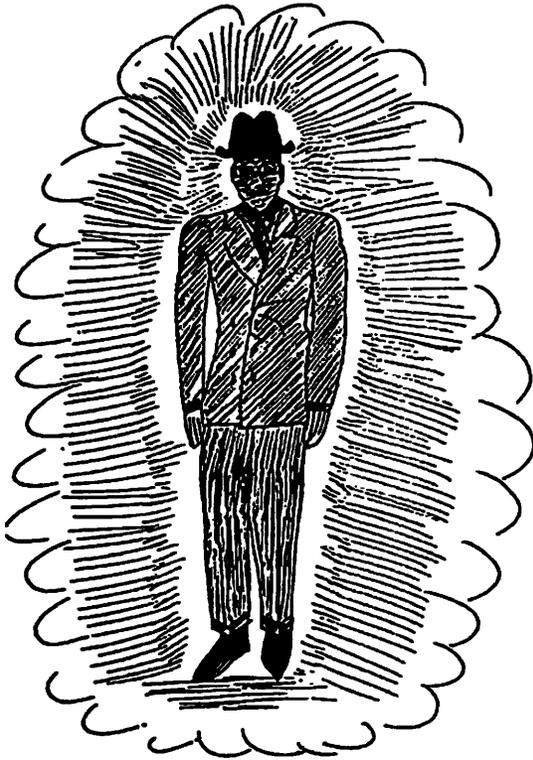
At the opposite end of the spectrum are fundamentalists including some members of various offshoots of the Orthodox Church who find it impossible to believe there is any goodness in the elusive and contradictory nature of UFO behaviour. They are particularly disturbed by the contacts and messages allegedly received by the contactees. In their view, such messages could not be of divine origin and therefore must be the result of demonic possession. In addition, some from these groups have argued that even if intelligent beings existed in outer space, because they are not mentioned in the Bible they could not, by definition, have heard of Jesus or have had the opportunity for redemption unless He had been born and died in billions of other solar systems. Therefore, if there are no aliens in the Bible, and they are not angels sent by God, then UFOs and their occupants must be demonic in origin.

Demonic aliens

Demonologists found plenty of material to fuel their theory in the UFO literature. Even in the early stages of the subject good and evil alien characters appear as substitutes for traditional angels and demons. Probably the most obvious manifestation of the 'dark side' were the Men in Black (or 'MIB') who visited Albert K. Bender, leading him to close down the International Flying Saucer Bureau, as described in Chapter 2. Bender had an obsessive interest in the occult and black magic along with horror films and flying saucers and when his experience allegedly took place, he lived on the top floor of a house which his local newspaper described as 'a chamber of horrors' (Rojcezwicz 1987: 149).

Although initially the 'three men in black' were believed to be Government agents, Bender later revealed they were hostile creatures who had bases appropriately beneath the Earth. The idea of three MIB quickly became part of the UFO legend even though few stories actually described this number of visitors. In fact the 'trinity of evil' – the Devil and his two lieutenants – was a well-known theme in demonology. The fate of Albert Bender had far reaching consequences in that it tended to alert some of the more God-fearing members of flying saucer clubs to the spiritual dangers of involvement in flying saucery. As a result, a schism occurred with some saucer groups actively avoiding any associations with the occult and spiritualist views that were rife among the contactee movement.

Although publicly some ignored the religious themes within their own movement, the spiritual connotations of UFOs would not go away. While many of the contact experiences in the 1950s were with benevolent space people from Mars, Venus and other planets in our solar system New Zealander Cecil Michael had an encounter of a different kind. In his 1955 book *Round Trip to Hell in a Flying Saucer* he describes meeting three types of space people – physical, semi-physical and what he calls the 'infernals', supernatural beings made of light and 'fallen angels'. Michael claimed he was psychically abducted by the latter. During the experience his spirit was taken into a flying saucer constructed from some type of 'etheric matter' which was curiously empty of machinery and powered not by motors but by psychic energy. From here he was taken to a place deep beneath the earth where he saw the tormented souls of men and women being cast into an icy sea where they drifted towards oblivion (Michael 1955).

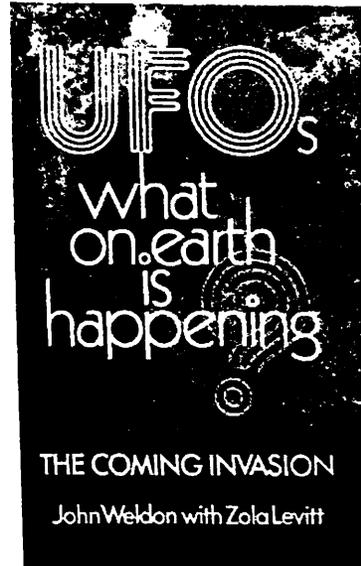


Albert Bender's drawing of one of the 'Men in Black' who visited him in 1953.

In this type of account the saucers and their occupants were replacing the angels and demons that accompanied the astral travels of visionaries such as William Blake and Emmanuel Swedenborg in earlier centuries. In the saucer era New Jersey signwriter and contactee Howard Menger claimed in his book *From Outer Space to You* how he met space people from Venus, Mars and Jupiter. Menger was told there were both good and bad space people, and the nasty ones could disguise themselves. When he asked how a mere mortal was able to tell them apart, one of the spacemen turned and looked at him sadly, saying: '... My friend this earth is the battlefield of Armageddon, and the battle is for men's minds and souls. Prayer, good thoughts and caution are your best insulation.' (Menger 1959: 143)

British author Gordon Cove, in a self-published book titled *Who Pilots the Flying Saucers?* published in 1954, conjured up a demonic theory of his own ideally suited to the Cold War era. Like many others, Cove believed we were being visited by physically real spacecraft from Mars or Venus. However '... what we are suggesting is the possibility that Satan has seized one of the planets as his base of operations to attack the Earth.' (Evans 1982: 1325) The warnings received by contactees were deceptions spread by 'demon-possessed Venusians or Martians' under the control of Satan whose ultimate purpose was the invasion of Earth. A similar message was implicit in George Unger's booklet *Flying Saucers: Physical and Spiritual Aspects* published in 1959. Unger interpreted the contactee phenomenon within the context of anthroposophy developed by the Swiss-born philosopher Rudolph Steiner.

UFOs: What on Earth is happening?. One of the most influential books to promote the demonic theory for UFOs.



According to Steiner the cosmos was permeated with spiritual beings, both good and evil in nature. Like Cove, Unger believed the contactees had been deceived by evil ahrimanic (Satanic) forces who were impersonating visitors from space (Unger 1959).

A direct narrative links the early occult writers who interpreted the saucers as demonic signs and the great outpouring of demonological literature on UFOs during the 1970s. These were a reaction to the occult revival of the previous decade which saw the beliefs of the flying saucer movement merge with the occult and new age philosophy. Two influential books promoting the demonic theory for UFOs appeared in the 1970s which had a long-lasting influence. They were John Weldon and Zola Levitt's *UFOs: What on Earth is Happening* (originally published in the USA in 1975) and *UFOs and Their Mission Impossible* (1974) by an Australian priest, Dr Clifford Wilson. Weldon and Levitt pulled no punches in setting out their stall, blaming all the world's problems on the baleful influence of the Devil and his legions of demons:

UFOs are a manifestation of demon activity. They are here to misguide the multitudes and they are doing pretty well... All of what we are witnessing in the fields of the occult, the UFOs, the false messiahs – even inflation and famine – lines up well with what the prophets expected of the period known as the end time.

(Weldon and Levitt 1975: 15)

For fundamentalists and demonologists the wave of 'close encounters' and abductions that spread with the publication of Betty and Barney Hill's story in 1966 (to be discussed in Chapter 10) were further proof that Satan's hordes had been let loose on the world. While many of these pronouncements came from USA, the belief that UFOs and their occupants were evil also played an important underlying role in

British UFOlogy. One way in which this theme emerged during the 1950s was the involvement of a number of Church of England clergy in the flying saucer movement.

The phenomenon of 'flying saucer vicars' began with Rev Ronald Cartmel, who was rector of the parish of Aldridge, Staffordshire, from 1945 until his death in 1969. From 1950 Cartmel fell under the influence of the books by Keyhoe, Scully and Heard and quickly became convinced that Earth faced an invasion from hostile creatures from outer space and that national governments were covering up the facts. Cartmel began to fill his parish magazine with saucer stories and raised the subject both in the pulpit and in his weekly bible study class. The vicar installed a telescope in his rectory garden and began collecting saucer stories from his 10,000 parishioners. By 1954 some members of his flock had become concerned about his obsession. In a story headlined 'Seen any good saucers lately?' one newspaper reported how it sent a reporter to Aldridge to quiz parishioners. He could not, however, find anyone who took the subject seriously. The only comment came from the vergier who said: 'There are people who laugh but I challenge anyone to defy what he says. Many people brush it aside but if you could spend half an hour with the rector you'd say: "He's right."' (*Sunday Graphic* 8 August 1954)

Rev Cartmel's interest in saucers continued for the rest of his life but his writings on the topic in the *Aldridge Parish Magazine* became more extreme as his views on their origins changed. In 1958 Cartmel visited the contactee Cynthia Appleton, who, as described in Chapter 6, claimed she had been visited by spacemen at her home in Birmingham. Although he believed she was telling the truth, the vicar could not accept the messages she received were from spacemen. Inevitably, he concluded her visitors were of satanic origin. In an editorial he told his flock: 'Paul describes "lying wonders" which are to mark the approach of the Anti-Christ (2. Thess. 2)... Yes the Day of the Lord is approaching and we must expect to see anything in the heavens.' (Cartmel 1958)

Cartmel's concern about demonic influence on the flying saucer mystery was shared by a number of Anglican parsons at this time. The most influential of these was Rev Eric Inglesby who, over four decades, became the centre of a British movement warning of the Satanic origins of UFOs. Despite numerous attempts he was unable to obtain a clear statement from Archbishop of Canterbury on the Church of England's policy towards accounts of UFO contacts. As a result he became determined to establish an unofficial group that would promote what he saw as genuine Christian concerns about the occult nature of the UFO phenomenon.

Rev Inglesby is unique in that his interest in evil aliens began a whole decade before the flying saucer era with a personal experience in 1938 while serving with the Royal Navy. His book *UFOs and the Christian* contains a detailed written account left to him by his late friend, Nigel Wright. This rambling manuscript describes how Wright contracted a tropical disease while serving in the war and lay dangerously ill for three months during which he underwent a 'devastating spiritual experience'. This consisted of strange forebodings about the future of mankind expressed in the form of visions and nightmares of a future atomic war where demonic forces control space ships and destructive weapons. While trapped in this timeless limbo '... not only did

Flying saucers from hell

I witness future events, in a mental telepathic sort of way, but throughout the whole of this time a battle was raging for possession of my soul.' (Inglesby 1978: 24–5) Fortunately for Wright, his prayers were answered and after a lengthy battle he was saved from the clutches of the demonic forces.

Nigel Wright was a pseudonym for Eric Inglesby and the account quoted in the 1978 book was taken from his own unpublished manuscript, *Sins and the Saucers*, written in 1954. In an interview with the authors, Inglesby, who changed his Christian name to Paul on conversion to the Orthodox faith, said he believed the wartime experience prepared him for the flying saucer era (Paul Inglesby personal communication 2005). When the first reports of sightings appeared in British newspapers in 1947 he began keeping a scrapbook of newspaper cuttings and soon afterwards he was formally ordained in the Anglican church. Like others who became interested in UFOlogy at this time he found the 'nuts and bolts' theories for flying saucers to be unsatisfactory but remained open-minded about the possibility some might be craft from outer space. In 1955 he became a subscriber to *Flying Saucer Review* and, like Rev Cartmel, quickly grew concerned about the contactee stories. Although he could accept sightings of objects in the sky as being genuine space visitors, he gradually came to believe the contacts and messages from UFO occupants were anti-Christian. His conversion to Orthodox Christianity came in 1980 following a meeting with Fr Seraphim Rose at a monastery in California. Fr Rose had written a treatise on UFOs as demonic signs which was highly influential on Inglesby's developing campaign. The monk advised him to take refuge in orthodox doctrine so that he would have spiritual protection for his campaign against 'flying saucery' that was to occupy much of his life.

Inglesby, like other Christian fundamentalists, saw the decline of traditional religious belief and the arrival of new age and UFO-based religions as a sign that Satan's power was increasing and the End Times were imminent. Before the end of the world could arrive Satan and his demons must implement their evil plan for world domination. In order to achieve this people, particularly those in high places, would be brainwashed or possessed by evil spirits to prepare for the final battle on the side of the Antichrist. Inglesby told us he had to deal pastorally with a number of people who had become possessed by evil spirits as a result of their involvement in UFOlogy. At one point he recommended that the diocesan exorcist should be involved in helping them overcome evil influences as a result of their obsession with UFOs.

Other priests shared Inglesby's concern. Rev Anthony Millican's interest in evil aliens came from personal experience. One night in April 1968 he was out for stroll with his wife near his vicarage on the outskirts of Bristol. Suddenly and without warning the couple saw a dome-shaped object hovering close to the ground below the crest of a slope just one hundred yards away from them. It appeared to float and rotate on its axis and glowed brightly. The object was transparent and silent and both felt 'uncanny and chilling' sensations. 'I don't think the thing I saw was mechanical at all,' he was reported as saying, 'I got the distinct impression that it was alive.' Millican sensed the object was evil and made a report of it to the Bishop of Bristol (*Daily Mirror* 6 May 1968).

Inglesby found more evidence of Satan's influence on UFOlogy in stories of crossbreeding between demons and human beings which began to emerge in the saucer literature from the mid-60s. Along with the experience of Betty and Barney Hill the most influential story in genre was that told by the Brazilian farmer Antonio Villas Boas published by *Flying Saucer Review* in 1964 (see Chapter 10). The demonologists did not question whether any of these experiences were externally 'real' as opposed to psychological in origin, as the Hill's therapist Dr Benjamin Simon believed. While 'serious' UFOlogists interpreted them as the evidence of the alien visitors they had been waiting for, the demonologists saw them as proof that a plot was underway to produce hybrid creatures under the control of Satan.

The ultra-terrestrials

By the late-60s some mainstream UFOlogists were growing disenchanted with the lack of progress in the discovery of unambiguous proof that would resolve the mystery. The long-predicted landings on the White House lawn had failed to materialise and the ultimate nature of UFOs seemed to remain as elusive as ever. At the same time this disillusionment was channelled into fascination with the great occult revival. One outcome was many UFOlogists turned away from the extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH) and looked instead to occult and supernatural theories to explain the phenomenon. This movement led some with deep Christian convictions to abandon the subject altogether.

American journalist John Keel and French computer scientist Dr Jacques Vallee, were leaders in what became known as the 'new UFOlogy' of this period. In particular Keel's theory of ultra-terrestrials, supernatural entities who co-exist with mankind in a parallel universe or other dimensions, proved immensely popular and influential among UFOlogists who were looking for an alternative to the ETH. Keel claimed he could contact the UFO entities via messages relayed by contactees and even via the telephone. These encounters led him to conclude the intentions of the UFO occupants were sinister and deceptive. Although Keel avoided religious conclusions and claimed to be an atheist, his ultra-terrestrials were the angels and demons of old. In *UFOs: Operation Trojan Horse* he wrote:

... the UFOnuts are the liars, not the contactees. And they are lying deliberately as part of the bewildering smokescreen which they have established to cover their real origin, purpose and motivation.

(Keel 1970: 190)

Keel's warnings were a gift to the Christian fundamentalists who used his writings to back up their Satanic theories. One line in Keel's book in particular was singled out as a warning against demonic possession: 'Dabbling with UFO can be as dangerous as dabbling with black magic... a mild curiosity about UFOs can turn into a destructive obsession...' *Flying Saucer Review* became one of the main conduits for the occult viewpoint. Under editor Charles Bowen the magazine published a series of Keel's articles and their influence upon UFOlogical thinking at that time cannot be underestimated. One of Keel's most notable converts was Gordon Creighton, whose

John Keel, the influential American journalist who developed the ultra-terrestrial theory of UFO origins.



influence on the content of the *Review* grew steadily as editor Charles Bowen's health deteriorated. Creighton pushed the demonic interpretation of UFOs heavily and in 1976 he wrote in a book review that: 'Demons... are here already in immense strength.' (Creighton 1976: 30). According to him they were busily selecting the few people whose genetic stock was worth preserving for use in crossbreeding. Even worse, the sinister forces behind UFOs were programming these slaves to commit acts of violence and telepathically controlling puppets in government. By this stage Creighton was following Rev Inglesby's agenda with UFOs as the Fifth Horseman of the Apocalypse.

Towards the end of the 1970s these increasingly bizarre and paranoid views were not just coming from fundamentalist Christian publications but from the mouthpiece of serious UFOlogy. As a result important and influential figures from the subject were drawn into this peculiar web. A number of well-known names in BUFORA, who claimed to represent the scientific approach to the subject, now became believers in the Satanic theories. These converts included the founding president, Graham Knewstub, and the association's enthusiastic chairman, Roger Stanway, who had earlier championed the cause of serious, methodological study of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, both men became convinced that UFOs were of demonic origin. The crunch came when their involvement in UFOlogy came into direct conflict with their pre-existing religious beliefs. Aerospace engineer Graham Knewstub was a long-standing enthusiast who had been one of the founding members and later chairman of Britain's oldest UFO group, the British Flying Saucer Bureau. Despite his leanings towards a 'technological' solution for the mystery, Knewstub was a practising Roman Catholic and found it difficult to separate his belief in the reality of the Devil from the occult nature of the UFO occupants. In 1979 he told *The Illustrated London News* he could not rule out the possibility 'that their source may be in malignant spiritual intervention.' (Wilson 1979)

In November 1976 Roger Stanway stunned his friends and colleagues by resigning from BUFORA and severing all contact with the subject that was formerly a major part of his life. In his resignation letter he explained that he and his wife had been born-again as part of a Christian revival that was sweeping through the world. But there was one disturbing experience that had irrevocably altered his attitude towards UFOs. Shortly after his conversion he was on a business trip to London and was waiting for a tube at Euston to Waterloo when '... as soon as I stepped onto the platform, I became alarmed to realise that there was, welling-up within me, a very strong sub-conscious compulsion to throw myself onto the electric line.' For sixty seconds he battled against the urge as 'my legs became weak, my heart raced and I started to sweat profusely... I didn't dare move in case I could not prevent my legs taking me onto the line.' (personal communication 2003) He was able to break this urge only by the recitation of concentrated prayer from St John's Gospel.

Six days later he underwent a ritual of 'deliverance' at his church to remove the evil spirit which he believed had tried to possess him. His resignation letter read:

... the immediate effect of all this is that I have now an irresistible desire to withdraw from active work for BUFORA as soon as possible. I realise that this will seem an incredible statement to those who know me well... Furthermore, I now believe that the UFO phenomenon has Satanic origins.'

(Bowen 1976: 2)

Despite the shock that accompanied his departure, Stanway's colleagues in BUFORA made no comment on the implications. It was seemingly business as usual. While some dismissed Stanway's decision to quit as being intensely personal, he was not the only active UFOlogist to abandon the subject as a result of a conflict with religious beliefs. Perhaps the most bizarre story of all concerns the BUFORA investigator for south Wales, Randall Jones Pugh. He was a deeply committed Christian when he set out to investigate the west Wales UFO flap of 1977 (see Chapter 12). Initially Pugh was another believer in 'nuts and bolts' spacecraft but gradually his views changed. During his investigations Pugh looked into a range of weird happenings centred upon a remote part of the Pembrokeshire coast and after completing his book *The Dyfed Enigma* in 1979 he concluded that the UFO entities were evil. Furthermore, he believed those who became involved were in serious physical and spiritual danger. Soon afterwards, like Roger Stanway before him, Pugh abandoned UFOlogy after undergoing a series of personal experiences which he claimed 'were too frightening to talk about.' But in an interview with the *Western Mail*, he said:

My first warning that I was into something very dangerous came from a friend of mine who became involved with UFOs from a scientific point of view after a sighting. After just 14 months he came to the conclusion that UFOs were involved with the occult, and decided to burn his books. He built a bonfire in the garden, but when he threw the books on it gave off an incredible heat. The smoke billowed up



← **The Rector expects an invasion from Space...**

SEEN ANY GOOD SAUCERS LATELY?

By JOHN LEE

PEERING nervously over my shoulder, I dived up to the only man in the deserted street. "These flying saucers," I said. "Are you worried?"

"WHAT flying saucers?" he said.

My question was met with a stare. The man's eyes were fixed on me. He said nothing for a moment. He then said, "You're not alone to think the same. Here's what he says in the parish newsletter."

★

The Sunday Graphic, 8 August 1954.

in the form of a human being, and two hands began to reach out. He was scared out of his wits.

(Western Mail 28 November 1980)

The Christian UFO Research Association

In May 1977 a group of these disparate former UFOlogists came together as a result of a letter by Rev Inglesby published by *The Church Times*. Inglesby was inspired by a BBC TV documentary *Out of this World* which covered a range of UFO believers including the Aetherius Society and Arthur Shuttlewood. He saw this as further evidence of the religious importance of the subject 'as human lives and souls are increasingly at risk' and bemoaned the lack of concern by the Church of England which, he said, 'neither knows nor cares about the subject.' He invited all those who were concerned by the malign influence of flying saucery to set up a Christian UFO Research Association and added:

The whole field of UFOlogy is riddled with heresy and false belief; it is fraught with such danger for the unwary that the antidote of straightforward Catholic theology in UFO circles is long overdue.'

(Church Times 20 May 1977)

Flying Saucerers



Orthodox deacon Paul Inglesby who believes UFOs and their occupants are of demonic origin.

Although membership of CHRUFORA never rose above forty, the society had associates from all denominations of the Christian faith. It included lay members in the form of UFOlogists such as Knewstubb, Stanway and Pugh and clergy such as Inglesby and Millican. CHRUFORA saw the imminent release of the Steven Spielberg film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* as the most obvious spearhead for the malignant spread of flying saucery. Inglesby described the massive popularity of the film as 'slow poison, more deadly even than *The Exorcist*.' In particular, the use by Spielberg of the Devil's Tower monument in Wyoming as the focus of the film's ultimate encounter was sufficient evidence of its demonic inspiration. He also identified a number of other Satanic elements in the plot. Key characters who receive a telepathic urge to go to the Devil's Tower are subject to demonic possession. Although the UFO occupants were portrayed in the film as benevolent and angelic, CHRUFORA members believed they were Satan's demons using this disguise to deceive humanity.

Rev Millican's reaction to the opening of the film in his native Bristol was to set up a stall in the foyer of the Odeon Film Centre. By June 1978 over 150,000 people had passed through. During his campaign he handed out almost 4,000 leaflets warning cinema-goers that UFOs were 'the devil's messengers.' Millican's display was in direct opposition to the message of the BFSB and the Aetherius Society which had twenty such stalls at cinemas up and down the country (*Sunday People* 23 April 1978). While Millican was saving souls in Bristol, Inglesby was more concerned about the spiritual welfare of 'top people'. Her Majesty the Queen, he felt, was in grave spiritual danger if she allowed herself to be seen to publicly endorse the film. In February 1978 he learned to his horror that both the Queen and Prince Philip had been persuaded to see the film in aid of the Cinema and TV Benevolent Fund at a Royal Premiere at the Leicester Square Odeon. In desperation he appealed to the Archbishop of Canterbury and to Lord Mountbatten, urging them to intervene and warning that her presence might prove 'disastrous' for the royal family (Paul Inglesby personal communication, 2005).

UFO'S ARE THE DEVIL'S MESSENGERS, SAYS VICAR

BEWARE if one of those widely sighted UFOs hovers over your garden. It may not be a close encounter with one of those little green men from Mars.

It could be a rather more evil visitation ... from one of the Devil's personal messengers. At least, that's the theory of Bristol vicar Anthony Millican.

Mr Millican aired his views on the controversial topic after seeing the smash hit film Close Encounters of The Third Kind at Bristol Odeon.

He was converted at the "brilliant" lines devoted for UFOs in the film.

For he believes the messages could be demonic, the odd transparent messages like other images. "I believe they want

to reduce us into the hellish world of the devil," said Mr. Millican, vicar of St. Constantine's, who now has a stall in the cinema foyer to advertise his views. He believes these demonic "Acidic Of Light" messages from a sinister world in the Universe. And he says:

By SHAN DAVIES

"Acidic earned that in the last days there would be in the sky terrors and great perils."

Mr. Millican has written his Close

Encounter to Lord P. L. Batten, and feels that it was evil.

"The increasing I see you that the UFO was not mechanical at all. I get the distinct impression that it was evil," he said.

He believes that the

extra-dimensional beings. I don't think so now. There are the many of them. "Incidentally it could be a case of demonic and evil."

"I believe there are good Christians and bad, but mostly bad for the human race."

Mr. Millican said he had his first sighting of a UFO in 1958, in 1961, and began research into the subject.

Sunday People 23 April 1978.

These appeals fell on deaf ears. Lord Mountbatten, as we have seen, had a long-standing fascination with flying saucers, that was shared by his cousin the Duke of Edinburgh. In the event, both Prince Philip and the Queen, accompanied by Lord Mountbatten, attended the star-spangled Royal Premiere on 14 March 1978, without any obvious intervention by demonic forces. Having failed in their campaign against the film CHURFORA had more success in their bid to make their mark on the House of Lords UFO Debate which had been tabled during the same year by veteran UFOlogist Brinsley le Poer Trench (Lord Clancarty). CHURFORA regarded Clancarty with suspicion because he said he disliked religion being brought into the UFO debate. As a result the society embarked on a leafleting campaign targeting 'top people' who had expressed an interest in speaking in the debate, which was held in January 1979. It was through the intervention of CHURFORA that the Archbishop of Canterbury asked Maurice Wood, the Bishop of Norwich, to contribute on the religious dangers of UFOlogy. In his speech the bishop said he was anxious about the dangers posed by UFO cults and pseudo-religions 'obscuring basic Christian truth' and added:

Some Christian researchers suggest that those who become deeply involved in the religious aspects of the UFO situation come under psychic domination which can cause serious distress to them in their personal lives.

(Clancarty 1979: 50)

One outcome of this period was that public interest in UFOs and the occult appeared to fall following the release of the Spielberg film. Fewer sightings were reported and the press lost interest in the subject once again. Inglesby's group felt they had achieved success in their campaign against 'an obsessive, unhealthy interest in UFOs now seen as occult phenomenon' and their group folded. Another outcome of the debate was that a number of peers of the realm were converted to the cause of UFOlogy, including a former British Chief of Defence Staff, Lord Peter Hill-Norton, who would play a very important role in UFOlogy in retirement. Like others

Flying Saucerers

who had followed this well-trodden path before him Hill-Norton initially believed the solution to the UFO mystery was a simple one. Alien spacecraft were visiting earth and all that was needed was proof. When that proof was not forthcoming he turned to the writings of demonologists for answers. By the end of his life in 2003 Hill-Norton was, according to Paul Inglesby, yet another convert to the demonic theories (personal communication 2005).

The reasons why this theory retained its popularity and influenced the thinking of so many important and apparently sensible figures in the subject was simple. It has an advantage over all other UFOlogical hypotheses because it explained *everything*. Many who became involved in the subject wanted a complete answer that left nothing unexplained. Those who sought to explain *all* UFOs as weather balloons, mirages, ball lightning, earthlights or alien craft simply could not provide such an all-encompassing answer. They could make their case only by distorting evidence that did not fit, or by ignoring it. However, those who believed in the Devil and his army of demons had a hypothesis that could account for every sighting, however bizarre or ambiguous it might be. As the Devil has unlimited powers, no UFO story was too absurd or contradictory as this was what would be expected of a Satanic conspiracy. For UFOlogists of a paranoid or apocalyptic mindset – and there were plenty – the idea of an invasion by evil forces, whether alien or Satanic, explained all aspects of the phenomenon.

Chapter nine

Slouching toward Warminster?

Arthur Shuttlewood and the Warminster 'Thing'

'If it wasn't true, it was truly well invented, and I don't really care either way.'

(*Warminster Journal* 20 September 1996)

The idea of a community besieged by alien forces is common in science fiction films and books. H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*, and John Wyndham's *Day of the Triffids*, among other early sci-fi fiction literature, capture the fears and anxieties of nations and communities as unfeeling alien forces beset them. As belief in flying saucers developed and spread throughout Britain the idea of a 'flap' arose. This term referred to short or long-term sightings of UFOs in a specific area, evidence to some that saucers and their occupants were targeting certain locations. Although no hard evidence has ever been forthcoming to suggest this was actually happening this is exactly what British flying saucerers believed took place in the small Wiltshire town of Warminster.

Between 1965 and the mid-70s Warminster was a centre of attention by the British media and of thousands of UFO enthusiasts. Each weekend, every Bank Holiday and most other nights as well, the hills around Warminster were thronged with people, up to several hundred at a time, as they searched and yearned for sightings of the UFOs said to haunt the area. People travelled from all over the world to descend on Warminster, filling its pubs and cafes by day, before expectantly ascending local hills at night. Friendships were forged and broken, based on contesting or contrasting interpretations of what the Warminster UFOs were. Romances developed as boy met girl in the warm, dark, countryside and discovered they shared a mutual interest in that most arcane of subjects, UFOs. Many saucerers who would later become authors and authorities on the subject cut their teenage teeth on those hills. One local man would rapidly become the focus for press and visitors, the conduit through which the Warminster phenomenon was shaped and expressed.

Flying Saucerers

Warminster was a UFOlogical and sociological phenomenon, spawning books, television documentaries and thousands of column inches in the popular press. But just what happened to create Warminster as a Mecca for saucerers, how did it rise from being a little known west country settlement to rank alongside Roswell as a flying saucer focus?

Warminster is a nondescript market town in the county of Wiltshire dating from the Anglo-Saxon period, although the area has been occupied for millennia. It is situated immediately south of Salisbury Plain, a vast upland chalk landscape dotted with thousands of archaeological sites and home to the prehistoric astronomical observatory at Stonehenge. The military use Salisbury Plain extensively and there are numerous training camps and weapons testing ranges in the area, many in close proximity to Warminster itself. Military exercises take place on Salisbury Plain twenty-four hours a day, throughout the year. A number of hills to the north, north-east, and west loosely ring the town, giving commanding and far-reaching views of the landscape. These hills, and in particular Cley Hill and Cradle Hill, played a major role in Warminster's flying saucer history.

Warminster, like all towns in Britain, has a wealth of local folklore involving ghosts and other supernatural events prior to its UFO invasion, and in fact it played no part in the great British UFO obsession until the mid-60s. Yet although Warminster was to become one of the most famous UFO locations in the world its curious relationship with flying saucers started not with a sighting of a flying saucer, but rather disappointingly with a noise.

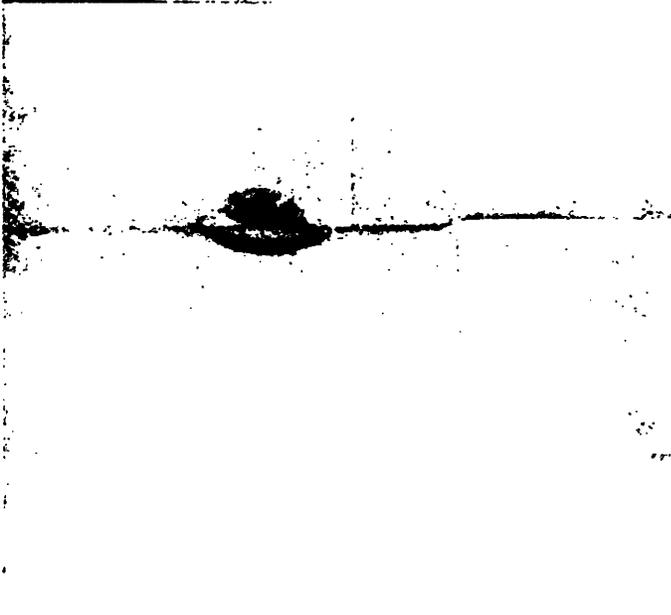
The post-Christmas lull in news was brightened on 7 January 1965, when a slightly tongue in cheek news snippet appeared in the pages of the *Warminster Journal*. 'Strange noise at Warminster' related how an unnamed female on her way to church at 6.30 a.m. on Christmas morning 1964 was startled by a sound like 'branches being pulled over gravel'. A mysterious hum was also heard. The weather was good with a clear, starlit sky, but despite the sound growing louder as it apparently moved over the witness's head, she was unable to see anything she could attribute to the cause of the noises. The newspaper piece ended with a variety of possible explanations for the noise, including it being Father Christmas taking off!

Had it not been for this letter, who knows what, if any, form the Warminster mystery may have taken. But the process had been started, albeit unwittingly, and the news item jolted the memory of Warminster's head postmaster, Roger Rump, whose letter in the *The Wiltshire Times* of 8 January noted that he had heard a similar noise at around the same time. With those two seeds, a mystery was germinated in the Warminster psyche, a mystery that would be incubated over the coming months by further revelations in the *Warminster Journal*. Initially there was no intimation or suggestion that the mystery sounds was connected to flying saucers, but the fact that they had appeared to be aerial in origin may have paved the way for what was to come.

On 15 January a local man, David Holton, wrote to the *Journal* claiming that the mysterious noise had been heard for years, yet had not been reported. Furthermore,

THE THING

A strange story of the goings-on in the skies above a country town



by ARTHUR SHUTTLEWOOD, Editor of the
Warminster Journal

With thirty years as a generalist behind me, I am about
to report on the Warminster Journal, which
about 4,000 copies each Friday, yet only read by more than
the town's population of 11,000.

Word
A
Trash
Scared
T
O
W
Pace

The man who took it



Last night words
A

This is the picture taken by... on Sunday evening...

Daily Mirror 10 September 1965.

Holton asserted, the 'hum' had '... disturbed a flock of pigeons from their roost in Southleigh Woods. They flew across its path of terror; several of the birds wheeled over and dropped lifeless to the ground.' (*Warminster Journal* 20 January 1965). Holton never produced any evidence or a witness for this event yet it became a key part of the development of the Warminster mystery, embellished and speculated on. The inference was clear and disturbing – whatever caused the noise could *kill*.

By May 1965 people were still reporting the occasional odd noises and the first recorded UFO sighting of the flap took place when Mrs Hilda Hebidge informed a local journalist that she had seen three separate UFOs around the 19 May. Several independent witnesses made another sighting, on 3 June. This event marked the first widespread public awareness that something, some *thing* perhaps, was afoot in the sleepy west country town. The sighting was remarkable for a number of reasons. Witnesses described a 'brightly glowing, cigar shaped object' that hung in the sky to the south of Warminster for thirty minutes, between 8.30 and 9.00 p.m. Cigar-shaped objects were one of the archetypal UFO shapes, reported by contactee George Adamski and hundreds of other witnesses in the 1950s, and in this respect the sighting mirrored other UFO sightings. But the handful of genuinely inexplicable

reports, those which defied all analysis, tended to be transient phenomena, short-lived events witnessed by only one or two people. Multi-witness sightings such as this were highly unusual and suggestive of misperceived atmospheric or celestial phenomena.

The Warminster Thing

A local journalist, who had been keeping a close eye on the Warminster mystery as it developed, seized on this sighting and sold it to the *News of the World* where the story appeared on the 6 June under the headline 'The thing from outer Warminster'. The story of the sighting was mixed up with the story of the Warminster mystery to date and via the *News of the World's* huge readership many thousands of people were sensitised to the events that were developing in and around Warminster.

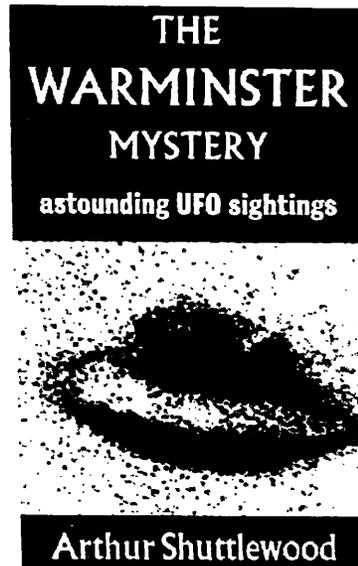
The mid-60s were, UFOlogically speaking, a 'dead' time. The fervid days of 1950s contactees had faded, the spectacular waves of sightings in 1967 still to come, and although UFO sightings took place sporadically, the subject was becoming moribund. Furthermore, such UFO sightings as were taking place were relatively dull by the standards set in the 1950s. Gone were the clearly defined flying saucers, the objects allegedly tracked on radar and pursued by military planes. Gone too were UFO landings and meetings with their unearthly occupants. Instead, the subject in Britain was dominated by American sightings or wild speculation about fuzzy lights that could have been anything from misperceived stars to aircraft landing lights.

At some unknown date in early 1965, the cause of the Warminster mystery became known as the 'Warminster Thing'. The name, with its echoes of the 1951 science fiction film *The Thing From Another World*, quickly stuck and was taken up by the media and other commentators to mean anything unusual which happened in or near Warminster. The Thing, however, wasn't a term unique to the UFOs seen at Warminster. RAF aircrew had also used the term to refer to sightings of the mysterious lights also known as 'foo-fighters' during the Second World War.

The journalist responsible for the initial stories in the *Journal* and for selling the June multi-witness sighting to the *News of the World* was Arthur Shuttlewood. A veteran of the Second World War, Shuttlewood had married a local girl and forged a career as a journalist on the *Warminster Journal*. His influence on the development of Warminster mystery is incalculable.

Although aerial sounds and now sightings were taking place, there was still a gulf to be spanned before Warminster would be forever connected to flying saucers. This came on the 10 August 1965 when Rachel Atwill was shocked to wakefulness at 3.45 a.m. by a horrible droning sound that was so tangible it shook her bed and floor. Atwill rushed to her window and saw:

... between the two bungalows opposite, about 200 yards above the range of hills beyond, was a bright object like a massive star. I have never believed in flying saucer stories, but I cannot describe it as anything else. It was definitely domed on top and was huge in size,



an unwinking light of uncanny brilliance. It hung there in all its glory and did not frighten me, but the awful noise it made did.'

(Shuttlewood 1967: 47)

Atwill's sighting is worth examining in some detail, forming as it does the first 'real' flying saucer sighting at Warminster. The sighting lasted for twenty-five minutes yet incredibly 'not one of my neighbours on this private estate saw or heard anything.' Other than Atwill's assumption that noise and sighting were directly connected, there is no evidence to link the two elements of the experience. If the object she was looking at were as far away as she suggests, and the noise was connected to it, it would have woken half of Wiltshire! Yet no one else reported anything untoward on that clear summer morning. Three forty-five a.m. is very early, but it should be borne in mind that Warminster is situated in the heart of farming country, adjacent to many military establishments, and there would have been quite a few people awake at that time as well as those who would presumably have been woken by the noise made by the object. No investigation into Atwill's experience was undertaken, and her account is mediated entirely through the purple prose of Arthur Shuttlewood who includes it in his first book, *The Warminster Mystery* (Shuttlewood 1967).

Decades of thorough UFO investigation has demonstrated that witness perception is notoriously problematic. Perhaps Atwill was woken by an unusual noise and perhaps she did rush to her window and see a bright light. But rather than the latter being the cause of the former it is equally possible, and much more likely that Atwill *assumed* the two phenomena were connected, thus creating a complete 'UFO sighting'. We can never know just what the reality behind the components of Atwill's experience was. The sound and vibrations could have been anything from military operations to a minor earth tremor. As for the light that lasted twenty-five minutes,

the planet Jupiter, with a magnitude of -2.1, was near the eastern horizon at the time of Atwill's experience and must be a strong contender for the visual source of her experience (Gary Anthony, personal communication 2006).

Other sightings and unexplained noises took place in the summer of 1965 and the letters page of the *Journal* were alive with argument as to what the Thing could be. The enigmatic David Holton, who was present at the genesis of the mystery, argued that this type of unusual noise had reported in other parts of the world. The *Journal* also noted that Holton had been on a television program where he claimed the noises were of spaceships.

An adversarial situation developed in the *Journal* whereby any letter that was pro-mystery was rigorously challenged by what appeared to be Warminster's only sceptic, Squadron Leader R.G. 'Tim' Woodman. It is usual for any discussion of UFO sightings in local papers to be contested by a sceptic, but Woodman was no ordinary doubting Thomas. After a distinguished career in the RAF, during which he shot down at least nine enemy aircraft, Woodman rose through the ranks to become Deputy Superintendent of Test Flying at Boscombe Down. There, he was responsible for testing the latest in aircraft technology. He had previous involvement with the flying saucer mystery when in 1950 he was asked by the Air Ministry to conduct a study into UFOs, which, he claims, led to him interviewing over one hundred pilots. None had ever seen a UFO and Woodman, with thousands of flying hours under his belt concluded:

I'd been test flying ever since the war, met up with the world's leading test pilots and aeronautical scientists and had acquired myself an exceptional background of knowledge of aerial phenomena, and yet here I was being told... that there were curious objects up there in the air which somehow had not come my way.

(Tim Woodman, personal papers)

The increase in sightings and the associated correspondence in the pages of the *Journal* slowly brought the Warminster mystery to the boil. The late summer of 1965 saw saucer hysteria in Warminster at such a pitch that Elwyn Rees, chairman of the Warminster Urban Council, announced his intention to call a public meeting, 'to allay fears that the happenings were a danger to Earth.' (*Warminster Journal* 6 August and 28 August 1965) Although he may have wished to allay the fears of his townsfolk, many of his statements clearly indicated that Rees was a believer of some sort. In another newspaper interview, he claimed that he wished 'to assure the population that they have nothing to fear from the astral phenomenon which has plagued them for some time now.' (*Warminster Journal* 28 August 1965)

A week prior to the meeting, David Holton threatened to destroy his dossier of over one hundred flying saucer sighting accounts from Warminster rather than disclose its contents to the public. 'This meeting is not the right way to go about it,' he said. 'This is a serious matter and must not be thrashed out in a half-hearted way by local people in front of newspaper men and television cameras.' (*Warminster Journal* 21 August 1965) The *Journal's* Arthur Shuttlewood was extremely concerned that

Slouching toward Warminster?

*Warminster arch-sceptic, Squadron Leader
Tim Woodman.*



Holton had refused to attend the meeting. As Shuttlewood notes in *The Warminster Mystery*, Holton had first raised the idea that the Warminster Things were spacecraft and it was he who had made the claims of pigeons being killed in flight by mysterious forces. Why would someone so intimately connected with the mystery withdraw from public debate and why would he not reveal the contents of his witness dossier to the press and public? Holton would not say, but he did make an enigmatic comment to Shuttlewood that, in light of later revelations, make a great deal of sense. 'One must accept that there is an intelligence behind them Mr Shuttlewood,' Holton pronounced:

I will make one final prediction to you. Then I wash my hands of the Thing controversy altogether. There will be plenty of sightings in future. There could be something of an important nature revealed to the world, if people are not too pigheaded and obstinate to listen with their eyes, see with their eyes.

(Shuttlewood 1969: 85)

The public response to this meeting was enormous. On 27 August two hundred people squeezed into the Town Hall's Assembly Room as more than 300 clamoured on the steps outside. Several television stations and representatives from all the national newspapers attended, as did many of Britain's leading UFOlogists. The British UFO Research Association (BUFORA) fielded several of its senior members, who had taken a keen interest in the Warminster phenomenon and interested townsfolk made up the rest of the audience.

Dr John Cleary-Baker, Evaluating Officer for BUFORA, spoke at length from the stage, expounding his theories about flying saucers. His argument, 'if unidentified flying objects do not exist, why are many governments spending thousands of pounds each year to investigate these things?' was flawed from the start. Documents subsequently released by the Ministry of Defence indicate that in Britain at that time there was no specific department in the government dedicated to the investigation of

'THE THING' STARTS CASH TILLS RINGING

A NEW noise was heard in Warminster yesterday—the merry tinkling of cash registers.

Tourists from all over the country are pouring into the Wiltshire town (population 11,000) to go Thing-spotting.

Nobody knows what The Thing is. But the townsfolk of Warminster say it is responsible for the fireball in the sky, the weird sounds and other strange happenings reported in the district over the past two years.

'As good as Loch Ness'

And last night there was no room at any Warminster inn. At the Anchor Hotel, Scots landlord Hugh McLaren, 53, said: "This could do us as much good as the Loch Ness monster did for Scotland."

Over at the Weymouth Arms, Mr. Pat Kelly, 46, secretary of the local licensed Victuallers' Association said: "The Thing could keep our season going right through the winter."

The Big Rush to Warminster follows Friday night's public meeting at the town hall at which it was decided to set up a Thing observation post on the Downs.

Said council chairman, Mr. Emlyn Rees, who organised the meeting: "One man from London has already volunteered to man the post at weekends. We might even get the Observer Corps in on it."

The Londoners will join local volunteers equipped with tape recorders, cameras and binoculars to record any odd sight or sound.

But even townsfolk who are welcoming the tourists with open arms are maintaining a healthy cynicism.

Said retired travel agent Joe Brownell, 74, member of the town's Tourist Committee: "If these visitors expect to see the Thing I think they will be disappointed."

Daily Mirror 28 August 1965

In the hills, volunteers will sweep the skies . .

NOW THE BIG HUNT IS ON FOR THAT 'THING'

THREE hundred townsfolk turned up at a public meeting last night—to find out more about "The Thing."

Then they decided to set up a special "listening post" to track the mystery object that has plagued them for months.

Cameras

The special observers post will be put up on the Wiltshire Downs, near the town of Warminster.

It will be equipped with tape recorders, cameras and binoculars.

And volunteers will be

By NED QUANT

recruited to man it through the night.

Any "sightings" will be logged and reported to the Unidentified Flying Objects Research Association in London.

More than thirty people have reported seeing coloured lights zooming about the sky over the town.

Some have also reported mysterious noises — "like flocks of birds" — when there was nothing to be seen.

Last night the first public meeting was held in the town's assembly hall to discuss the strange occurrences.

Dr John Doel from the research association told the meeting: "We are

struggling to explain these phenomena.

"We'd duty sceptics to find any explanation that will satisfy people that these things are not from Outer Space.

And another association investigator, Dr. J. Cleary-Baker, said: "Don't be afraid. You are privileged to be able to investigate these things."

Sunday People 29 August 1965

UFOs and the amount spent on dealing with reports and enquiries was miniscule (*Warminster Journal* 31 August 1965).

Undeterred by his speculative ignorance and warming to his theme Cleary-Baker went on to counsel the assembled throng: 'Do not be alarmed. If any harm was going to come to Earth from people from other planets it would have happened long ago. There is no need to fear the phenomenon. We should welcome their arrival in the sky.' (*Warminster Journal* 31 August 1965) He then suggested that nearby Cley Hill might be a 'homing beacon' for the flying objects that were haunting the area. BUFORA were portraying themselves as an objective UFO research organisation that assessed sightings purely on the basis of scientific evidence. Yet it is clear from Cleary-Baker's pronouncements at the Warminster meeting they were believers in alien spaceships. This lack of objectivity from Britain's major UFO research group did not bode well for any objective study of the Warminster 'Thing'.

In and among the belief-driven chaos of the meeting a flash of genuine humour was generated when Emlyn Rees was handed an urgent telegram. He opened it and read out, 'Investigations completed. Invasion fears are unfounded — Dr. Who.' Summing up the argument against those who expressed scepticism about the Warminster Thing, John Cleary-Baker stated: 'in confounding the critics we may make a very substantial step forward in understanding the universe in which we live.' (*Warminster Journal* 31 August 1965)

As David Holton had predicted, the public meeting degenerated into a circus. But whatever its lack of success in untangling fact from fiction, the meeting, held on the Friday of the August Bank Holiday weekend, generated enough publicity to attract

up to 11,000 extra tourists all eager to be part of the Warminster phenomenon. Local business owners were not blind to the potential benefits of alien visitation. Hotelier Hugh McLaren of the Anchor Hotel noted that: 'This could do us as much good as the Loch Ness Monster did for Scotland.' Hotels and inns in the area were fully booked and the secretary of the Warminster Licensed Victuallers Association opined, 'The Thing could keep our season going right through the winter.' (*Warminster Journal* 31 August 1965). Whatever lay behind the sightings, the Thing was extremely good for business if not for civic pride.

So many people arrived in the area over the Bank Holiday weekend that they could not all be accommodated. Many spent the nights camping or sleeping out on the hilltops around Warminster, in Shuttlewood's words, '... taking it in turns to watch the night sky for the capricious capering of the Thing.' The events of that August Bank Holiday weekend led to the start of the regular sky watches for which Warminster became world famous.

The huge influx of visitors over the Bank Holiday period as well as the increase in publicity was bound to lead to an increase in sightings of the Thing and there was a dizzying wave of expectation among the visiting sky watchers that weekend. But it was a local man who, within forty-eight hours of the public meeting, had the sighting and took the photograph which put Warminster firmly on the map of world UFO hotspots.

The Gordon Faulkner photograph

At 8.20 p.m. on Sunday 29 August, 23-year-old Gordon Faulkner set off to visit his mother, taking his camera that he intended to lend to his sister. Just as he shut the house door his attention was caught by something in the sky. He said afterwards 'It was a silvery object. Not all that high... looked like a jet aircraft. As it flew past over the south of the town, I could just make out the unusual shape. It was circular.' Faulkner quickly raised his camera and aimed where he thought the object would be, not expecting to catch anything on film due to the object's speed. When the film had been processed Faulkner was amazed. 'It shook me rigid when I saw what came out of it all.' (*Daily Mirror* 10 September 1965) There, captured on one frame of Faulkner's film was the Thing itself, a grainy depiction of a 'classic' flying saucer shape. Faulkner immediately sent the photo to the *Warminster Journal* with a brief accompanying letter. Rather surprisingly, considering the media and public interest generated by the public meeting, the editor tucked the photograph away on the correspondence page.

However, for journalist Arthur Shuttlewood the Faulkner photograph was the vehicle that would propel the Warminster mystery – and by default Shuttlewood himself – into a limelight neither would fade from for many years. The photo, together with an account by Shuttlewood, was broken in the *Daily Mirror* and rapidly syndicated across the world. The *Daily Mirror* was happy to make money from the *idea* that Faulkner's photo may have depicted a genuine flying saucer. But *Mirror* science reporter Arthur Smith was curiously ambivalent about the image: 'It is one of the best photographs of a "saucer" ever taken,' he said, 'but the lack of any knowledge of the

Slouching toward Warminster?

'MUFOB – Experimental UFO Hoaxing.' (Magazine cover supplied by John Rimmer)

MUFOB

NEW SERIES 2

MARCH 1976



size, distance of the object captured on the picture reduces its scientific value to nil.' Shuttlewood, whose name was now intimately connected with the Warminster Thing was '... quite certain that the picture is completely genuine.' Yet Smith's certainty was based on belief rather than on scientific analysis of the photograph's negative, which never took place. Nevertheless, the Faulkner photograph became an iconic image among the British UFO community. It was endlessly discussed and featured in books and magazines. To many the mere fact that it *looked* like a classic flying saucer was enough. Faulkner's photograph beamed its message across the world from the pages of newspapers, magazines and via television. That message was essentially 'come to Warminster, you may see this thing.' (*Daily Mirror* September 10 1965)

While Faulkner's photograph was accepted as the symbol of Warminster's burgeoning mystery it has been the centre of controversy ever since. Both the image on the photograph and the circumstances in which it was taken have been called into question. Although Faulkner alleged the flying saucer was in full view for quite a while, as with the Atwill sighting, it appears that no one else in or around Warminster saw the UFO. Accusations that it may have been a hoax were made and Faulkner was forced to defend himself, making statements such as 'I do not expect any payment. It was purely by chance – a million to one, probably – that I was fortunate enough to take it. The print and negative are yours, free, if they are any use to you.' At no time, however, did Faulkner state outright that his photograph and the

image on it was *not* a hoax. This ambivalence was enough to guarantee the future of the Faulkner photograph as an emblem of the Warminster mystery as a whole.

In 1994 controversy over the photograph was revived. Roger Hooton, a former acquaintance of Faulkner's, wrote to the *Daily Mirror* and the *Warminster Journal*. Hooton claimed that he, Faulkner and some friends had hoaxed the photograph and gave a painstaking explanation of how the hoax was created, an explanation which on balance of probability is much more likely than the possibility a genuine flying saucer had been snapped. A private letter from Hooton to the *Warminster Journal* explains how the photo was planned as part of a long-standing tradition in the office to place joke letters in the 'Letters to the Editor' column (*Warminster Journal* 29 April 1994).

The idea for a specific UFO hoax was conceived both to play a practical joke on editor Charles Mills and to inject mischief into Warminster's rapidly developing UFO mythos. Hooton believes that the *Journal* editor knew it was a hoax and placed it in the letters page. Had he believed it was a genuine photograph Hooton insists Mills would have splashed it on the front page, capitalising on the recent sightings and public meeting. Hooton also believes the reason Faulkner refused to take any money in copyright royalties, a potentially huge sum, was because it was a hoax and to receive payment would have left him open to possible criminal action.

Hooton, a printer at the *Journal*, recalls that Shuttlewood took Faulkner's photograph from the editor's office without permission and took the train to London where he sold the photograph and story to the *Daily Mirror*, quoting himself as editor of the *Journal*. Was this a measure of Shuttlewood's wish to spread news of the dramatic photograph across the world, or something more cynical? Perhaps it was a ploy to raise his public profile to make him central to the Warminster experience? Hooton ends his letter with 'I just wanted to put an end to a joke that had got out of control and was being manipulated by others.' (*Warminster Journal* 29 April 1994)

When questioned about allegations his photo was a hoax Faulkner chose his words carefully saying, 'I maintain the photograph which I took was completely genuine.' (*Western Daily Press* 18 April 1994) Of course, even a hoax photograph is still a completely genuine *photograph*, and the image on the photo is genuine also. Whether the image on the photograph is a large, distant and genuine anomalous flying object or whether, as Hooton suggests, it is a model made from a cotton reel, milk bottle top and a button is another matter. In lieu of an original negative to study, any consideration of Faulkner's photograph must be reduced to an analysis of what he said, contrasted with the lack of witnesses and Hooton's claims of a hoax.

Following the publication of Faulkner's photograph, the Warminster phenomenon exploded. UFOlogists and would-be flying saucer spotters flooded into the town and Arthur Shuttlewood's role in the development of the mystery rapidly grew. Shuttlewood began to go on regular nocturnal rambles to Cradle Hill and Cley Hill to meet up with the groups of UFOlogists and tell them about the Warminster mystery. He rapidly became a feature of the developing mythological landscape, always ready to speak to journalists and public alike about the Warminster Thing.

Slouching toward Warminster?

Almost anyone who encountered Shuttlewood in action, even sceptics, were impressed by both his sincerity and his charisma, which awed those who gathered around him. Veteran sceptical UFOlogist John Rimmer described Shuttlewood's voice as:

A voice as soft and gentle and rounded as the hills of southern England, a voice quiet and sincere, that holds the gathering enthralled. As he talks... the people listen with awe and admiration, fascinated by the strange wonders that this man describes.

(Rimmer 1969)

Shuttlewood quickly became a media celebrity. Television companies filmed him, journalists wrote about him and thousands of people who returned repeatedly to walk Warminster's hills with Arthur Shuttlewood revered him as some kind of saucer guru. Many people had UFO sightings whilst on the hills with Shuttlewood. In fact, one of his claims was, 'I promise you that if you stand on Cley Hill from around 9.30 at night you'll see something unusual by midnight.' Lured by such promises thousands flocked to Warminster to stand and look at the night sky with the Shuttlewood and many people *did* see and photograph strange lights. But that was the problem. Although hundreds of sightings took place, they were just of odd lights that came and went, unusual flashes, or point sources of light seen at a distance. Some other mechanism had to be at work to make the saucer spotters return week after week. It seemed that what was happening revolved around Shuttlewood himself. His personality, presence, sincerity and enthusiasm, coupled with his oratory skills helped create the environment in which the mundane could become the miraculous. John Rimmer again:

To be on Cradle Hill, on a sky watch, listening to Arthur Shuttlewood, is a very remarkable experience. He speaks with the assurance of a professional commentator; his voice is carefully modulated to sound clearly over the noise of wind and cars. He is a persuasive, not a dogmatic person.'

(Rimmer 1969)

Most of those who walked the hills with Shuttlewood fervently believed their sightings were genuine and did not doubt his words of wisdom. Others were not so sure, and sceptical UFOlogists, hitherto almost unknown in Britain, were becoming active. Warminster provided them with a UFO flap they could study as it happened and many took a keen interest in the unfolding events at Warminster.

John Harney was one such young sceptic who made several trips to Warminster to observe the mystery at firsthand. Harney was disenchanted with Shuttlewood and the gullibility of his followers when he witnessed him interpret lightning seen from a great distance as a UFO. Details of other sightings merely served to confirm his doubts in the literal truth of the Warminster Thing. 'From other accounts it seems that Shuttlewood's usual technique is to point out a satellite, calling it a UFO. Then, when the satellite disappears in the earth's shadow he directs the observer's attention to a nearby star and says that the UFO is now hovering.' (Harney 1966)

This perception of what was taking place in Warminster was not just confined to the sceptical UFOlogists. In 1968 the BBC produced a television documentary, 'Flying Saucers and the People Who See Them', presented by a psychologist, Dr Stephen Black. This was a level-headed look at the phenomenon and as part of the research Black and his producer Philip Daly visited Arthur Shuttlewood on a sky watch. In a letter to Edward Condon, leader of the contentious Colorado University study of UFOs, Daly writes:

There was some haze about when we got up on the hill, but slowly it began to lift and suddenly Mr Shuttlewood excitedly drew our attention to a UFO. When the mist lifted 45 minutes later and the whole sky became clear, the light we had been watching was quite clearly Jupiter, though we could not prevent Mr Shuttlewood from claiming yet another UFO. But the sensation of autokinesis was very real.

(BBC 1968)

Autokinesis is a visual illusion that occurs under certain conditions, especially on dark nights in areas with few visual cues such as lights or other illuminated objects or landmarks. When a fixed light source remains within visual range for an extended period of time, this phenomenon can occur, making it appear as if the light source were moving. The illusion has been responsible for thousands of UFO sightings and can really be quite dramatic. The Warminster landscape was particularly conducive to autokinesis, being very dark at night and having many distant roads and hills from which car and other lights could be seen – and misinterpreted.

Autokinesis was not the only mechanism causing the UFO sightings. Hoaxers were also at work in the landscape. By the very nature of the exercise it is impossible to know just how many hoaxes were perpetrated on the Warminster sky watchers over the years but there were many. Often these were actually known about by the saucer watchers, who took them in good part, hunting the hoaxer being a game to pass the time when 'real' UFO sightings were absent. Kites, torches and more sophisticated methods were used. Often the saucer spotters were fooled but would deny this when the hoax was revealed.

Experimental UFO hoaxing

One sceptical UFO group, the Society for the Investigation of Unidentified Flying Object Phenomena (SIUFOP) conducted an experimental, scientific hoax at Warminster to monitor how a UFO sighting would be perceived and portrayed by the UFO community. Prior to the hoax itself, holes intended to be interpreted as UFO marks were dug and grass was singed at a location near Sack Hill. Then, at 11.00 p.m. on Saturday 28 March, a light was shone from that location towards Cradle Hill where a group of UFOlogists were conducting a sky watch. The light was switched on and off at regular intervals for 25 seconds. A SIUFOP 'plant' on the hill triggered a UFO detector when the light appeared and took some photographs. The film was handed over to one of the sky watchers who submitted it to *Flying Saucer*

Andy Roberts standing on Cradle Hill.



Review. After processing it was claimed the photograph showed '.... a large cylindrical object with two smaller objects leaving the main sphere. In one photo it seems one of the smaller spheres is still in contact.' (Simpson 1976)

In other words, blobs of light on a two-dimensional negative were being interpreted, through the filter of belief as three-dimensional objects; the implication being that these objects were spacecraft. Publication of the photographs in *Flying Saucer Review* saw the event being seriously misinterpreted with the length of time the light was visible exaggerated. The article also stated that the light moved, when in fact it was stationary. There seems to be little doubt that the vast majority of all flying saucer sightings in and around Warminster were the direct result of permutations of misperception, autokinesis and hoaxing. These factors, coupled with belief in UFOs and an expectation that they could be seen at Warminster, created a self-fulfilling prophecy for all but the most sceptical.

Arthur Shuttlewood acted as the focus of attention that held everything together. Moreover, the Warminster experience affected him profoundly in a short space of time. His first book, *The Warminster Mystery* was a straightforward, if bizarrely written, account of the early days of the phenomena. His subsequent books sank into an almost unreadable mishmash of sightings, leavened with homespun new age philosophy. Essentially Shuttlewood had undergone a religious transformation. He had become a landscape mystic, a shaman mediating between the mundane world and that of the mysterious visitors he called Aenstrians. Arthur claimed to have met aliens and to have received alien messages over the telephone. Arthur could guarantee UFO sightings and effectively, as we have seen earlier, transform mundane celestial objects into UFOs by the power of his enthusiasm and imagination. Few, if any, would challenge Shuttlewood as he sermonised on Warminster's hills.

Sceptic Tim Woodman was one of the few who dared take Shuttlewood on via the letters page in the *Journal*, where he was polite, but firm that it was all a load of nonsense. Privately, based on his extensive knowledge of the main players and especially Shuttlewood, Woodman grew more and more concerned at Shuttlewood's



involvement. In one private letter he writes 'Shuttlewood himself is now generally regarded by the local population as having gone slightly round the bend... He has also developed a religious streak, not an uncommon occurrence as regards UFO researchers.' (Tim Woodman, personal papers)

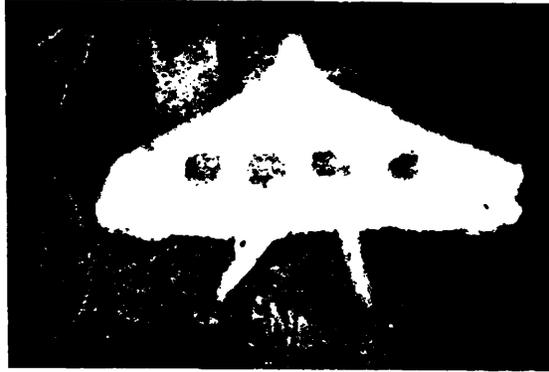
As we saw in earlier chapters, hills played a significant role in the beliefs and experiences of the Aetherius Society, the new age saucerers and the flying saucer contactees. As with other religious-based groups from all cultures, in all times, hills were locations where the 'other' could be contacted. They were places of pilgrimage where nothing came between seeker and sky, places to await contact, salvation, or just to be with fellow initiates on the quest. Cradle Hill and Cley Hill were central to the beliefs of the Warminster sky watchers. News clippings from the era show groups of mainly young men armed to the teeth with sleeping bags, cameras and UFO detectors milling around the barn and copse on Cradle Hill. Night after night the faithful would wait, logging and photographing each unusual light, listening to Arthur, waiting for the 'big one', the sighting that would prove the physical reality of flying saucers.

Cley Hill accrued an even more esoteric status. According to UFOlogist Keith Palmer 'in May 1965 a UFO was seen over the town of Warminster and a large torpedo object shot from it and buried itself into Cley Hill. After many months of searching, this object was located with metal and mine detectors. It was not touched and left there.' The Marquis of Bath, owner of the nearby Longleat Estate also heard about the significance of Cley Hill and wrote:

I was once visited by a group of UFO enthusiasts, who appeared surprised that I hadn't previously been told that Longleat is situated above some vast flying saucer, which brought the initiators of our human civilisation down to Earth from a distant galaxy. I think the idea was that Cley Hill was the beacon, while Longleat Park was the garage. And when the day of Armageddon finally draws nigh, the faithful will congregate in the park before being given their special

Slouching toward Warminster?

Opposite and right: Typical flying saucer graffiti on the barn at Cradle Hill, Warminster.



ticket to the saucer, which would then take off and escape to another galaxy, where an additional civilisation would be started in the same colonial tradition.

(Marquis of Bath, speech to Warminster Council, 28 October 1996)

Warminster residents were ambivalent about the Thing's influence on the town. Some, like Arthur Shuttlewood, believed it represented contact with alien forces. Others were dismissive of the phenomenon, complaining that the visitors clogged up the streets and created a nuisance. The local tradesmen were extremely pleased at the business it brought to the town. Everyone, young and old, was touched by the phenomenon. Schoolgirl Sara Burgess was fascinated by it and as an eleven-year old wrote this poem, which was published in the *Warminster Journal*:

The Thing

The Thing has come to Warminster, it hovers overhead
And people say they see it as they climb their stairs to bed
Some see it in the afternoon all glowing green and red
They try to take a photograph, but all the film goes dead
Some say that it's cigar in shape and others that it's round
Some say it makes a noise like hail and some a humming sound
Is it a flying saucer, a ship from out of space?
Full of little green men who have come to view the place
Warminster is famous and on the television screen
And pictures of the object are in the papers seen
Some do not believe in it and say it's all a lie
The only ones to believe in it are the ones who've seen it fly

(Sara Burgess, personal communication 10 July 2005)

Warminster continued to be a focus for UFOlogists long after the wonder years between 1965 and 1975. Sky watchers of all persuasions still visit the small town and make their pilgrimages to Cley Hill and 'alien graffiti' is still on the barn at Cradle Hill and occasionally has new glyphs added to it. Yet despite town's rich legacy of modern saucer folklore the council has surprisingly failed to capitalise on

it for tourism; there are no guides to Warminster's UFO hot spots, no 'I went to Warminster and all I got was Abducted' T-shirts. Nothing in fact other than the graffiti on Cradle Hill exists to remind the twenty-first century saucer-seeker that Warminster was once the crucible of the British flying saucer experience.

The facts are that despite the thousands of alleged UFO sightings, unusual sounds and purported alien contacts no hard evidence, no uncontested photo, no UFOlogical grail was discovered at Warminster. More intriguingly not one of the UFO sightings at Warminster was ever reported to the Ministry of Defence and in the mid-70s interest gradually began to tail off. Those who had once treated Warminster as a place of pilgrimage lost interest in the subject when no proof was forthcoming. Others simply drifted into other areas of occult belief where evidence was not required or wanted. Arthur Shuttlewood, plagued by ill health, drastically cut down his nocturnal rambling in the 1980s and died in 1996.

To many the events at Warminster are just a footnote in the annals of UFOlogical history. To others they are an embarrassment best forgotten about. A memory of a time when they were young and it was possible – necessary even – to believe six impossible things before breakfast. The giddy excitement of being on a sky watch with like minded souls facilitating and reinforcing those beliefs. But even a cursory study of the Warminster Thing teaches a great deal about how UFOlogy is constructed and sustained. In the early years of the twenty-first century a significant piece of information came to light which shed light on the motivation of one of the main players in the Warminster mystery.

In 2005, a letter from David Holton, the man who acted as midwife to the Warminster mystery, was printed in the *Warminster Journal*. Perhaps precipitated by an isolated article in the paper in June that year in which the present authors appealed for information about the Warminster phenomenon, Holton's letter was both revealing and uncompromising:

After forty years the 'Warminster Mystery' remains a mystery no longer. In view of its origin, it should be known as the 'Crockerton Mystery' because I was the person who set it in motion initially as a psychological experiment that succeeded beyond even the wildest flight of my imagination... Mass hypnosis; widely used in advertising, politics and religion had always fascinated me for hypnosis generally is a little understood occult force latent in mankind and some animals, of unbelievable power. Late in 1964 the *Warminster Journal* reported that some unexplained sounds had been heard in the town and it had long seemed to me that the public mood of that time was yearning for some demonstration of the unseen realms' presence. I invented a story about a flock of pigeons being killed by sound waves over Five Ash Lane in Crockerton and one of two other fictitious incidents and simply sent them to the *Warminster Journal* to see what happened. I was not kept waiting for long! My theory about a deep-seated popular demand for a mystery was proven to be all too true. The response was explosive, no less. Reports from witnesses

Slouching toward Warminster?

poured in the *Journal* from the surrounding district and continued to do so for the next ten years at least. What, of course, is unbelievable are modern myths about flying saucers and other objects, crop circles and space aliens! (*Warminster Journal* 19 June 2005)

Did this admission prove, finally, that Holton had invented the Warminster Thing? Holton offers no evidence other than assertion, but consider the facts. Holton claimed the mystery noises could kill, and were connected to flying saucers. Holton *claimed* to have hundreds of sighting reports but would not reveal them at the public meeting. Squadron leader Tim Woodman, the Thing's most vociferous critic, had frequently challenged him in the *Warminster Journal* and was convinced of Holton's crucial role in the making of the myth.

The final word on Warminster must go to Woodman. Writing to the *Journal* in 1968 he concluded 'More simply, if there had been no Mr Holton there would have been no Warminster Thing. Or, if Mr Holton was to emigrate to Australia tomorrow, then in a year's time there would probably be the Wagga-Wagga Thing.'

Chapter ten

UFOlogy in the 60s

When popular interest is stimulated in UFOs, as in the recent press flurry, people look for UFOs: indeed they wish to see them... The other psychological aspect is almost a religious desire to believe in UFOs. People become depressed about the troubled state of the world with its threats of nuclear, bacteriological and chemical warfare. They find it comforting to believe that superior beings exist whose technology must have triumphed over the same sort of vicissitudes as we are now undergoing; and they regard it as a sign of hope for the world.

(Carruthers 1967)

From the early 1950s the tiny pool of enthusiasts had grown with the creation of a myriad of flying saucer clubs and societies across Britain. A number of flying saucer books were in print and the subject received a further boost from 1957 when the Soviet Union launched a satellite, Sputnik I, into orbit around the Earth. The opening of the space race confounded those who had been reluctant to accept the possibility of travel in space. A frantic period of competition followed between the superpowers before the Soviets placed cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin into space in 1961. Now journeys to the moon and other planets in the solar system appeared inevitable. At the same time, the possibility that older and more advanced civilisations might wish to visit us appeared distinctly more probable to many ordinary people.

Extraterrestrial visitations to Earth were relentlessly promoted as fact by the man who became the elder statesman of British UFOlogy, Brinsley le Poer Trench. Trench was the fifth son of the Earl of Clancarty and came from an Anglo-Irish family which traced its ancestry to Huguenots who fled to England in the sixteenth century. Like many others his imagination had been captured by the idea of flying saucers and he started to keep a scrapbook of newspaper cuttings. At that time Trench lived close to Derek Dempster in London and the two became friends and shareholders in the company which founded *Flying Saucer Review*. At this time Trench had a title but no

Brinsley le Poer Trench.



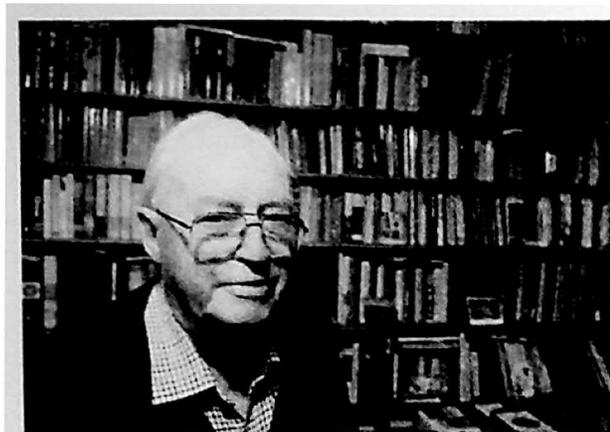
private income and earned a living selling advertising for a gardening magazine. Like Leslie he was keen to develop a writing career from his involvement in flying saucery. Dempster says of him:

Brinsley was a delightful, curious guy, a personable character and one of the gentlemen of the world. We got on terribly well, but when I started to pull away from involvement in flying saucers, he got into it more and more, writing books and trying to persuade his friends in high places.

(personal communication 2002)

On Dempster's departure Trench took over editorship of the *Review*. Under his control the magazine strayed from the aims laid down by its founders. From 1956 it became increasingly a mouthpiece for the contactees and what one of the later editors, Gordon Creighton, ironically described as 'wild and absurd ideas.' Trench, like Desmond Leslie, believed that space people had been visiting Earth for millions of years. He developed the idea to its logical conclusion, with the then far-out theory that aliens had 'created' or seeded modern humans 30,000 years ago and their visits in flying saucers in more recent times 'are to keep an eye on us.' He also incorporated an apocalyptic element into this hypothesis. The increase in visits since the end of the Second World War, he suspected, were because the visitors were getting ready to warn us 'of some pending catastrophe.' His most eccentric idea of all was the conviction that aliens had bases inside the Earth and their craft entered the atmosphere by flying out from holes in the poles.

Trench was a prolific letter writer and was equally keen on making an effort to make direct contact with the saucer occupants. His editorship saw the beginning of 'saucer spotting' evenings where enthusiasts could meet and swap stories. It was at this time that the first UFO detectors were advertised for sale in the *Review*. These were crude devices which their makers claimed were capable of detecting changes in the Earth's



*Gordon Creighton, veteran UFOlogist and editor of Flying Saucer Review 1982–2003.
(Photo Clas Svaln)*

magnetic field that would trigger an alarm when a UFO was in the vicinity. In 1956 a new organisation, the 'International UFO Observer Corps' was founded from Trench's home in Belgravia and he quickly appointed representatives across the world from his collection of pen pals.

The sixth annual International Flying Saucer Day was held on 7 June 1958 and involved saucer groups armed with UFO detectors at locations in England, Japan, Denmark, New Zealand and elsewhere (Trench 1959). By 1959 Trench's plans grew even grander with the announcement of the First International Flying Saucer Contact Weekend during the Whitsun holidays. The event was billed as 'the most daring and biggest attempt yet to contact the space people.' Trench was personally responsible for the organisation of these events and the growing workload began to take its toll. Meanwhile the finances of the *Review* were neglected and in September 1959 he was forced to resign as editor after twenty issues.

'Saucers are no longer news'

Trench's place in the editor's seat was taken by publisher and fellow saucer enthusiast Waveney Girvan. He was one of the original shareholders in the company and, as editor-in-chief at Werner Laurie publishers, was an astute businessman. The new editor was a totally different personality to his predecessor. Scots-born Girvan quickly realised the commercial potential of a serious journal dedicated to the saucers. In a letter to Graham Knewstub, President of the BFSB, in May 1960 he reveals that he did not always see eye-to-eye with Trench 'although we had no actual disagreement.' Trench, however, 'had strayed from the precisely defined role of editor and was busying himself much too much with other organisational activities, all of which involved him in correspondence of some magnitude.' He added: '... it was a wonder that the *Review* was ever produced [and] a wonder that it did not flounder under the weight of its overheads.' (Dennis Plunkett, personal communication 2005)

Girvan tried to shift the focus of the magazine, now bimonthly, back to the original aims which intended that it should 'treat this phenomena at a scientific and serious level.' Under his guidance its circulation and influence outside Britain grew along with its coverage of the world-wide nature of the phenomenon. However, Girvan

UFOlogy in the 60s

had some peculiar ideas of his own which led some UFOlogists opposed to the contactee movement to view him with suspicion. His 1955 book *Flying Saucers and Commonsense* supported the authenticity of George Adamski's photographs and as editor Girvan promoted the idea of a conspiracy involving the establishment and the press to prevent 'the truth' about saucers reaching the public.

At the same time the departure of Trench accentuated the growing schism between those students of saucery who took 'a scientific approach' and the followers of contactees who placed their faith in the space visitors. The public often could not differentiate between the two factions and in reality there was much overlap between the two groups. For instance, when one magazine asked its readers in a poll who they considered to be the best authors on UFOs, they found Donald Keyhoe was the most popular, but contactees George Adamski and Dan Fry followed closely behind (McIver 1983).

As a result Girvan's successors were faced with combat on two fronts. First they had to tackle what they perceived as the growing 'lunatic fringe' within their own subject in the form of the contactee movement. Secondly they felt the need to respond to unjustified ridicule from a hostile press which tended to portray all enthusiasts as eccentric or deluded. In 1966 one newspaper summed up the attitude of the establishment towards UFOlogy, saying: 'the whole subject of flying saucers has a music hall air about it in Britain, with no anxiety by scientists to top the bill.' (*The Times* 31 December 1966)

These problems were made worse for a period of years in the early 1960s when the media lost interest in flying saucers or UFOs as they were now being described. UFOlogists began to refer to this era as 'the Dark Ages' and some believed it was all part of a plot to stifle public discussion of the phenomenon. An article published in the May-June 1960 issue of *Flying Saucer Review* implied the media were now part of the 'conspiracy of silence.' Reminding readers of the massive coverage saucers received in the media during 1950, Girvan stated: 'To-day we may speculate about life on other planets but our newspapers no longer print anything about Flying Saucers. The intelligence and the courage have both evaporated.' (Girvan 1960) In response Robert Chapman, science correspondent with the London *Evening News*, wrote that it was true that newspapers had lost interest but not because of a conspiracy. 'The real answer, I suggest, is that flying saucers have ceased to be good newspaper copy,' Chapman wrote. 'The majority of sightings are much of a muchness.' He added that if a saucer landed in Hyde Park and remained long enough for Fleet Street's finest to interview the occupants, that would be a different matter. 'But we just cannot go on reporting "mysterious lights" in the sky or "silver objects travelling at great speed." Just one saucer story that was different would be enough to get this fascinating mystery right back on the front page.' (Chapman 1960)

Waveney Girvan did not live long enough to see the revival of interest in his subject. He succumbed to cancer in October 1964 and his place was taken by his friend Charles Bowen, who became the magazine's longest-serving editor. During his record eighteen years in the chair both the magazine and company changed their image, becoming *FSR* in 1968 and 'FSR Publications Ltd' respectively. These

changes appear to have been an attempt to improve the poor public image which students of flying saucers had attracted in the press. During this period Bowen and Gordon Creighton worked together to make *FSR* one of the most successful magazines in UFO history. Creighton, like Bowen, was a civil servant whose belief in aliens was strangely at odds with his more orthodox daytime employment as a diplomat in Whitehall. A gifted linguist, he studied twenty different languages and was fluent in many of them. Born in 1908, he traced his interest in UFOs to a personal sighting of 'a white disc with a piercingly bluish light on top' in China while serving at the British Embassy in Chungking in 1941. On return to London after the war he worked in an office directly below the intelligence branch of the Air Ministry who were involved in work on UFO sightings. Creighton was one of the earliest contributors to *FSR* and sat on the board of the magazine for many years. According to his obituary, he had no time for traditional British nervousness about 'what the neighbours might think.' For thirty years, while commuting daily from his home in Hertfordshire to central London, he 'made a special point of carrying and reading *FSR* in the train.' This resulted, much to his delight, on at least a dozen occasions 'that complete strangers would step across the gangway to me and say: "*Flying Saucer Review!* Where can I get that?"' (*The Times* 16 August 2003)

Creighton described Bowen as *FSR*'s 'hardest-working and most severely harassed editor' but the two men never agreed on their approach to the subject. While Creighton was keen to take on the doubters Bowen, he said, was 'somewhat timid' and he 'often seemed afraid to defend his corner vigorously against the sceptics and critics.' (Creighton 1981) Nevertheless, Bowen managed to publish the magazine from his suburban home for eighteen years while working in a full-time job in the Finance Department of the South African embassy. A BBC television programme in 1972 showed him editing copy for *FSR* while commuting by rail from his home in Surrey to his office in London. At the peak of its popularity in the late-60s Bowen was producing 4,000 copies of *FSR*. The magazine also published case history supplements and a series of special issues. Its masthead listed among its 'special consultants and correspondents' such names as Dr J. Allen Hynek, the French computer scientist, Jacques Vallee and John A. Keel whose views on the occult origin of UFOs had a growing influence on the editor. The arrival of the Warminster Thing in 1965 coincided with a major new wave of UFO sightings. Media interest reached a crescendo in North America in 1966–7 when Congress approved a plan to award a contract to the University of Colorado to produce a detailed study of Blue Book, the USAF's UFO project.

As a UFO revival spread to Britain the schism between contact-orientated and 'serious UFOlogy' was magnified. This provided more opportunities for the media to poke fun at those involved in the subject. The two differing approaches were illustrated in June 1967 when Brinsley le Poer Trench clashed with Charles Bowen over comments in an article by journalist Clement Freud published by the *Sunday Telegraph* magazine. Freud, in typical laconic style, described a visit he made to sky watches at Warminster and at Crews Hill, near Potters Bar. There he met Trench and various other UFOlogists armed with a variety of UFO detectors. Freud's description of the enthusiasts was hardly flattering:

UFOlogy in the 60s

They were a motley group: 21 men, 2 women. A very small man, in his early twenties wearing a corduroy suit was equipped with two cameras tied onto a plank of wood... His wife, a sad long-haired lady, was carrying a thick batch of UFO magazines; her husband, she explained, was chairman, secretary, printer, everything really. They had an association. Membership had reached four.

(Freud 1967)

Freud's article resulted in a furious letter from Charles Bowen who accused the writer of seizing the opportunity to entertain readers 'at the expense of the cultists, the hilltop worshippers and the publicity seekers who plague the fringe of the movement.' As a result, he complained, the public was left with the impression that everyone who studied UFOs was nuts. But Trench got the better of Bowen in his light-hearted response. Pointing out that 'all minority groups are apt to take themselves too seriously' the veteran saucerer added 'we must allow a little light relief to enter the subject otherwise we become bores.'

Ironically, while complaining about the activities of what they regarded as 'fringe' elements, Charles Bowen and Gordon Creighton were themselves becoming more receptive to far out ideas. Most influential of all were the fashionable supernatural and occult theories to explain the bizarre nature of UFO landings and sightings of their 'pilots', the UFO occupants. Occult theories were increasingly published in the pages of *FSR* by writers such as John Keel and Jacques Vallee, whose book *Passport to Magonia* drew links between UFO occupants and creatures from folklore such as the fairy folk (Vallee 1968). Bowen and Creighton became fascinated by stories describing encounters with the occupants of flying saucers that were reaching them from correspondents across the globe. These were of a totally different character to the stories of the contactees from the previous decade. The UFO occupants reported during the 1960s were at best ambivalent to humans and at worst openly hostile. Instead of awe, fear was the predominant emotion described by those who claimed to have seen and, in some cases, been forcibly abducted by the occupants of alien craft.

In 1962 Creighton translated a report sent to London by a South American correspondent which contained an amazing story told by young Brazilian farmer, Antonio Villas Boas. Brazilian UFOlogists had suppressed his testimony for several years because of its wild content. This story finally delivered what Robert Chapman had demanded on behalf of Fleet Street. Here was a saucer story that was very different. It involved sex with aliens. Villas Boas claimed his experience happened in October 1957 just a few days after the launch of Sputnik. While working in the fields one night near his family farm, he saw a strange object land and was dragged inside by four small men wearing helmets. Once inside the craft he claimed he was seduced by a beautiful naked woman alien who, before leaving, pointed to her stomach, then to the farmer, and then towards the sky, which he took to mean 'they wanted... a good stallion to improve their stock.' (Creighton 1969)

What Charles Bowen called 'The most amazing case of all' was published in the October 1964 issue of *FSR* and from that point UFO stories became stranger than

Flying Saucerers

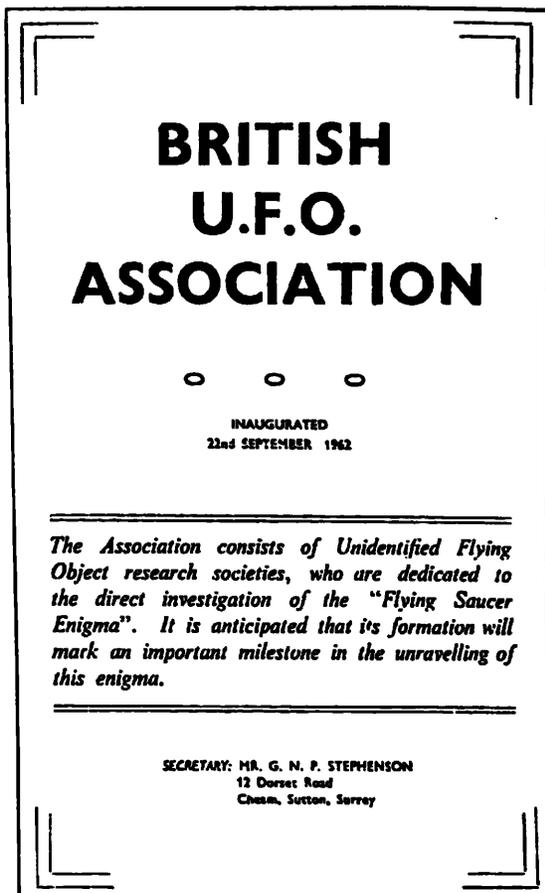


Brazilian farmer Antonio Villas Boas who was abducted by sex-mad aliens in 1957. (Photo supplied by Mary Evans Picture Library)

ever. Exactly two years later the *Daily Mirror* in a series headlined 'The kidnapers from outer space' published extracts from a book by US journalist John Fuller, *The Interrupted Journey* (Fuller 1966). The book, which became a best-seller, was subtitled 'two lost hours aboard a flying saucer.' Fuller told how a mixed-race couple from the US mid-west, Betty and Barney Hill, had suffered an inexplicable period of 'missing time' following an encounter with a UFO on a lonely road in New Hampshire in 1961. Unlike Villas Boas the Hills story of an abduction and examination aboard by aliens only emerged during hypnotic regression conducted by their psychiatrist, Dr Benjamin Simon, as a method of treating anxiety and nightmares experienced by the couple. Although Simon believed the memories obtained under hypnosis was a shared fantasy, journalists and UFOlogists thought otherwise. This case quickly overshadowed the Brazilian story and became a foundation stone of the UFO abduction literature.

As interest grew in 1966 a collection of UFO occupant stories collected by Creighton and Bowen were published in a special *FSR* supplement called *The Humanoids* (Bowen 1969). This was so successful that it was re-published in 1969 in book form, underlining the growing fascination with reports of landings and occupant sightings both within UFOlogy and among the wider public. Charles Bowen's contribution, 'Few and Far Between', noted how rare such stories were in Britain before the late-60s when meetings with UFO pilots were regarded as a taboo subject even within UFOlogy. Bowen's theory was the creatures, for reasons of their own, tended to avoid landing in densely populated areas and this might explain their reluctance to touch down in the British Isles (Bowen 1969). By this stage the bizarre nature of the 'occupant' reports had led Bowen to reject the extraterrestrial hypothesis. He now preferred Keel's theory which identified the UFO occupants as 'ultra-terrestrials', creatures from other dimensions who occasionally visited our world. Bowen pointed out that physicists were speculating about the existence of 'another invisible universe, running on a parallel course to ours, but where time runs in the reverse direction to ours.' Even Dr Hynek, Bowen noted, had accepted that some UFO experiences had links with psychic phenomena and the paranormal. It was Hynek who later coined the phrase "close encounters of the third kind" to describe sightings of UFOs and their occupants, in his book *The UFO Experience* (Hynek 1972).

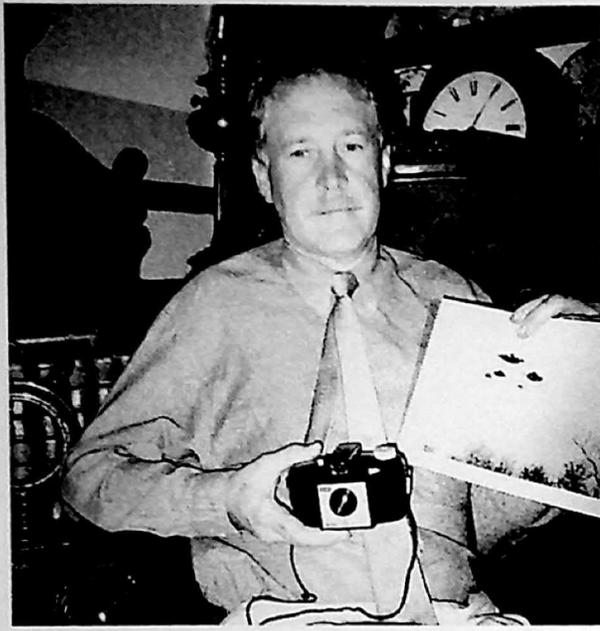
British UFO Association leaflet.



BUFORA and Contact (UK)

During the early 1960s the process of consolidation of individual enthusiasts and smaller clubs into a larger, loosely-organised national structure continued. During this period magazines and newspapers began referring to those who dedicated their lives to investigating or believing in UFOs as 'the UFO movement' or UFOlogists. UFOlogy was in fact just one of a number of fringe movements to emerge from the larger 'occult revival' of the late-60s. The movement grew in size during the decade as it attracted many younger people drawn to UFOlogy from a variety of different backgrounds. At the opening of the decade several hundred enthusiasts kept in touch via a patchwork quilt of small clubs and societies. One of the most active was the London UFO Research Organisation (LUFORO), founded in 1959 by a group of friends who published a duplicated newsletter, the *Luforo Bulletin*.

At this stage there was no British organisation equivalent to the US-based National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP), which had been led by Donald Keyhoe from 1957. This chaotic situation continued until 1962 when one of the London group's more enthusiastic founders, Nigel Stephenson, drew up



Alex Birch with his camera and UFO; photograph taken in 1962.

ambitious plans for a federation of smaller groups linked under the umbrella of what he called 'the British UFO Association.'

Another of the founder members, Lionel Beer, fondly recalls the leaflets he produced to advertise its launch. One read: 'You are invited to attend the British UFO Association Convention to be held at Kensington Central Library, on Saturday, 22 September 1962.' 'Tickets were sold at four shillings and the buffet tea at three shillings,' Beer recalls. 'The response was overwhelming – I had to return several dozen ticket applications. Many people were turned away at the door [and] even so, the aisles were packed with people and many were standing.' (Beer 1985)

According to a report published in *Luforo Bulletin* over two hundred people attended the convention. They were welcomed by chairman Nigel Stephenson 'who spoke enthusiastically of a new seriousness in the public's attitude to UFOs' and called for greater co-operation between UFO societies. At the gathering eight societies – including the oldest, the BFSB – agreed to work together as 'corporate members of BUFOA' with *Luforo* acting as the central office.

After a welcome speech, presentations were made by guest speakers and a cine-film of alleged UFOs was shown. Engineer and inventor Leonard Cramp gave 'a fascinating lecture on science and the UFO' in which he outlined his theory that flying saucers utilised gravity fields as a method of propulsion. For those who found 'G-fields' dull the highlight of the afternoon was the appearance of fourteen-year-old schoolboy, Alex Birch, at the lectern. Alex made national headlines earlier that year when he took a grainy black and white photo on his Box Brownie camera apparently showing five flying saucers in the sky near his Sheffield home (Broxholme 1962). The youngster, accompanied by his father, was subsequently escorted by reporters to London where Alex was quizzed by Air Ministry officials. When they issued the rather unlikely explanation that the saucers were ice particles in clouds those who

suspected a cover-up felt their claims had been vindicated. 'Alex, whose head scarcely reached the top of the speaker's stand, held the audience of more than 200 spellbound during his four minute speech,' *Luforo Bulletin* reported after the convention (Stephenson 1962). Like young Stephen Darbishire a decade before him, Alex's sincerity deeply impressed many in the audience and Cramp declared that it was 'inconceivable' that a boy of fourteen could have created a hoax. A decade later Alex, then 24, announced the photo was a hoax. He and friends had painted the saucers onto a pane of glass which they then photographed (*Sheffield Telegraph* 6 October 1972). Lionel Beer, who was present at the event at which Alex appeared, spoke for many who felt crestfallen by his confession. He said: 'It is hard to believe he hoaxed everyone, including his parents, as he now claims.'

Many hoped the 1962 convention was a sign of a growing maturity within the UFO movement but stability remained elusive. Nigel Stephenson's plans for the fledgling association were unworkable as they expected each member society to continue covering their own geographical area and send a representative to sit on a council that met in London. In practice this system was a shambles as few of the societies could afford to send representatives to the capital on a regular basis. Despite the notion of a 'federation' the London group continued to produce its own bulletin while making most of the decisions on behalf of the member groups. This was the beginning of a long tradition of mutual suspicion among UFOlogists in the provinces who disliked taking orders from what they perceived as an over-centralised organisation based in London. Like the grand titles which UFOlogists gave themselves, the endemic battles between competing individuals and groups had already become a characteristic of the movement and a signpost for its 'cranky' image to the outside world.

The impasse which emerged from the 1962 convention was papered over when, two years later, LUFORO merged with BUFOA to produce a new 'corporate body', the British UFO Research Association. BUFORA operated under a detailed constitution drawn up by one of its future journal editors, John Cleary-Baker. Its aims were straightforward: 'to encourage and promote unbiased scientific investigation and research,' publish evidence and data and 'co-ordinate UFO research on a nationwide scale and co-operate with persons and organisations engaged upon similar research in all parts of the world.' In spite of its simmering internal feuds the new association slowly established itself as the premier national organisation. Throughout this period BUFORA continued to remain dependent upon subscriptions from a fluctuating membership to keep it afloat. Inevitably much of the association's resources were spent on high-profile publications and conferences rather than on the less glamorous investigation and research set out in its original aims. From 1964 it began to publish a *Journal and Bulletin* and elected its first president, Graham Knewstubb, who was a founder member of the British Flying Saucer Bureau.

Meanwhile Brinsley le Poer Trench had achieved a level of commercial success for his ideas through a series of books on flying saucers and mysteries of the ancient world. The first, *The Sky People* (1960), promoted his own version of the 'ancient astronaut' theory. With his star rising again in 1964 Trench, now in his mid-50s, was asked to lead a new world-wide UFO organisation primarily for young people. The

Flying Saucerers

idea originated in Japan with a contactee-oriented group called 'the Cosmic Brotherhood Association' who gave it the bizarre title 'International Committee of Flying Saucer for Junior.' On accepting the post of chairman Trench changed its name to the International Sky Scouts which he felt was 'more in keeping with the space age.' For five shillings members received a 'Sky Scouts Handbook' and were encouraged to join a number of smaller branches around Britain which aimed 'to foster interest in astronomy and train sky observers.' In stark contrast with the 'scientific' aims of BUFORA, sky watching, plotting saucer sightings on maps and making contact with the space people were central to the ideas of the ISS founders. In June 1966 Trench visited Japan where:

[he] was given a remarkable welcome and gave several talks, including one from the top of the 'Sun Pyramid' which the Japanese built on the site where according to legend, a space being landed aeons ago to teach them agriculture and sun worship.

(Goddard 1967)

Soon after the founding of the English branch of the ISS the The Scout Association wrote to Trench 'to inform him that the name Sky Scouts could be mistaken in the public mind as part of the Boy Scout Movement' (*Daily Mirror* 27 October 1966). According to Dutch UFOlogist Johan Quanjer, Trench told him that '... if [he] was not amendable to desist from using an inappropriate description, a court of law might be the right place to settle this argument.' Quanjer said Trench was not optimistic he could win such a case and so he decided to change the name:

'Let's call it Contact; Contact UK' a name suggested by one of our co-conspirators... after all the exercise was to contact something, even if 'only' the deep well-spring of our inner being.

(Quanjer 1997)

As a result early in 1967 the English branch of the ISS was re-branded as Contact (UK) and, following a major reorganisation in 1969, the world-wide group became Contact International with Trench as chairman. Quanjer was closely involved in many facets of new age UFOlogy at this time and was given the title UK Chairman. Working closely with a young man called Ken Rogers, who worked as copy boy at the *Daily Express*, they quickly built up what Quanjer called 'one of the largest UFO societies Britain ever had.' After a decade Contact International claimed to have some 2,000 members across the world, with approximately half being members of the British branch. This compared with just 300 paid up members of BUFORA in 1964, a figure which rose to 600 in 1967.

As in most UFO organisations, discontent began within Contact UK almost from inception. According to Quanjer's autobiography:

... the bulk of the membership was mostly interested in the 'nuts and bolts' of UFOs, whereas I myself was primarily concerned with the enlargement of consciousness UFO lore could provide us with.

Friction broke out, and because I had no intention of 'fighting' my corner, I felt it was time to move on and offered my resignation...

(Quanjer 1997).

From 1968 Trench himself began to take a backseat and Contact UK's headquarters moved from London to Oxford where a group of the influential new members lived. Contact UK's new leaders began to emphasise their name did *not* refer to any desire by the organisation to make contact with visitors from space as the group's founders had intended. Rather tamely, its name was now interpreted as referring to the promotion of 'contact between UFOlogists everywhere.' (Delair 1980: 89) From 1968 the Oxford-based UK branch began to publish a magazine, *Awareness*, edited by J. Bernard Delair and compiled a catalogue of sightings, *The UFO Register*, which contained 50,000 reports by the late-70s.

Rivalry, both between BUFORA and Contact (UK), and feuding between individuals within each organisation and member society was endemic. Journalist Des Wilson interviewed a number of leading lights both from BUFORA and Contact (UK) for an article he wrote for the *Illustrated London News* (Wilson 1979). He noted two particular characteristics of UFOlogists. Firstly, 'most were terrified of being assumed to be crazy, or of being made fun of.' Second was the problems caused by 'rivalry, mutual suspicion and even ridicule between different organisations and individuals.' No one, Wilson said, picked out anyone in particular for mockery, 'but hesitations when names were mentioned and subtle little hints' left little doubt about what some members of BUFORA felt about members of Contact, and vice versa. Veteran BUFORA member and journal editor Norman Oliver, who joined the association in 1965 said that UFOlogists at this time could be roughly divided into two camps. 'You could say that one group was represented by Contact UK and the other by BUFORA,' he said. 'BUFORA was basically "nuts and bolts" and Contact was obviously alien-orientated.' (personal communication 2005) During the course of the decade BUFORA's council became increasingly hostile to those involved in work with contactees even though the association contained a group dedicated to the topic. This ideological divide is curiously referred to in passing in BUFORA's official history which describes how in 1969 'the Contact Section had had a chequered history and BUFORA was happy to let it pass to COS-MOS', a magazine run by Norman Oliver (Beer 1985).

All this frenetic evolution culminated in the legendary summer of 1967 with the 'national skywatch day' held on 24 June, the thirtieth anniversary of Kenneth Arnold's sighting. UFOlogists from rival groups turned out in force at locations across southern England that had become 'windows' for UFO activity, the most important being Warminster. A camera crew from the BBC's *Panorama* visited one gathering of enthusiasts encamped at the Pewley Downs, near Guildford, where a Australian inventor, Colin McCarthy, had set up a UFO detector he had designed. It was during this broadcast that BUFORA's grandly titled 'Mobile Unit' (a Ford Thames van decorated with BUFORA logos) made its debut. The van, owned by member Arnold West, was intended to provide the association with a 'mobile investigation



headquarters' but was rarely used. One of its few recorded fieldtrips was to Loch Ness during a tour of member groups in Scotland and the north in the summer of 1968. On arrival the Mobile Unit stood out in contrast with six green Bedford vans manned by members of the Loch Ness Phenomena Investigation Bureau (Ltd). Lionel Beer wryly noted: 'monster sighting forms were found to be very similar to UFO report forms.'

"Britain's busiest UFO days"

For a few hours on the morning of 11 September 1967 it appeared that flying saucers had landed in force in the peaceful English countryside. Six strange objects were found, almost simultaneously, positioned in a line across the southern counties from Clevedon near Bristol to the Isle of Sheppey. These saucers might have been disappointingly small, but they looked convincing. They were gunmetal grey and measured around four feet across and eight inches deep in the central domed section. Some beeped, others flashed green and red lights and one – blown up by an Army bomb disposal team – released a disgusting smell described as 'like a cross between pigswill and porridge.' The saucers were all found by passers-by, one of whom flicked pennies at it hoping to attract the attention of the 'little green men' inside. The press gleefully reported how the Ministry of Defence was left guessing for twelve hours while scientists from Aldermaston examined one of the objects.

Saucer hoaxer tells: How we did it

By DANIEL McGEACHIE
and JAMES BRADY

THE Great Flying Saucer Mystery —six "spaceships" were found yesterday in a 160-mile line across Southern England—was exposed last night as a hoax of old British rubbish.

An Outer Space-ised hoax, in fact, thought up and executed by students from Farnborough Technical College, Hants, as a gag stunt for charity.

A day-long operation had been kept on the lips and the public speculated about the six silver saucers which were thought to have come from outer space.

It was a hoax, however, with the other boys of the school to reveal.

As the hoaxers would describe it, a group of six men and a dog, a cat, a sheep, a pig and a horse were seen in the area.

BLEEPERS
Most of the sightings are reported to be from the area of the Southampton Test Range, where the British Army's test range is located. The sightings were made last night.

SAMPLE
Saucers discovered by a policeman in a field near Chippenham, Wiltshire, by the name of...

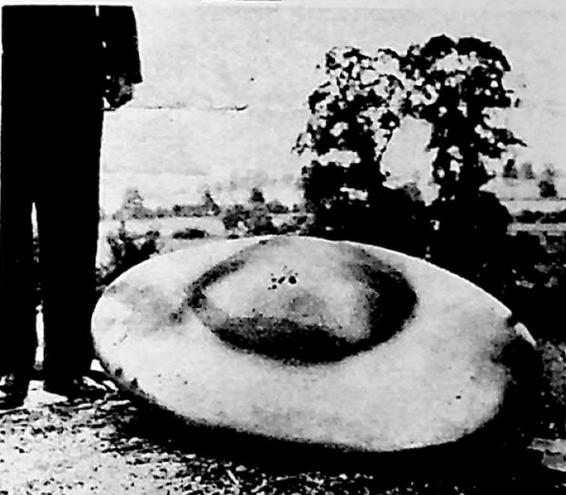


Hoaxer Chris Southall (right) with helper "Boote" Harrison last night in their workshop where the saucers were made



Policeman with the Thing found at

The Chippenham "Thing"



The mysterious object showed as a flying saucer found yesterday in a field near Chippenham, Wiltshire, by the name of...

Newspaper cuttings about the 1967 student saucer hoax.

Another was whisked away in a RAF helicopter after being placed under police guard.

Hopes that the aliens had finally landed were dashed when it was revealed that the objects were part of a rag stunt to raise funds for charity. The hoax spaceships had been built by students Roger Palmer and Chris Southall, from Farnborough Technical College, at a total cost of thirty pounds. They were powered by batteries and filled with a foul-smelling liquid. The students loaded their equipment into vans and left them beside footpaths and roads thirty miles apart on a carefully constructed line. In comments which can be seen as a precursor to the claims of crop circle makers in a future era, Southall said: 'We wanted the whole thing to appear as credible as possible. And we had the experts baffled.' (Chapman 1969: 125)

The Flying Thing leaves two constables baffled

FROM A CLIP MOUNTED
BRISTOL, OCT. 24

The North Devon "Thing" revealed itself to two police constables in the latterly cold and stormy night pictures of the weather.

It "observed" them for about 30 minutes and played an elaborate game of catch me over the Trecrop, at a speed far in excess of Mrs. Cade's 70 m.p.h.

Its antics, say experts in scientific unaccounted flying objects, have earned it a fairly shining place in the records of strange sightings. They have also earned it a place in Ministry of Defence files and in the "unsolved" books of Easter police.

Constables Roger Willey and Clifford Waycott were on patrol near Iltonworthy when they first saw it. "It looked like a winged cross rotating about a light from all angles," said Constable Willey, who at times drove up to 90 m.p.h. to try to keep up.

He told a press conference. "It first appeared to the left of us, then went in an arc, and dipped down, and we thought it had landed. It seemed to be watching us and wouldn't let us catch up. It was at various altitudes all the time, but usually just above the trees."

"It had terrific acceleration. It seemed to know we were chasing it."

Constable Waycott said that once it seemed to stop in a field,



Left: A picture of The Thing. Right: the two constables who chased it at 90 m.p.h.

"When we got out to look, it started moving again. It was not an aeroplane or a helicopter, but it was as large as a conventional aircraft."

The nearest they could get to the object was 400 yards. The merits of screaming around twisting roads at 4 a.m., the constables decided, might be disputed. Their fears were in no way allayed by

remarks coming by radio from police headquarters. So they pulled up alongside a car parked in a layby and woke the driver, Mr. Christopher Garner, aged 25, of Luton, who was on his way in a holiday in the area.

"They said they wanted confirmation of what they had seen," Mr. Garner said today. He was able to give it, he thought he was in the middle of a nightmare.

Before the "thing" disappeared from the distance it was joined by a second object. This also was large, shaped like a cross, extremely bright, and motionless.

Today the R.A.F. at Chivenor decided that it could be anything to do with them. They knew of no aircraft that could fit the description—fly slower than 90 m.p.h. for extended periods, hover, and then reach supersonic speed.

"Things" have been seen regularly all around the Severn estuary area for the past four years. Most sightings have come from Warrminster, where long cigar-shaped red glowing objects are seen. Bristol and Devon police have also seen the strange sights.

Tonight all patrol cars in Devon will be keeping a watch. A similar object was first seen in north Devon on October 5. Since then some experts have said that Venus is to blame.

Seen over Norfolk—Mrs. Ursula Donnett, wife of the Rector of Carter-on-Sea, Norfolk later claimed that she saw an object heading out to sea there.



Constable Willey (left) and Constable Waycott near the spot where the object vanished.

PCs PLAY TAG WITH LIGHT IN THE SKY

By DOUGLAS ELBERT
TWO police officers yesterday described a strange glowing object which they saw in the sky.

They told how the object seemed to land their patrol car as a constable came of the road nearby road. Constable Roger Willey, 22, who was driving the patrol car, said: "It was just ahead, and I would say it was about 100 yards away."

He went on: "It was hovering about 100 feet high over wooded country, east of Brimley, Devon."

But they followed the object for about thirty miles as it flicked back and forward along the road.

Science Reporter ARTHUR SHIFFER writes: "The unidentified flying object" was probably the planet Venus, which was above the horizon at about that time.



A photographic technique made this impression of the light in the sky.

What's this?



We chased it at 90 mph says P-cs

Western Daily Press Reporter

Two policemen in a patrol car chased a strange light in the sky at 90 mph at 4 a.m. yesterday.

Later an artist drew the picture reproduced above, as the two P-cs related their experience.

Driving the car was P-c. Roger Willey. With him was P-c. Clifford Waycott, aged 25, father of two.

the movement said the patrol car crew later saw a second light join the first.

The light was also seen by officers at Churminster police station for nearly an hour before fog cloud obscured their vision.

The patrolmen were so amazed by the sight that they woke the man sleeping in a Land Rover. He was Christopher Lerner, of Marchwood Farm, Heather-

Newspaper cuttings about 'The Flying Cross'.

Mystery of 'bright
pulsating light'
that left 90 m.p.h.
police standing



ROGER WILLEY (LEFT) AND CLIFFORD WAYCOTT

Z-Car chases 'flying cross'



AN ARTIST'S IMPRESSION OF
THE CROSS SEEN BY Z-CAR MEN

IT was just after four in the morning when the two Z-Car men first spotted the bright, pulsating light over a Devon road on the edge of Dartmoor.

They drove over to investigate — but the light moved off at high speed at tree-top level.

The police car chased the unidentified flying object for 10 miles at speeds reaching 90 miles an hour.

'SPANGLED'

The nearest they got was about 40 yards. Then the object appeared to stop in a field. The men got out of their car—but the light vanished, nearly an hour after the first sighting.

The patrolmen — Police Constables Clifford Waycott and Roger Willey—said it was "a sort of flying cross much bigger than any star."

Said Police Constable Waycott, who was observer in the car which was patrolling the A5972 between Okehampton and Holworthy: "The light wasn't very piercing, but it was very bright. It was

star-spangled — just like looking through wet glass—and although we reached 90 miles an hour it accelerated away from us."

The men also said that at one time another shining object appeared to join the first.

The light was also seen by officers at Okehampton police station.

The patrolmen were so surprised by the sight that they woke a man sleeping in a Land-Rover. He was Christopher Garner, of Marshwood Farm, Hatherleigh, who said: "I thought I was having a nightmare when I woke up. This object was much too bright for any star."

Mr. David Hill, chairman of the Exeter Flying Objects Research Group, commented: "One of our observers said he saw an object similar to the one reported by the police rise from the ground and shoot off at about 2,000 miles an hour."

JAMES WILKINSON WRITES: The Ministry of Defence said that the sighting seems to tie up with similar reports from the area in the past week. A spokesman said: "We have insufficient evidence to identify the object at the moment."

The student hoax did not kill off media interest in UFOs. Rather the opposite. Throughout the summer the media toyed with the subject but it was not until the autumn of 1967 that floodgates burst open to produce what *Flying Saucer Review* dubbed 'Britain's busiest UFO days.' While saucers or discs remained the dominant shapes associated with UFOs a myriad of other shapes, from cigars to squares, had been reported by witnesses across the world. The 'flap' of 1967 featured a very different UFO shape, the 'flying cross', a portentous symbol of the great social and religious changes that Britain was undergoing.

As was the case in earlier flaps, the key event which triggered off UFO fever was a sighting by credible witnesses, in this case two police officers on patrol in the early hours. They were PCs Clifford Waycott and Roger Willey of the Devon constabulary. At a press conference held the next day they described chasing an Unidentified Flying Object at speeds of up to 90 m.p.h. in their 'panda' car. They described the UFO, which was visible for almost one hour, as 'like a star-spangled cross radiating points of light from all angles. It first appeared to the left of us, then went in an arc, and dipped down and we thought it had landed,' said PC Willey. 'It seemed to be watching us and wouldn't let us catch up... it had terrific acceleration. It seemed to know we were chasing it.' (*The Times* 25 October 1967)

At a press conference police Inspector Frank Harding, said: 'We are mystified, but we must keep an open mind. After all there may be other planets already in advance of the satellite launchings we are beginning to make.' With this type of confirmation, the once nutty topic of UFOs was transformed overnight into a serious matter for Fleet Street. Newspapers immediately latched onto the idea of a 'flying cross' in a manner reminiscent of the way the media had created the notion of 'flying saucers' in the USA. The following morning's headlines were dominated by the policemen's report. 'Z-car patrol shadows flying saucer' (*The Sun*), 'The flying thing leaves two constables baffled' (*The Times*) 'UFO - we chased it at 90 mph say PCs' (*Western Daily Press*).

When the two officers appeared on television to discuss the sighting other early risers began to scan the night sky. Hundreds saw lights and many reported seeing 'the flying cross.' As the news spread, police officers on patrol across the country reported sightings. A police motorcycle patrol radioed the news to colleagues in Sussex shortly after 4 a.m. on 25 October. Within minutes the crews of four police cars in other parts of the county had reported the same UFO. Acting swiftly the Chief Constable, George Terry, called a press conference at Lewes where he said he was satisfied that there was 'nothing sinister' going on and the UFO was 'probably Venus.' Pressed for an answer, the Ministry of Defence was initially lost for words but within days the USAF came up with one possible explanation. They said the UFOs were American air force tankers practising refuelling in mid-air over the west country, with lights of the aircraft and their fighter escorts appearing as a cross-shaped formation from the ground. This theory was quickly abandoned when it became clear that the refuelling exercises took place between 5 and 9 p.m., whereas the 'flying crosses' had all been reported between midnight and dawn.

The first UFO abductees, Betty and Barney Hill. (Photo supplied by Mary Evans Picture Library)



The wave of sightings triggered a series of questions from Members of Parliament. Some MPs were concerned about the possible threat to Britain's defences. Others posed questions on behalf of UFOlogists who believed Earth was under surveillance by an alien intelligence. During 1967 the MoD received 362 sighting reports, the greatest number since statistics had first been kept. Of these reports the Ministry decided the majority (150) were of aircraft, with space debris (57) and balloons (42) in second and third place as a source of misidentification. A total of 46 reports remained 'unexplained.' In Whitehall, civil servants briefed ministers that the *apparent* increase in numbers of UFO reports during 1967 was an illusion, triggered off by newspaper reports of the 'flying cross' incident. More than 70 similar reports were received by the MoD within days of the media circus which followed the police sightings. And according to a briefing prepared for Labour Under-secretary of State for Defence, Merlyn Rees MP, most of them were generated not by an increase in UFO activity but as a result of an increased awareness of the subject. People were looking at the sky, the Ministry said 'impelled either by the good weather or by Press aroused curiosity' and seeing what they expected to see. 'The [increased] number of reports show that it is becoming fashionable for people to see UFOs.' (Carruthers 1967)

The west country sightings were played out not only in the national and local media but also received the first substantial coverage on national television and radio. Riding the wave of interest was journalist Robert Chapman, who used the 'flying cross' controversy as the central theme for the first book to deal specifically with British UFO sightings. *UFO: Flying Saucers over Britain?* was serialised by the *Sunday Express* and reprinted twice in paperback during the 1970s (Chapman 1969). The BBC and ITV networks began to research programmes and documentaries on UFOs. The most accomplished of these was *Flying Saucers and the People Who See Them* broadcast on BBC 1 in May 1968. This programme, produced by Philip Daly,



Flying saucer graffiti on Cross Fell, north Pennines.

was presented by an eminent psychologist, Dr Stephen Black. An Audience Research Report commissioned by the BBC afterwards revealed the programme had been seen by more than sixteen percent of the British public. Members of the Viewing Panel were fascinated by UFOs and a number became convinced, after watching the programme, there was 'something in it' (BBC 1968). Dr Black interviewed UFOlogists but paid most attention to key witnesses whose stories had now become the foundation stones of belief in UFOs. Despite his initial scepticism he felt those who reported 'close encounters' such as Betty and Barney Hill and an American farmer who had been given pancakes by the crew of a flying saucer, were reporting bizarre experiences which they *believed* had happened to them. The only clue to emerge was Black's discovery that the Hills and some other 'close encounter' witnesses could be hypnotised easily 'and tend to put too much faith in their unconscious imagination.'

After 75 minutes of prime TV airtime Black wound up his investigation by leaving viewers with no definitive answer to the mystery. The psychologist was left with a theory that some sightings of moving lights in the sky could be caused by a visual illusion known as autokinesis that can occur when people concentrate on a point of light in darkness, such as a bright star or planet, when there are few visual cues (see Chapter 9). Black and Daly both experienced an example of this phenomenon at Warminster during the production of the programme. As one reviewer noted, Black's probing revealed UFO witnesses were sincere but implied they were deluded in some way. As the *Daily Telegraph* observed, by failing to reach any conclusion Black 'only succeeded in emphasising the mystery of his subject.'

None of these landmarks in UFOlogy can be viewed in isolation from developments in the wider world and in popular culture. Major changes had taken place in British society and elsewhere, in the world of science, a new frontier was opening up in

UFOlogy in the 60s

space with the Apollo space programme and the moon landings. The Kubrick film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, released in 1968, predicted the discovery of evidence of extraterrestrial life and implied that alien intervention had occurred at an earlier stage in human evolution. While *2001* was fantasy, many thousands had begun to believe the alien presence was fact. Flying saucers had come of age and were a talking point across the country and the world. The throngs of veteran skywatchers huddled on hilltops across the land were now joined by hordes of new recruits including many who would lead the movement into the twenty-first century.

Chapter eleven

A saucer full of secrets

...UFOs were not just in the air, they'd become a religion and the word a common sacrament to everyone who'd tripped.

Neil Oram (personal communication 2005)

The word 'hippie' conjures visions of brightly-clad young people rebelling against society while advocating peace, free love and the right to alter their consciousness when and how they chose. It is an appealing image, but one straight out of the imagination of a *Daily Mail* reader. For behind the fashions and fads the hippie underground movement in Britain was also responsible for the greatest expansion of interest and belief in Fortean phenomena in the last few centuries.

Social historians invariably associate the hippie movement with Eastern beliefs such as Buddhism and Hinduism, from which they freely drew inspiration and imagery. That the hippies' interest in these philosophies has been well-documented is understandable. These beliefs were exotic, vibrant and essentially alien to the blinkered Western world-view of the 1960s. Flying saucer culture however was already deeply embedded in the British cultural psyche and, courtesy of daily newspapers throughout the 1950s, present in the lives of those who would form the hippie movement known as the English Underground.

Although the English Underground took the flying saucer myth to its heart, there is scant reference to it in histories of the period. The media, too, ignored the hippies' interest in flying saucers simply because it was not as visually immediate as the 'love in', posters of Hindu deities or the wild spontaneity of music festivals. But the story of the English Underground's close encounter with UFOlogy, although a little-known area of the social history of flying saucers, is one worth telling.

In the mid-60s, though flying saucers were being discussed among the influential group of post-beatniks and modern mystics who would form the core of the English

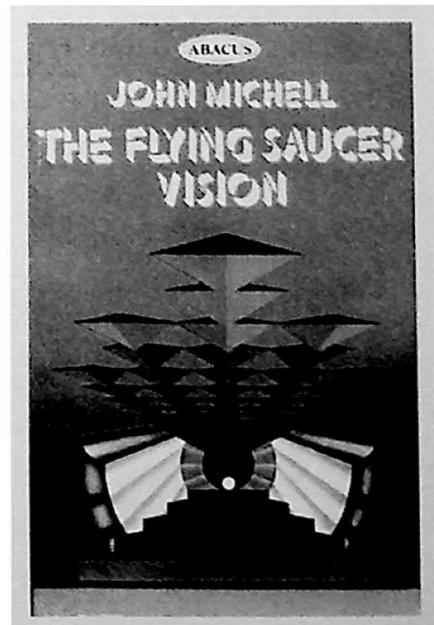
John Michell, the man who turned hippies onto UFOs. (Photo supplied by Mary Evans Picture Library)



Underground, the nascent movement lacked a voice. A figurehead was needed, someone who could breathe life into the background hum of belief in flying saucers, articulating it for the burgeoning hippie subculture.

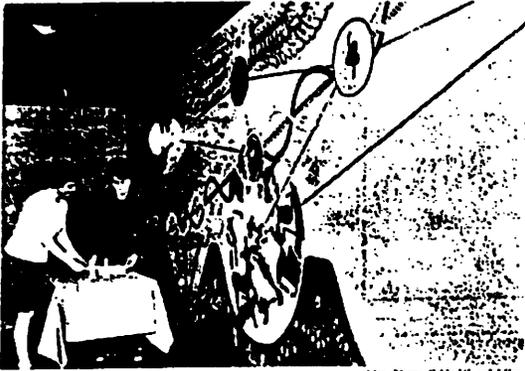
That voice came in the form of John Michell, whose influence on the English Underground cannot be underestimated. Like many of his generation Michell was disillusioned by the acquisitive postwar society: '... when I was at Cambridge the whole atmosphere was extremely rationalistic materialistic. Everyone believed the current academic orthodoxies of the time and there seemed no way of questioning them.' (*Quicksilver Messenger*, no date.)

UFOs first caught Michell's imagination in the 1950s when he noticed, 'It was quite obvious that people were having experiences that weren't allowed for within the context of our education. There was a split between the view of the world we'd been taught and accepted unquestioningly and the world of actual experience.' To



John Michell's seminal hippie flying saucer book, The Flying Saucer Vision, published in 1967.

Central Somerset Gazette 17
July 1968.



Mrs. Nancy Schradel and Miss Pauline Bush prepare a table in the new restaurant below the mural of the Glastonbury Zettler.

GLASTONBURY AS FLYING SAUCER CENTRE THEORY

Artist's mural in new 'Temple'

Was Glastonbury the centre of a Flying Saucer cult in prehistoric times? Is the Tor an ancient sacrificial hill where primitive man placated 'the flying Gods from the sky?' Does St. Michael's tower mark the spot where ancient Britons came face to face with men from outer space?

The whole question of the Flying Saucer cult in prehistoric times is raised in the mural, in the new restaurant below the mural of the Glastonbury Zettler. The name, too, marks with the previous date, in Somerset Street. The

Michell flying saucers were more than just 'nuts-and-bolts' craft, they were one of a number of phenomena which became attached to the 'Matter of Britain'. This largely concerned itself with the legends of King Arthur and the Holy Grail and was focused on the Somerset town of Glastonbury.

Glastonbury and the Matter of Britain

Glastonbury is firmly embedded in the public consciousness as a centre of all things alternate and strange. But this is not a recent phenomenon. Glastonbury has been the pulse of alternative Britain since the early twentieth century and has seen wave after wave of settlers arrive there each seeking their personal Holy Grail. This vortex of the strange was well-known to John Michell and, with the mysto-steam of the 60s beginning to rise, he decided to experience the 'Glastonbury effect' for himself. Michell said:

It was, I think, in 1966 that I first went to Glastonbury, in the company of Harry Fainlight... We had no very definite reason for going there, but it had something to do with....strange lights in the sky, new music, and our conviction that the world was about to flip over on its axis so that heresy would become orthodoxy and an entirely new world-order would shortly be revealed.

(Miller and Broadhurst 1989: 11)

Michell continues:

Central Somerset Gazette
22 September 1967.



FLOWER PEOPLE SEEK 'THE TRUTH' IN GLASTONBURY

Town is 'centre of the world'

THE BEATLES' psychedelic coach could be among a huge "pilgrimage" of "flower people" to Glastonbury within the coming weeks.

The past weekend has seen the first "invasion of Glastonbury pilgrims who have been to buy" by flower people, as the tabloids in search of "the National Press has styled them, "truth" and some of them believe was a fervent one. They hold

Several others in Glastonbury at the weekend were Lord (Beatles) daughter, Jane Birkin (centre), her husband Michael (right) with baby Chloë and Lou Lushington.

At that time I was writing the first of my published books, *The Flying Saucer Vision*. It followed up the idea, first put forward by C.J. Jung in his 1959 book on flying saucers, that the strange lights and other phenomena of the post-War period were portents of a radical change in human consciousness coinciding with the dawn of the Aquarian Age. A theme in my book was the connection between 'unidentified flying objects' and ancient sites, as evidenced both in folklore and in contemporary experience.'

With this statement Michell encapsulated an entirely new way of looking at flying saucers and their meaning. If Michell was the catalyst and helmsman for the hippies' interests in flying saucers then the motive power was provided by the drug LSD, which had hit London during 1965. LSD, or 'acid' as it soon became known, was quickly taken up by the counter-cultural mystic vanguard and suddenly everything was not only *possible*, it was *likely*!

Art gallery owner and Underground luminary Barry Miles summed up the effect of LSD on the hippies as being:

...from the mid-sixties onwards you have what would have to be called a sort of LSD consciousness permeates the whole of the counterculture side of British society. And you get it in the songs of the Pink Floyd [...] all these bands incorporate LSD inspired imagery,

*Glastonbury Tor – destination
of many hippie saucer
pilgrimages.*



and that of course was not the normal imagery of love songs and picking up girls, it was much more to do with a rather sort of specifically British form of psychedelia which involved dancing gnomes and flying saucers.'

(BBC 1 *Timewatch* 'Britain's X-Files' 9 January 2004)

The combination of potent psychedelics with the Matter of Britain and a new generation of seekers revitalised Glastonbury as a spiritual centre. In addition to King Arthur, the terrestrial zodiacs and other landscape legends, flying saucers were now woven into the tapestry of belief. Issue one of the Underground magazine, *Albion* (edited by Michell), gives the visual clues; dragons and UFOs appear in the skies over Glastonbury Tor, while swords serpents and geomantic imagery is visible in the Earth. A new meaning for flying saucers was being forged and to the English Underground this blend of saucers, sacred sites and mythology was a damned sight more interesting than the nuts-and-bolts, sci-fi derived vision of the current UFO orthodoxy. Barry Miles was not particularly interested in flying saucers but he realised the power that UFO symbolism held for the hippies:

With the Indica Bookshop, which I ran, our headed notepaper in fact had an engraving from a Mayan carving, which if you look at it in one way looks like an alien flying a flying saucer.

(BBC *Timewatch* 9 January 2004)

Miles was also aware of the attraction Glastonbury held for those in the counter culture, 'The King's Road led straight to Glastonbury in those days... The people we knew... led double lives, experimenting with acid, spending entire evenings discussing flying saucers, ley lines and the court of King Arthur. Other people waited patiently at Arthur's Tor for flying saucers to land.' (Miles 2002: 232) They did, and as word got round that Glastonbury was the new 'window area' for UFO sightings more and more hippies made it a place of pilgrimage. John Michell again:

UFOs were constantly being sighted over St Michael's tower on Glastonbury Tor. Mark Palmer, Maldwyn Thomas and their group were then travelling with horses and carts on pilgrimages across

NUMBER 7

2s.



Albion – a hippie magazine depicting a blend of flying saucer and new age imagery.

England. They often camped near the Tor, and while I was with them we used to watch the nightly manoeuvrings of lights in the sky. Jung's prophecy of aerial portents being followed by a change in consciousness was evidently being fulfilled.

(Miller and Broadhurst 1989: 12)

Flying Saucerers

Craig Sams, who set up England's first macrobiotic restaurant, was also a Glastonbury enthusiast:

I didn't see a flying saucer till October 1967 when I went to Glastonbury. One day I got a 'phone call from Mark Palmer saying that it would be a good idea to come down, that there was a lot of UFO activity, that John Michell, who had just written *The Flying Saucer Vision*, was camping down there, and Michael Rainey. So here we are in the field and up come the UFOs. We weren't tripping, I'd given up acid. I was completely normal, maybe I'd had a cup of tea about half an hour before... Mark Palmer saw them – they were definitely there. They were in the classic cigar-shaped mother-ship form. Little lights emanating from them. Then at one point you saw these other lights coming up towards them and the smaller lights just shot into the cigar-shaped mother-ship, which then just disappeared at high speed. The other lights had been RAF jets. It was obvious that the RAF had scrambled some jets.

(Green 1989: 215)

Flying Saucers and the hippy subculture

It would be easy to dismiss The Underground's fascination with saucers if 1967 had not been a huge 'flap' year for UFO sightings in Britain. This wasn't just a 'hippie thing', it was even happening to policemen, who chased them for hours in their patrol cars. The MoD were so inundated by UFO reports they radically changed their UFO policy and set up a team of investigators to interview civilian UFO witnesses. As flying saucers became further embedded in popular culture rock musicians were becoming interested in them as a means of expressing the psychedelic experience. The link between drugs, music and flying saucers was consolidated by Barry Miles and Joe Boyd when they named one of the first hippie clubs, on Tottenham Court Road, 'UFO'. Although 'Unidentified Flying Object' was only one of its meanings, advertisements in *International Times* showed a flying saucer hovering over the head of a dancing hippie, with the phrase 'night tripper'. Music histories of the psychedelic era use eastern influences, such as sitars and raga-like instrumentals, along with the drug references as the indicator of how 'far out' the music was. But there was also an aspect of psychedelia steeped in saucers and space.

Pink Floyd's first album *The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn* included the atmospheric paean to deep space, 'Astronomy Domini', possibly the first song to use outer space as a metaphor for inner space. By their second album Pink Floyd had further absorbed saucer culture, entitling it *A Saucerful of Secrets*, mixing ideas of flying saucers, the secrets found inside the mind, with perhaps a nod toward a batch of potent LSD called 'flying saucers'. The sleeve artwork left fans in no doubt that space, inner or outer, was the place; swirling universes and spinning discs mixed with signs of the zodiac, and the keynote song, 'Set the controls for the heart of the sun', became the backdrop for many psychedelic journeys toward dawn.

The Rolling Stones, possibly the least spiritual band of the generation, also took an interest in saucers. John Michell accompanied the Stones on a saucer-spotting mission to Stonehenge, while singer Marianne Faithful recalls Stones' ill-starred rhythm guitarist Brian Jones taking a great interest in Michell's ideas on the subject:

Like a lot of people at the time, myself included, he was convinced there was a mystic link between druidic monuments and flying saucers. Extraterrestrials were going to read these signs from their spaceship windows and get the message. It was the local credo: Glastonbury, ley lines and intelligent life in outer space...

(Lachman 2001: 371)

Similarly, the Stones' Keith Richard was more than curious about saucers, 'I've seen a few, but nothing any of the ministries would believe,' he told a journalist. 'I believe they exist – plenty of people have seen them. They are tied up with a lot of things, like the dawn of man, for example. It's not just a matter of people spotting a flying saucer. I'm not an expert. I'm still trying to understand what's going on.' (*Melody Maker* 15 June 1968)

Throughout his career, David Bowie has flirted with the idea of 'the alien', often mentioning extraterrestrials in songs such as 'Starman', and creating the Ziggy Stardust persona. In the late-60s, before he was catapulted to fame with the single 'Space Oddity' (based on Kubrick's film *2001: A Space Odyssey*) he claimed to have been closely involved with flying saucer research. In 1975 he revealed to an American magazine:

I used to work for two guys who put out a UFO magazine in England about six years ago. And I made sightings six, seven times a night for about a year, when I was in the observatory. We had regular cruises that came over. We knew the 6.15 was coming in and would meet up with another one. And they would be stationary for about half an hour, and then after verifying what they'd been doing that day, they'd shoot off.

(*Creem* February 1975)

The fact that the '6.15' was so regular over south London should have given Bowie a hint that it may have been an airplane rather than a UFO! Bowie's active interest in UFO research dwindled as his fame as a performer grew, but it cannot have been helped by this event, recounted in an issue of *The Word*:

An early attempt, while living in Beckenham, to attract extra-terrestrials involved standing on his roof at dusk pointing a coat hanger into the skies. He gave up, dejectedly, when a passer-by enquired, 'Do you get BBC2?'

(*The Word* November 2003)

The Beatles, too, flirted with saucer lore. John Lennon's interest is well-known and his UFO sighting is recorded in the song 'Nobody Told Me' But the genesis of this

Flying Saucerers

interest lay in the haze of the late-60s. At that time the Beatles' Apple entourage included a mysterious character called Magic Alex. He enthralled the fab four with stories of electronic wizardry and he planned to build a Beatles flying saucer. George Harrison was all for the idea:

We were naïve to the teeth... I was going to give him the V12 engine out of my Ferrari Berlinetta and John was going to give him his, and Alex reckoned that with those two V12 engines he could make a flying saucer. But we'd have given them to him – 'Go on, go for it! – daft buggers.' But Paul McCartney drew the line, saying, 'John and George might have agreed to donate the engines from their cars to help build this bloody flying saucer. But I certainly didn't go that far.'

(Harrison 1983)

If music was one way of spreading the flying saucer message through the English Underground then poster art was another, equally valid, method. Artists created lavish posters for even the most small-scale event, incorporating the myths, signs and symbols of the era with visual images of the music and musicians. Barry Miles recalled:

The symbol of the flying saucer on the posters of Michael English and Nigel Weymouth and the references in all of the songs wasn't just used as a graphic symbol or a convenient lyrical device. People did feel that flying saucers were shorthand for a wider, deeper understanding, a sort of god figure I suppose or a sense of an external spiritual deity of some sort. There was one clothes shop called Hung On You that Michael Rainey had and, he very much believed in flying saucers and there was a lot of flying saucer imagery all over the shop.

(BBC *Timewatch* 'Britain's X-Files' 9 January 2004)

As saucers permeated the hippy subculture they began to appear more frequently in the underground press. *International Times* (later *IT*) featured many articles and book reviews concerning saucers, engaging John Michell as their 'UFO correspondent'. At the height of the psychedelic sixties *IT* reviewed *Anatomy of a Phenomenon*, the first UFO book by UFOlogist Jacques Vallee. The reviewer, Greg Sams used the argot of the period to express what a significant book it was:

Do you believe in flying saucers? Most people with even a slightly open mind accept their existence, if only because so many reliable people have seen them... The book itself doesn't turn you on. You must read the book and turn yourself on... If you are just beginning to be interested in saucers then read his book. If you are already convinced and want a beautiful rave with your mind, read other further out authors.

(*IT* June 16 1967)

Quite! *Oz* was less keen, editor Richard Neville being more interested in provoking the establishment through explorations of radical politics or sex than through modern myths. When Neville took his eye off the ball for issue nine, leaving the work to poster artist Martin Sharp and designer John Goodchild, he was shocked at the result, 'To my embarrassment it was devoted to flying saucers'. Enraged, he asked Sharp, 'How can you indulge your intergalactic delusions, when Asia is a bloodbath?' Sharp's reply typified the zeitgeist, 'There are far more things in heaven and earth, Richard, than are dreamt of in your philosophy'.

The cover of 'Flying Saucer *Oz*' as it became known, featured a large flying disc, taken from a collage by the surrealist artist Max Ernst, with six coloured pages featuring a variety of quotes about the saucer phenomenon from 'hip' people ranging from Charles Fort to Mick Jagger.

Michell's influence on the hippie movement coupled with his erudition was such that the 'establishment' could not ignore him. Following the screening of *UFOs and the People who See Them* on BBC1 on 9 May 1968, *The Listener* devoted most of that week's issue to a discussion of flying saucers. John Michell was asked to contribute an essay which, simply entitled 'Flying saucers', clearly laid out the hippie philosophy in relation to aerial phenomena. This was a blend of sightings of inexplicable lights in the sky, mixed with snippets of folklore, Glastonbury ley and dragon lines and other ephemera from the Underground's dream world.

Listener editor Karl Miller contributed a critical piece, 'Midsummer Nights' Dreams', analysing the 'UFO cult' and Michell's place within it; 'He is less a hippy, perhaps, than a hippy's counsellor, one of their junior Merlins.' Recognising Michell's influence, but keenly aware of his shortcomings, Miller wrote:

Michell behaves like a visionary, though his language doesn't always avoid the current jargon of the pads and barricades. He likes to talk about how the light from the midsummer sunrise shot across the land, travelling a line from holy place to holy place, starting the crops, bathing the feasts and fairs that saluted its passage. I would say that... his book is relatively weak, busying itself with sundry mysteries like that of the Marie Celeste and converting them to extra-terrestrial proofs.

(Miller 1968)

'Straight' society was intrigued by the hippie take on flying saucers but then, as now, saw no real evidence they could take seriously. Just as 'straight' society disassociated itself from the hippies, mainstream UFO enthusiasts kept their distance too, the nuts-and-bolts saucer buffs considering the hippies to be just a bunch of drug takers with strange views. The irony that 'straight' society viewed the nuts-and-bolts crowd as being equally strange was completely lost on them!

The Lusty Beg saucer convention

Some influential individuals from mainstream UFOlogy recognised the hippies were receptive to new ideas and that mercurial aristocrat of flying saucer culture, Desmond Leslie, decided to organise Britain's first flying saucer convention for them. The conference, held during the summer of 1968 on Lusty Beg Island on Lower Lough Erne in County Fermanagh, Northern Ireland, near the Leslie family seat of Castle Leslie, was jointly organised by Desmond Leslie and Camilla, Countess of Erne. Camilla was a wealthy socialite with an interest in flying saucers who frequented the edges of the English Underground. Johan Quanjer remembers meeting Camilla in 1966 when he was recruiting for the recently formed Contact UK and she introduced him to a world where he attended, 'parties at which such well-known people as Mick Jagger and Marianne Faithful were present.' It was at these hip society shindigs where the latest trends in music and far out ideas were discussed. Barry Miles remembers many such psychedelic soirees, 'experimenting with acid, spending entire evenings discussing flying saucers, ley lines and the court of King Arthur... [with] Michael Rainey in Sherwood green, grinning as always, stoned, talking about UFOs.' (Miles 2002: 213)

Now in with the in-crowd, Quanjer was contacted by:

... a would-be song-writer who needed a studio to record a UFO song which should have been ready in time for the UFO Fly In, on an island in Lough Erne. The songwriter and musician introduced me to the Beatles, at their office in Marylebone and I shook hands with them. The songwriter was given quite costly studio time, in a Soho establishment, courtesy of Apple, the Beatles' record company. The record was duly cut and it had a nice tune to it, but the talent was not great enough for the single to be released and it disappeared without trace.

(Quanjer 1997)

It is unclear exactly who wrote this song but it is almost certain to have been one Chas Hodges, a session musician in the 1960s who eventually became half of the 'mockney' pop group Chas and Dave! The Lusty Beg event was small, with attendance estimated at between sixty and a hundred people. Small it may have been but many of those who did attend were movers and shakers from the English Underground. Lusty Beg alumni included Nicholas Saunders, editor of *Alternative London* and founder of the Neal's Yard shopping complex in Covent Garden. Saunders' friend Gini Wade remembers, 'Nick was always up for an adventure, particularly if it involved something unusual. In 1968 we went to a flying saucer conference...' (Gini Wade, personal communication 2005). Saunders himself recalled:

I was fascinated by what John Michell was saying about UFOs and ley-lines and so on, but felt pretty guarded about it too. I did go to a Flying Saucer conference on an island in the middle of a lake in the

Castle Leslie, family home of Desmond Leslie, organiser of the Lusty Beg flying saucer conference in 1967.



northwest of Ireland. There were all these people plodding about in the rain and the mud and there were very serious talks by people who either said that flying saucers had visited, that they'd been on flights themselves or that they'd seen them.

(Green 1989: 215)

One of the aims of the convention was to attract a flying saucer to display itself to the assembled crowd. Unsurprisingly this failed to take place, but the faithful took heart from the fact that a 'strange red light' had been seen coming to rest in a nearby field. Gini Wade again: '... most of us congratulated ourselves on having lured the aliens successfully, even if they had landed in the wrong spot.' (personal communication 2005)

Another key member of the English Underground, Neil Oram, was also there. Oram had morphed from beatnik wanderer to hippy philosopher, later writing his psychedelic memoirs, *The Warp* trilogy of books. In *Lemmings on the Edge*, Oram describes the scene as they arrived at the shores of Lough Erne:

At the water's edge we were met by Michael Roner, who took us across the choppy lake in a battered rowing boat which was equipped with a noisy, erratic outboard motor. Apart from the big white house on the lawn, the rest of the island was overgrown, without a trace of permanent habitation. Although now, there were camp fires and tents scattered all over the wooded hills, which rose quite steeply from the beach.

(Oram 1981: 121)

Desmond Leslie was responsible for organizing the conference lectures, held each evening in a large marquee. Scant information now exists as to exactly who spoke, but Neil Oram remarks that they consisted of 'rather dull pronouncements of what lay in store for the human race'. According to Oram, 'It wasn't until the fourth night that we were given some *real* information, by an ex-Australian Air Force radar expert.' This impressed Oram:

Flying Saucerers

It made *my* hair stand on end when we learnt that he'd picked up unidentified craft, whose estimated diameter was in the region of three hundred miles! *Miles!* Traveling in excess of one hundred *thousand* miles an hour!

(Oram 1981: 122)

On the last night of the 'fly-in' Desmond Leslie introduced a young Irishman called Gerald to the audience. Gerald claimed to have had what would now be termed an abduction experience. He related a story of how, walking home from a dance across an isolated area of moorland, he saw three coloured lights descending on him, after which he awoke on a bed in a circular, red room which hummed. He was ordered to strip and a female humanoid figure seduced him. Afterwards she told him, 'All you Earth people are strange'. The next thing he knew he was back on the moorland road with the three coloured lights receding in the sky above him.

This story, with its obvious echoes of the well-publicized Villas Boas case, was too much for some of the assembled hippies and vigorous arguments broke out. Even John Michell was dubious, questioning Gerald as to how he could be sure he was in a spaceship. As the arguments raged, Gerald slipped away and Desmond Leslie was left to calm the crowd. Gini Wade recalled the abductee being, 'invited back to London where he was feted in Notting Hill, but he turned out to be a fraud and was spat out again.' (personal communication 2005)

Another well-known face on the London scene, Dave Tomlin, attended the Lusty Beg conference. Tomlin had been a member of famous underground experimental bands including Sun Trolley and the Third Ear Band. He remembers '... people camped in the woods who went in the evenings or afternoons for lectures or talks.' Tomlin believed the hippies adopted flying saucers as 'one of their credos', certain the spacemen were going to come because, 'one way or another this would be the only way to save the planet, because it was quite obvious what was going on.' (Dave Tomlin, personal communication 2004)

But Johan Quanjer's experience of the event was not as positive. He notes that while 'Dozens of people had descended on the island for fun, jollity and invocation of higher energies. By the end of the week the entire hippy UFO community had gone native. They had formed separate tribes with some not speaking to others.' (Quanjer 1997) This event was as close as the hippie subculture ever got in organizing its interest in flying saucers, and they were rapidly losing interest. Too many other fantastic possibilities vied for their attention, and when you've explored inner space, outer space could seem positively tedious. Essentially those among the English Underground who took an avid interest in flying saucers did so, not out of certain belief, but from a desire to explore possibilities. When the flying saucer experience did not deliver the goods or, as the hippies saw on Lusty Beg, it descended into conflict and argument, they no longer wanted to know.

Poet and author Barry Gifford, whose novel *Wild at Heart* was used by David Lynch as the basis for his film, sojourned as a hippy in late-60s London. In *The Duke of Earls Court* Gifford writes of his interest in flying saucers and refers to an incident

when a friend, Ace, invited the editor of *Flying Saucer Review* to dinner. The clash of cultures was inevitable:

It was obvious upon his entrance that the editor, an ordinary-looking, balding, middle-aged man in a dark gray three-piece suit, was visibly shaken by the den of freaks to which he had unwittingly lent his presence. He had no idea, he said, attempting to smile, that the dinner was to be such an event. After answering a few desultory questions about saucers it was clear that the editor wanted to be anywhere else but with those people. The food was macrobiotic and when he enquired what was in the meal was told, 'Brown rice, kasha, bulgur, soy, miso. The food of the people. It makes you high.' Mention of the word 'high' caused the editor to drop his fork, obviously afraid that the meal had been spiked with drugs of some form. He left soon afterwards, pleading a prior engagement.'

(Gifford 1982: 123)

Flying saucers continued to be courted by the English Underground in the dying embers of the 60s, but by 1970 the hippie movement had become subsumed into the broader spectrum of youth culture and was no longer fresh. You could buy kaftans in Marks and Spencers and like all youth movements, it had been diluted and repackaged by commercial interests, being sold rather than invented. Those who had been heavily involved in saucerdom moved swiftly on. For everyone else the subject of UFOs was now just another hip belief to be 'into', the publishing floodgates opened and books on earth mysteries, witchcraft, astrology, occultism and mysticism offered other ways of thinking and being.

Were it not for the hippies' interest in flying saucers, nurtured by John Michell, the interest in Earth Mysteries, folklore and ancient sacred sites which flourished in the 1970s onwards would not have taken place. This brief burst of drug-fuelled exploration cross-pollinated many Fortean subjects, the results of which we are still seeing today. Where mainstream UFOlogy was mired in the 'yes'/no' argument about the physical reality of UFOs, the hippies treated the subject as just one in a long line of possibly useful ideas. This dichotomy of attitude between the hippie and the straight view of saucers was aptly summed up in an exchange between Barry Gifford and his friend, after the *FSR* editor had fled their dinner party. Referring to the editor's 'stuffy' attitude Ace pointed out to Gifford:

But it's ok man, it really is, he's a dedicated cat. I mean he's never seen one, but he really *believes* in them flying saucers.'

'So do you,' Gifford said.

Ace nodded. 'Sure, man, sure I do. The difference between him and me is that I'm not so bloody *serious* about it.'

(Gifford 1982: 124)

Chapter twelve

In preparation for the landing

At the end of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* the audience is sitting in the lap of the universe, ready and waiting for new magic to fall into their lives.

(*Daily Telegraph* 21 December 1977)

Public interest in UFOs ebbs and flows and by the opening of the 1970s the subject was at an all-time low. The publication of the Colorado University study in 1969 coincided with a dramatic decrease in media interest in the subject and some UFOlogists feared that a new 'dark age' was approaching. The US UFO group NICAP, which had a membership of 12,000 in 1967 saw this fall to just 4,000 in 1971. In Britain during the same period BUFORA's membership dropped by a third. Sociologist Shirley Mclver believes one factor for this downturn was the identification of UFOs with the counter-culture between 1966 and 1973. This was in itself an outcome of wider cultural changes which included 'a revival of interest in the occult and new religious movements.' (Mclver 1983: 10) During this period, from the point of view of the media and public, UFOs lost their unique status and became just one part of the much broader area of 'strange mysteries' and 'the unexplained' that included topics as diverse as the Bermuda Triangle, the Loch Ness Monster and a range of psychical phenomena. At the same time the publication of Eric von Daniken's *Chariots of the Gods?* and its sequels created an outpouring of public fascination for the idea of 'ancient astronauts' which sidelined UFOlogy even further. These changes were reflected by a motion carried at a BUFORA annual general meeting in 1970 which committed the association to 'widen its scope to include Fortean and para-physical phenomena, in cases when such may be deemed to have a bearing on the solution to the UFO problem.' (Beer 1985: 2)

Paradoxically, while interest in UFOlogy declined, the number of people who claimed a personal experience with UFOs was growing. In the USA, surveys show the numbers claiming a sighting doubled between 1966 and 1973 to 11 percent of the population, or 15 million Americans (Durant 1997: 235). Similarly in Britain an

In preparation for the landing

Flying saucer badge.



Audience Survey Report by the BBC carried out following the broadcast of *Flying Saucers and the People Who See Them* in 1968 found two of the 346 members of the viewing panel 'claim to have seen UFOs for themselves' (BBC 1968). The US Gallup poll found that approximately half of those interviewed believed UFOs were 'real' and not figments of the imagination. Unfortunately respondents were not asked to define what they meant by 'real' although interestingly a similar number said they believed there was intelligent life in outer space.

Dramatic changes had taken place in public opinion since 1947, when imagination, hoax and secret weapons were the most popular explanations for the 'flying saucers'. In the intervening years the space race had resulted in men leaving the Earth and walking on the moon. This breakthrough opened up the possibility that life could soon be discovered in outer space and the yearning for contact with aliens was reflected in fiction and the movies. Belief in aliens was now an acceptable part of modern life. Nigel Watson's interest in UFOs began with the moon landings of 1969. He told us:

The Apollo mission had made it logical to think that if we could leave our 'cradle' then alien intelligences could have done so long ago. This type of reasoning was certainly used in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. I saw this in the early 1970s and was really knocked out by the special effects and its use of the black monolith that represented an alien force. I started by collecting newspaper clippings that mentioned anything related to space exploration [and] on the same shelves were books about UFOs and I inevitably gravitated towards them. At the time I was open to the idea that spaceships might be visiting us. Eric von Daniken's *Chariots of the Gods?* seemed to confirm that they had been visiting us for thousands of years and that aliens had influenced our society since the dawn of humanity.

(personal communication 2006)

During this period Britain's UFO groups began to organise and consolidate themselves. Some of the more dominant personalities in these groups were preoccupied with the notion that the reality of UFOs could only be established when



Tony Pace and Roger Stanway. (Photo supplied by Joe McGonagle)

the subject was taken seriously by the scientific community. In the spring of 1974 a coalition of eighteen smaller UFO groups in northern England came together to form the Northern UFO Network (NUFON) led by a science teacher from Manchester, Jenny Randles, who would soon become a leading light in British UFOlogy. In her book with Peter Warrington, *UFOs: A British Viewpoint* Randles says this move was partly as a result of a 'lack of regionalisation and isolation of the north' from the two large national groups based in the south of England (Randles and Warrington 1979). Another key driving force in BUFORA at this time were two friends, Roger Stanway and Tony Pace, whose interest in the subject grew, like Nigel Watson, from the mid-60s Apollo programme and from reading the UFO literature. They had investigated a flap of sightings in the Potteries area of Staffordshire during the summer of 1967 which they were unable to explain. Their growing interest led them to self-publish a detailed report, *UFOs: Unidentified, Undeniable* that was launched at a press conference attended by most of the national newspapers (Stanway and Pace 1968). Stanway, an enthusiastic young solicitor, and Pace, an amateur astronomer, wanted to establish a permanent research headquarters for BUFORA at Newchapel Observatory on a hilltop near Stoke-on-Trent. The stone-built structure had a telephone hotline installed and plans were made to employ a full-time member of staff to deal with calls. Unfortunately, like other ambitious BUFORA schemes, this proposal never came to fruition.

Stanway was more successful in using his legal skills to establish BUFORA Ltd as a non-profit-making company. This was seen as the first step in the association's long term plan to gain charitable status as a means of raising funds for research and investigation. Other initiatives included the production of a comprehensive manual for UFO investigators and *A Guide to the UFO Phenomenon* which was designed 'to dispel some of the woolliness and present the serious side of UFOlogy in a straightforward manner.' Interviewed by *The Times* Stanway revealed that despite UFOlogy's new air of professionalism internal battles continued between 'serious'

Badges worn by UFO enthusiasts during the 1970s.



researchers and what Stanway referred to as ‘a small, vociferous, quasi-religious element that has been attracted to the UFO enigma.’ Ironically *The Times* chose to lampoon both groups in their review of the booklet and its ‘fuzzy photos.’ BUFORA, it said, was so obsessed with the need to become scientifically respectable ‘that it has been drawn into a turbid scientific terminology which sometimes manages to make its tales of nocturnal meandering lights, “daylight discs” and humanoid operators portentously dull.’ (*The Times* 23 Oct 1972)

Meanwhile the vociferous quasi-religious element in UFOlogy was keeping busy. This period saw the creation of third national group, the British UFO Society, by a London-based UFO buff, Ken Rogers, who had become a key member of Arthur Shuttlewood’s entourage at Warminster. BUFOS abandoned any pretence of being a ‘serious’ group and shamelessly sold T-shirts and badges proclaiming belief in UFOs and aliens. By 1971 the importance of Warminster as a centre of UFO-spotting at holiday weekends continued but interest was beginning to wane. This was partly the result of a series of hoaxes perpetrated on the watchers by David Simpson and his team from SIUFOP described in Chapter 9. In 1972 the group used illuminated kites to spoof a sky watch that was attended by a BBC film crew and the pranksters subsequently revealed the hoax live on the news programme *Nationwide*. By this time another of Shuttlewood’s protégés, Keith Palmer, had moved from north London to live in Banbury, Oxfordshire. Soon after his arrival this rural market town became a centre for UFO activity which initially rivalled Warminster. The Banbury flap was preceded by the chance appearance of a ‘UFO’ during filming by an ATV camera crew in rural Oxfordshire. The object captured on the film was later found to have been a USAF F-111 dumping fuel but the screening of the colour footage sparked a new round of media interest. During the winter of 1971–2 some 275 sightings were reported from the area around Banbury mainly by Palmer, who established his own ‘International UFO Research Association’ based in the town. A dossier of his reports were sent to the Ministry of Defence but officials dismissed most of them as USAF aircraft whose flight path took them out of nearby RAF Upper Heyford at low level to the west of Banbury (National Archives AIR 2/18872).

The Banbury UFO flap never achieved the levels of media attention enjoyed by Warminster, because it lacked both novelty and the charismatic input provided by Arthur Shuttlewood. Nevertheless, it did inspire one of the most interesting

programmes on UFOs ever shown on British television. This was broadcast as part of the BBC's *Man Alive* series on 2 February 1972. The format was unusual in that it consisted of a short documentary followed by a recording of a live public debate chaired by Desmond Wilcox at Banbury Town Hall. This was the first time since the BBC's *First Hand* programme of 1956 that the pro- and anti-saucer factions had been given the opportunity to put their case in front of an audience of millions. The Banbury debate was attended by around two hundred people, including witnesses, UFOlogists and local residents. The panel of experts featured Charles Bowen, Gordon Creighton and Charles Gibbs-Smith from *Flying Saucer Review* arguing the case for UFOs. The sceptics were represented by psychologist Dr Chris Evans, who argued for a Jungian interpretation of UFOs as a modern myth (Evans 1974). Alongside him was a senior Ministry of Defence official, Anthony Davis, who was described as 'the only man in the MoD who investigates UFO reports.' His appearance on the *Man Alive* programme was noteworthy because it was the first time the MoD had ever agreed to field one of its officials to discuss UFOs in public.

Some of the more vocal UFOlogists were unhappy with the manner in which the subject was portrayed by the programme. Gibbs-Smith, an aviation historian, dismissed it as 'a fiasco' and wrote to the BBC to complain about what he called 'the biased attitude' of the production team (Stenhoff 1972). The majority of the objections related to the documentary section of the programme that began with a sequence filmed at a sky watch organised by Keith Palmer in November 1971. Several hundred enthusiasts attended this event, held in torrential rain and mist on the Burton Hills near Banbury, and some were interviewed by the BBC crew. Keith Palmer said he believed the UFO occupants were 'coming from another star system and when we're talking about them, we're talking about several different types of beings.' The general impression given of UFOlogists was rounded off by an interview with contactee Bernard Byron who described his telepathic contact with beings from the second planet of the star Kruger. Byron was unable to provide the BBC with an example of the Kruger language but did come forth with an example of Plutonian which one reviewer described as 'a quick-fire language, sounding like Welsh at four times its usual speed.' (*Daily Telegraph* 3 Feb 1972)

The overall impression that viewers were left with was that serious students of UFOlogy and 'contactees' were one and the same – 'amiable, intelligent but daft as brushes' as the *Daily Mail* put it. This contributed to the feeling of persecution and paranoia felt by some who believed they were being singled out for unfair treatment by the media. The complaints of bias were a sign that UFOlogists perceived themselves as courageous crusaders for the truth against the closed-mindedness of the media, the establishment and pedestrian scientists. This self-image increased with the transmission of a second BBC documentary, *Out of this World*, in 1977 just as a new revival of interest was gathering pace. The programme opened with a seemingly-ordinary film of two young men plodding across a sunlit section of English countryside. It quickly became apparent these were no ordinary young men, as their heads were wired up to UFO detectors. These consisted of a tin dish on a stick which the two men jabbed spasmodically at the sky searching for tell-tale signs of the magnetic fields which identified visiting spacecraft. 'Scan along the edge of the

cloud,' one advised the other in a matter-of-fact fashion, 'because very often they use the clouds for cover, the crafty so-and-so's.' (BBC 1 *Out of this World* 10 May 1977)

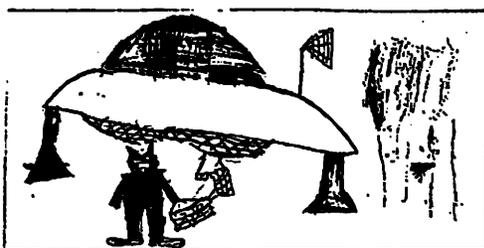
Presenter Hugh Burnett then interviewed George King who described his meeting with Jesus who arrived on a hilltop in Devon in a flying saucer from Venus. This was followed by footage of members of the Aetherius Society charging a 'prayer battery' as part of its operations to protect the Earth from natural disasters. Charles Bowen of *FSR* overheard reactions to the programme next morning from fellow commuters. He wrote '... we heard how wives and daughters, convulsed with laughter, had rolled helplessly out of their chairs, and how others had, in disgust, switched to another channel after suffering the first few minutes.' Bowen felt that by associating UFOlogy with the Aetherius Society and Arthur Shuttlewood the BBC was trivialising a serious subject and making it a centre of unjust ridicule. The feeling of persecution was made worse because the producers had promised *FSR* 'a serious, common sense documentary on the subject.' The only explanation that made sense to Bowen was that the BBC had been leaned on by *someone* and 'alarm bells had been set a-ringing, somewhere.' (Bowen 1977: 2)

'New' UFOlogist John Rimmer took another view. Writing in the magazine *MUFOB*, which bucked the trend in UFOlogy by taking a sceptical view of the subject, he said it was 'flattering to imagine that UFOlogy is so important to the powers that be that they go to great lengths to downgrade our work.' (Rimmer 1977: 14) Rimmer pointed out that television set out to entertain as well as inform 'and sadly for us, nutters on hilltops are far more entertaining than "serious research".' Anyone who expected a television documentary on UFOs to resemble an article in *FSR*, he said, was naïve: 'As far as TV is concerned, UFOlogy is on a hiding to nowhere, and it's because of showbiz, not sinister silencers!'

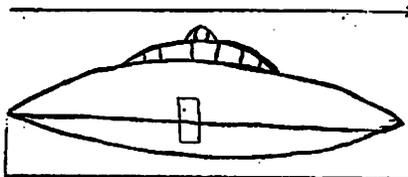
The Welsh Triangle

By the late-70s the popularity of the Warminster 'Thing' had waned and the short-lived flap at Banbury was now just a memory. Then for a time in spring of 1977 a rugged section of the west Wales coastline made national headlines as the new 'hot spot' for sighting flying saucers and their occupants. Here the focus of the Welsh 'flap' was a retired veterinary surgeon, Randall Jones Pugh, who was a regional investigator for BUFORA. Like Arthur Shuttlewood at Warminster and Keith Palmer in Banbury, Pugh was instrumental in bringing the 'Welsh UFO flap' to the attention of the media who sought him out for comment whenever a sighting was made. In the autumn of 1976 Pugh, in an interview for his local paper, discussed a number of recent sightings and predicted there would soon be a spate of similar events in West Wales. But even he was not prepared for what happened next. During lunchtime on 4 February 1977 fifteen schoolchildren at Broad Haven Primary School said they watched a silver cigar-shaped UFO in fields behind their school. Some of the group, aged from nine to eleven years, claimed they saw a silver man with pointed ears emerge from the craft. Teachers initially dismissed their stories but the children were so adamant they had seen something unusual they handed in a petition to the police station. Their head teacher later asked them to draw the UFO and was reportedly amazed at how similar their pictures were. (*Western Mail* 9 Feb 1977)

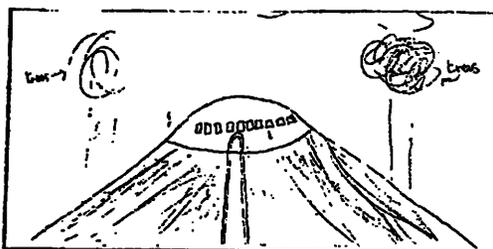
Flying Saucerers



WHAT DAVID WARD SAW ... the ship was silver, the paper was green.



WHAT PHILIP REES SAW ... a dome on top of it and a light.

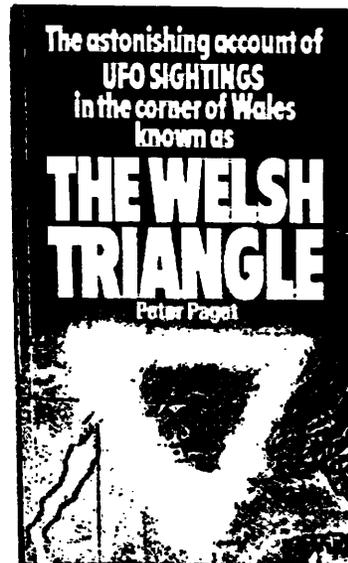


WHAT SHAUN GARRISON SAW ... ten or eleven windows and a door.

Drawings of UFO made by Broad Haven schoolchildren.

The 'Broad Haven flying saucer' became an overnight media sensation not only in Wales but across the world. One of the authors recalls seeing the children interviewed by a presenter on the popular early evening children's television programme *Magpie*. Journalists and television crews flocked to the Welsh coast and before long flying saucers were the main topic of conversation in the principality. An enterprising hotelier in the resort of Milford Haven jumped on the bandwagon by advertising 'flying saucer spotting weekends' to attract enthusiasts to the area, with Pugh acting as the expert guide.

By May, when *Out of the This World* was shown on BBC 1, straightforward lights in the sky had been replaced by stories of UFO landings and giant humanoid figures in spacesuits prowling around the Welsh countryside. A whole gamut of strange phenomena clustered around the Coombs family at Ripperston Farm. Here a dairyman, Billy Coombs, his wife Pauline and their five children told of repeated close encounters with UFOs and their occupants which left a trail of burned-out cars and television sets and spiralling electricity bills. Mrs Coombs had a sighting almost every month and on one occasion she was driving along a country lane with her children when their car was pursued by a fiery object shaped like a rugby football. Later the couple claimed a herd of cows were inexplicably teleported from a locked field into to an adjacent farmyard. But the most terrifying incident of all happened in the early hours of an April morning as the couple watched a late movie. Suddenly they were terrified by the appearance of a tall figure in a spacesuit, whose blank face was framed in the window of their sitting room. Mrs Coombs said she could not see the creature's face as it was hidden by a black visor but it was seven feet tall. 'It was not a man, it was more of a monster,' she told the BBC. 'It was silver in colour and had a glow like an astronaut. I have no idea what it was but it could be something



from another planet.' (BBC Radio 4 Wales 30 June 1977) The couple were so terrified they made a 999 call to the police. There was no doubt the couple had seen something unusual, but what?

The weird events at Ripperston Farm were chronicled in a trio of books published in 1979 long after the Welsh flap had faded from attention. The most sensational and successful was a paperback, *The Uninvited*, written by journalist from London, Clive Harold, that was devoted almost exclusively to the Coombs family's experiences. The cover depicted Ripperston Farm as an isolated Alamo besieged by fearsome extraterrestrial forces. The book sold so well it reached 'No 7 in the best seller charts' possibly because Harold chose to write it in the style of *The Amityville Horror*. The story was presented in breathless, narrative style filled with invented conversation. The opening words of the foreword are now iconic: 'The story you are about to read is true', and in case anyone doubted the 'facts' Harold added: 'You will find no explanations for the events reconstructed here, for there are none.' (Harold 1979: 7)

Harold worked closely with a UFOlogist, Peter Paget, who was responsible for a second paperback, *The Welsh Triangle* published the same year. During the 1970s Paget had become a regular at Warminster where he and wife Janet had established a bed and breakfast for UFOlogists. With the popularity of the Wiltshire scene in decline they temporarily transferred the scene of their operations to west Wales. The title of the book had been partly inspired by tabloid headline 'Spaceman mystery of the terror triangle.' (*The Sun* 20 May 1977) The idea of UFOs targeting certain geographical areas for scrutiny had grown since the Warminster mystery and west Wales had oil refineries and military bases that might be of interest to 'them'. The notion of such areas forming a 'triangle' when plotted on a map was a direct outcome of fascination with the 'Bermuda Triangle' that was generated by the book of the same name published in a blaze of publicity during 1974 (Berlitz 1974). Author Charles Berlitz invented this triangle as a convenient description of an area of

Flying Saucers

Stack Rocks in St Brides Bay, West Wales, which some believed hid a secret UFO base.



the western Atlantic between Bermuda and Florida where he claimed 'over 1,000 people and 100 aeroplanes have vanished without a trace.' Vanishing aircraft and people had become a popular theme in the early flying saucer literature and the idea of a 'zone of terror' appealed to the mass media. What exactly constituted the Welsh version of the Bermuda Triangle was never entirely clear, as no aircraft or people had been reported missing during the UFO flap. In one version the 'Broad Haven Triangle' was said to include most of the south-east corner of St Bride's Bay along with the towns of Milford Haven and Haverfordwest.

Journalist Hugh Turnbull, who chronicled the events for the local weekly, *Western Telegraph*, believed that 'something military' lay behind the sightings. This speculation, shared by some local people, was founded on the fact that within a twenty-mile radius of Broad Haven, where many of the reports of UFOs and humanoids were concentrated, there were a range of RAF and other military bases including a rocket testing range. A more extreme theory, favoured by Paget, was that aliens had established an underground base beneath the Stack Rocks in St Bride's Bay, where UFOs had been seen to hover and disappear. In a revealing passage from *The Welsh Triangle* he wrote:

...here we were, sitting in a Welsh farmhouse built of solid slate, talking with amiable, hospitable country people who had no interest at all in the far-out recesses of space...and yet one mile distant from where we were sitting had been discovered possibly the first UFO base on earth.

(Paget 1979: 125)

In comparison with Harold and Paget, the third and last book to chronicle the Welsh weirdness, *The Dyfed Enigma*, was a relatively sober and straightforward account. It was produced by Randall Pugh in collaboration with Ted Holliday, a local author who had written a book, *The Dragon and the Disc*, linking UFOs with the Loch Ness Monster and ancient astronauts (Pugh and Holliday 1979). Reflecting the trend towards a 'para-physical' interpretation their book combined straight transcripts of interviews with speculation that linked UFO occupants with fairy lore and ley lines. Pugh was particularly impressed by the accounts of the giant silver-suited humanoids that had been sighted not only by the Coombs but by a number of other frightened witnesses along the Welsh coast. He saw these as part of an escalation of activity that

In preparation for the landing

Ripperston Farm, whose occupants were terrorised by a silver-suited monster in 1977.



began with 'lights in the sky' and progressed to landings and encounters with humanoids. Initially Pugh claimed to have no firm idea as to their purpose, but later he came to believe the UFOnuts were controlled by evil forces from a parallel universe. His increasing fear and paranoia led him to leave UFOlogy shortly after the publication of his book in 1980 (see Chapter 8).

During that year writer Hilary Evans was commissioned to write a series of articles on the 'Welsh Triangle' for the news-stand part-work *The Unexplained*. After speaking to a number of the witnesses quoted in the books and newspaper stories he was astonished to discover that many of the sensational claims were a mixture of 'fiction, fantasy and falsehood.' (Evans 1981: 874) While some people had genuinely puzzling experiences, he found the investigators of the 'flap' had been less than objective and in some cases had exaggerated and distorted their testimony in their retelling of the story. During Evans's visit he overheard a local rumour that two members of a Round Table club were responsible for the sightings of 'spacemen'. Inquiries by the BBC discovered the prank began after the publicity surrounding the alleged UFO landing at the primary school. At the time a silver-lined asbestos suit manufactured by a local fire-fighting company for oil refinery workers had been on display in a local shop window. The shopkeeper said the suit 'went missing' on the night of the Ripperston Farm sighting and was returned the next morning. Around the same time two men turned up at a fancy dress evening in Broad Haven wearing asbestos suits with the monstrous appearance completed by the in-built square helmet and black visor. The conclusion seemed obvious.

In 1996 BBC presenter Ray Gosling tracked down one of the jokers for a Radio 4 documentary on the west Wales flap. Shortly afterwards Glyn Edwards, a member of Milford Haven's Round Table confessed his part to the *Western Mail*. He described the spaceman outfit as having:

... a solid in-built helmet so I would have looked about 7ft tall. Alien sightings were all the rage, so I took a stroll around for a bit of fun. I remember when I visited the garden of a certain lady, who later called the police, that I had to dive into a hedge because she appeared to be aiming a rifle or a shotgun at me.

(*Western Mail* 27 January 1996)



CLOSE

WON'T TURN

OF THE THIRD KIND

DAILY

THE VOICE OF BRITAIN

EXPRESS



No. 24,150

Tuesday February 21 1978

Weather: Cloudy, some snow

8p

UFO reports pour into the Express
Surely they can't all be misguided?

FLYING SAUCERS GALORE!

ACCOUNTS of unidentified flying objects flooded into the Daily Express UFO Bureau yesterday.

They ranged from bright orange lights in the sky to dome-shaped and cigar-shaped objects.

All callers maintained they were serious. And they left the question: Whether you believe in flying saucers or not, can all these people be wrong?

THE PILOTS

Two pilots called the UFO Bureau. Both have photographs to back up their sightings. Here are their stories.

FREDERICK UNDERHILL, a British Cessna pilot, says: "I was doing a VFR home from Tisbury. It was early morning over the Exmoor."

"Out of the corner of my eye I saw a fast moving object. It was

By
ROBERT MCGOWAN
EXPRESS UFO BUREAU

travelling west to east across the mountains. All I can say is that it was shaped like a star. It was obviously a controlled vehicle, travelling at great speed.

"My first officer saw it too and then my engine. As we watched, it turned towards us and then we saw it moving under our tailwind wing. Then it disappeared.

Captain Underhill added: "In all my years as an airline pilot I had never seen anything like it. Ever all pilots, I am a trained observer. But I am not able to find any rational explanation for what I saw."

RONALD KLINE, another pilot, saw his UFO from an airfield. The ground crew pointed out a triangular object at a great height.

Mr Kline, 50, said: "Minutes later it took off in a diagonal and climbed to 7,000ft. The object was

hovering and seemed to glow. We estimated its height at about 10,000ft. I landed again and we watched it. Altogether it stayed put in the same part of the sky for a full four hours. Then it vanished.

That happened over Weymouth Garden City in Dorsetshire.

MRS PAULA LONSDALE had her experience in Dorset, while taking care of her three-week-old baby daughter in the early hours.

From the bedroom of her home in Upper Beeding, she said: "I saw this oval, saucer-shaped object going slowly past the window."

"It was only 20ft away, really just 20ft. It had red and blue flashing lights. I couldn't believe my eyes. Then it just vanished."

'ABDUCT'

One man, claiming he can produce 10 witnesses, says a UFO tried to abduct him from his back garden.

An RAF man, with 12 witnesses as witnesses, saw a UFO from his base in Wales. He was in a position to check if it was an aircraft or satellite. It was not.

And so the calls kept coming in.

Pocket Cartoon
By Derek Lancaster



"Just a moment, dear! Do you want to be Daily Express nurse of the year or don't you?"

The most shattering science fiction film ever

SERIALISED ONLY IN THE DAILY EXPRESS • Your Four Page pull out starts on Page 17

Daily Express 21 February 1978.

Despite Gosling's attempts to persuade the witnesses from Broad Haven school to confess to a hoax, the boys, now in their forties, stuck doggedly by their story. One of them, David Davies, told him: 'I did see something unexplained that day and I will stick to that story for the rest of my life.' (BBC Radio 4, 26 January 1996)

'We are not alone' – the CE3K effect

The movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* was released in Britain in February 1978 when the world was gripped by what can only be described as a UFO frenzy. Its director, Steven Spielberg, was just 29 years old but was riding the international success of his blockbuster film about a man-eating shark, *Jaws*. As one reviewer put it, Spielberg had the financial fate of Columbia Pictures – who had invested \$19 million in the film – 'riding on his flying saucers.' In anticipation of success Columbia embarked upon one of the most extensive advertising campaigns in its fifty-year history. With so much at stake, the company took out special two-page advertisements in US newspapers six months before its release. The adverts, along with a long trailer shown at cinemas, helped to build up the feeling of anticipation. The trailer explained the meaning of the title, which was based upon the classification system for UFOs developed by US astronomer Dr J. Allen Hynek, who acted as an advisor. Spielberg had long been fascinated by UFOs and told interviewers he had been born in 1947, the year which marked the beginning of the 'flying saucer' phenomenon.

The plot came after reading John Fuller's book on the Betty and Barney Hill 'abduction' by a UFO during the 1960s. His first script was originally titled 'Watch the Skies' and was centred on a USAF officer frustrated at orders from his superiors to cover-up UFO reports. This sub-plot of conspiracy reflected the director's belief in 'a Cosmic Watergate' by the US Government to conceal evidence of alien visitors. The story changed during a drastic rewrite though it kept the new title, the 'cover up' theme and the mystical and psychic elements of the plot. Ideas for scenes were adapted from 'real experiences' described in the UFO literature including the dramatic pursuit of UFOs by police patrol cars. Spielberg based one of his characters, the French UFO expert Claude Lacombe (played in the film by Francois Truffaut), upon UFO author and scientist Jacques Vallee. Observant UFOlogists could also catch a glimpse of astronomer Dr Hynek at the end of the film as he emerged from a crowd of onlookers to greet the aliens at the Devil's Tower monument in Wyoming. Referring to the liberal mixing of fact and fiction Spielberg said: 'If you believe, it's science fact; if you don't believe, it's science fiction.' (Pilkington 1996)

The film's release marked the 'high water mark' of popular belief in UFOs as extraterrestrial spacecraft. In the USA that year surveys found 57 percent thought 'UFOs were real' and seven percent had seen one. A Gallup poll commissioned by the *Sunday Telegraph* in Britain found 27 percent of those interviewed said they 'believed in flying saucers.' (*Sunday Telegraph* 27 December 1981) While this showed belief was substantially less widespread in Britain, it did reflect a steady growth from the 16 percent recorded by a poll during 1954. These figures have never been substantially matched and must have been influenced by the hype which surrounded the film. After all, the theme of aliens slowly making their presence known to national governments, culminating in a spectacular contact, was the end result of thirty years of speculation about UFOs and reflected what many thousands believed was *really* going on.

Millions saw the film and the semi-religious theme of contact with benevolent God-like beings from the sky had a deep resonance not only for UFOlogists, but for many thousands of ordinary people who had either seen UFOs or had ever asked the question 'Is there life out there?' One immediate symptom of what FSR called 'the CE3K effect' was a dramatic rise in the number of people reporting UFO sightings and in the numbers joining UFO groups. The number of new sighting reports received by the Ministry of Defence in 1978 reached 750, a figure almost double that for 1977 and the highest total since official records had been kept. A similar increase was noted by civilian UFO groups. Some people simply 'saw' the fantastic craft from the film for themselves. In April one man from Ealing Common in London rang the MoD to report 'a gigantic saucer' lit up with coloured lights 'just like a scene from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.' It seemed, he said in an echo of Roy Neary's character from the film 'as if I was meant to see this object.' (National Archives AIR 20/12966)

Two national tabloids, the *Daily Express* and *The Sun* splashed 'flying saucers' across their front pages for first time since the heady days of the 1950s. The *Express* serialised the novel based on Spielberg's screenplay and set up a 'UFO Bureau' where readers could phone or send written accounts of their experiences that 'we will pass on to experts for study and analysis.' (*Daily Express* 21 Feb 1978) Within days the numbers calling or writing topped 6,000. Oddly BUFORA's then director of investigations Jenny Randles, noted that the massive response 'demonstrated the amazing impact the film had on society, but it did not provoke waves of new UFO sightings as sceptics vociferously predicted.' (Pilkington 1996) Instead it encouraged witnesses to report old sightings which they had previously kept secret, fearing ridicule. A number of these were in a category which Randles called 'high strangeness' that would become the focus for much of the UFO literature in the next two decades. An elite group of experienced UFOlogists called the UFO Investigators Network (UFOIN) formed in 1977 to concentrate their energy upon scrutinising these types of reports away from the administrative burden of running a formal group.

Membership of such groups reached an all-time high as a result of the CE3K effect but, as in the past, this level of interest would prove to be short-lived. By the August Bank Holiday in 1979 when BUFORA staged its first 'International UFO Congress' at the Mount Royal Hotel in London numbers had risen to 1,500, the highest the association reached in its entire history (Norman Oliver, personal communication 2005). This figure was reduced to 550 in 1981, by which time public interest in UFOs had fallen dramatically (McIver 1983: 42) Shirley McIver's survey of the reasons why people joined UFO groups, carried out in the early 1980s for her doctoral thesis, found that many people's interest could be triggered by reading a book or media report, or as a result of a personal experience. In some cases this led them to seek out more information, but only a few retained their interest long enough to join a UFO research group. Her study found that even at the height of the subject's popularity there were no more than a few thousand people who were members of formal groups or societies (McIver 1983).

UFOs in the House of Lords

The huge impact that *Close Encounters* and the space fantasy epic *Star Wars* had on the public has been seen in retrospect as symbolic of a need felt by many to escape from a troubled world. Mark Pilkington notes that 'America was still stuck in a post-Watergate, post-Vietnam gloom; Britain was swamped by unemployment, strikes and societal dissatisfaction.' (Pilkington 1996). By the winter of 1978–9 Britain was in the middle of an IRA terror campaign and the economy was paralysed by the industrial chaos that became known as the 'Winter of Discontent.' In the New Year the gloomy headlines were momentarily lifted only by news of a dramatic UFO flap in Europe. On 31 December hundreds of New Year revellers spotted a blazing UFO streaking across British skies. This sky spectacular was quickly explained as debris from a Soviet satellite, Cosmos 749, burning up in the upper atmosphere. But this sensation was quickly followed by news of a remarkable film showing mysterious lights seen by the crew and passengers of a freighter aircraft near the east coast of New Zealand. Footage taken by the crew was shown on prime-time television news and quickly became a world-wide sensation.

These developments came at an opportune moment for Brinsley le Poer Trench who had taken the title Lord Clancarty following the death of his half-brother in 1976. From taking his seat in the House of Lords he made it clear he was determined to place the topic of UFOs on the agenda. Questions about UFO sightings and Government investigations had been asked in the House of Commons on many occasions since the 1950s but the motion Clancarty intended to present in the Upper Chamber was unique as the first full debate on UFOs held in the British Parliament. Official papers released at the National Archives in 2006 have given a unique insight into the background to the debate and the serious way it was dealt with by the British government. Clancarty's elevation to the Lords added to the problems faced by the authorities who were already fending off an attempt by Sir Eric Gairy, the President of Grenada, to promote an international UFO study funded by the United Nations. Britain refused to sanction such a move and was equally evasive when Clancarty asked the MoD what it knew about the French Government's UFO project. These tactics did nothing to alter his conviction that they were involved in a 'cover-up.'

When the debate was tabled Patrick Stevens, a retired soldier who was responsible for UFOs at the MoD, warned colleagues at Whitehall: 'We do not take this lightly because Lord Clancarty is an acknowledged expert on UFOs, whilst MoD has no experts on UFOs – for much the same reasons as we have no experts on levitation or black magic.' Stevens added that public interest in UFOs was high and warned 'there is a risk that the Government will be persuaded to conduct a study of UFOs, or at least to examine the mass of evidence that Lord Clancarty and his fellow UFOlogists have assembled in the last 30 years.' As a result he recommended that the Government 'adopt an unequivocal and uncompromising line' in their response to Clancarty.

The task of representing the Government in the debate fell upon a distinguished wartime soldier, Lord Strabolgi (David Kenworthy), who was Labour's Chief Whip in

the Lords. After several meetings with Patrick Stevens he agreed to adopt an open-minded attitude to UFOlogy. Privately, however, Stevens advised 'there is nothing to indicate that UFOlogy is anything but claptrap,' adding: 'The UFO industry has prospered from equivocation and, with 1979 being heralded as "the year of the UFOs", it is highly desirable for HMG to inject some massive common sense into the business.' Ironically, his draft closing speech was revised and altered at the eleventh hour on the direct advice of the Labour Under-Secretary of State, James Wellbeloved MP who, while claiming not to disagree with a more scathing approach, felt it 'would benefit from being toned down so as not to pour quite so much scorn on "believers."' (National Archives AIR 20/12966)

The big day came on 18 January 1979 with the nation in turmoil and many MPs demanding a State of Emergency. As the *Daily Express* put it, despite the chaos 'the House of Lords stuck to its schedule and debated Unidentified Flying Objects.' The debate was one of the best attended ever held in the Lords, with sixty peers and hundreds of onlookers squeezing into the public gallery. Interest was so high that tickets and copies of Hansard containing the transcript were quickly sold out. Lord Clancarty opened the three-hour session with his motion 'to call attention to the increasing number of sightings and landings on a world wide scale of UFOs, and to the need for an intra-governmental study of UFOs.' He wound up his speech by calling on the government to reveal what they knew about the phenomenon. And he appealed to the Labour Minister of Defence, Fred Mulley, to give a television broadcast on the issue in the same way his French counterpart, M. Robert Galley, had done in 1974.

The pro-UFO lobby was supported eloquently by the Earl of Kimberley, a former Liberal spokesman on aerospace, who drew upon a briefing by the Aetherius Society for his UFO facts. Kimberley's views were evident from an intervention he made when a Tory peer referred to the Jodrell Bank radio telescope's failure to detect a single UFO: 'Does the noble Lord not think it conceivable that Jodrell Bank says there are no UFOs because that is what it has been told to say?' More than a dozen peers, including two eminent retired scientists, made contributions to the debate. Several reported their own sightings of UFOs including Lord Gainford who gave a good description of the Cosmos rocket, 'a bright white ball' like a comet low over the Scottish hills on New Year's Eve (Clancarty 1979: 74).

The government's reply to this outbreak of eccentricity was delivered in elegant old-world language by Lord Strabolgi. Drawing upon the Ministry of Defence's long experience he did his best to pour cold water on the idea of UFOs as alien spacecraft. Strabolgi outlined the colossal distances that would make visits from outer space unlikely. Referring to Clancarty's claim that evidence existed of thousands of such visits he said 'there is nothing to convince the Government that there has ever been a single visit by an alien spacecraft.' And he rounded off his presentation with a succinct response to Lord Clancarty's appeal to the Government to reveal what it knew. 'As for telling the public the truth about UFOs, the truth is simple,' he said:

In preparation for the landing

House of Lords debate book cover.



There really are many strange phenomena in the sky, and these are invariably reported by rational people. But there is a wide range of natural explanations to account for such phenomena. There is nothing to suggest to Her Majesty's Government that such phenomena are alien spacecraft.

Although Clancarty's motion was defeated he did succeed in making history by holding the debate in the face of considerable ridicule. One of his aims, to establish an all-party House of Lords UFO Study Group, came to fruition. It met irregularly for several years before interest waned. Lord Clancarty died in a Sussex nursing home on 18 May 1995 age 83.

Chapter thirteen

To infinity and beyond?

What I believe to be true is more real to me than what I am told is the truth.

(Rimbaud 1998: 2)

The producers of *The X Files* would have us believe that 'the truth is out there'. Most of those who have been involved with the study of flying saucers would wholeheartedly subscribe to this motto. The search for truth behind sightings of flying saucers and contacts with aliens has been the motivation for UFOlogists since 1947. Yet as we have seen, there are few truths to be found in the subject. Where truth can be found it is always temporary or contingent, liable to be overturned at any minute by developments in science or psychology.

We have concluded this book at the end of the 1970s but of course, UFOlogy did not end there. Following the release of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* in 1978 what had already been a confusing subject became positively kaleidoscopic. As Spielberg's tale of alien obsession spread throughout the western world, UFOlogical belief mutated and multiplied. The subject of UFOs and UFOlogy had changed dramatically between 1947 and 1978, but from 1978 onwards the rate of change increased rapidly and other elements began to enter an already confusing subject area.

The publication in America of Budd Hopkins' book *Missing Time* in 1981 was to have a lasting effect on the face of UFOlogy. Hopkins was a New York artist with a penchant for creating powerful sculptures, many depicting mythological figures with titles such as 'Guardians'. In *Missing Time* Hopkins collated UFO-related supernatural experiences in which the witness reported a period of unexplained amnesia. Hopkins, believing this period of 'missing time' to be an artefact of a physically real UFO experience, sought to retrieve what had taken place by subjecting the witnesses to regression hypnosis. While under hypnosis witnesses often recalled abductions by small grey, oval faced almond-eyed aliens. Hopkins' ideas spread like wildfire and soon many British UFOlogists were actively seeking to hypnotise witnesses. Several British witnesses who underwent hypnosis did reveal encounters with aliens with the result that the media and those UFO writers who held a belief in the literal reality of aliens trumpeted these experiences. It soon

became an article of faith among the vast majority of British UFOlogists and the popular media that alien abductions were taking place.

At the same time as the rise of belief in Britain of alien abductions, a new strand of UFOlogy was being born. The small number of sceptics who, throughout the Sixties and Seventies, had seriously questioned the physical reality of UFOs, became more organised. Although small in number, unlike the majority of UFOlogists and the media, the sceptics possessed a thorough knowledge of UFO history and were well-read in the social sciences and other area of supernatural phenomena, contemporary and historical. This broad overview coupled with their lack of literal belief in visitors from space led them to place UFO experiences against a much broader social, psychological and historical backdrop. John Rimmer, John Harney and Peter Rogerson were at the forefront of this 'new UFOlogy' and Merseyside UFO Bulletin (MUFOB) sought to provide an informed, intellectual counterpoint to the UFO literalists. In 1979 MUFOB was re-titled *Magonia*, from a medieval French name of the fairy kingdom used in the title of Jacques Vallee's book *Passport to Magonia: From Folklore to Flying Saucers* (Vallee 1969).

These 'psychosocial' UFOlogists argued that fairies, elves, lake monsters, ghosts and other anomalous phenomena occupied the same status as UFO sightings and abductions, in that an experience took place that the witness believed was literally true and was representative of an external reality. It is important to be aware that the psychosocial position on supernatural experience is often misinterpreted. Those who take a psychosocial standpoint do not disbelieve the witnesses or dismiss their experiences. However, they doubt the conclusions and the interpretation drawn from the experience by witnesses, investigators and the media. This doubt, true scepticism, is rooted in the fact that over 95 percent of UFO experiences are misinterpretations of prosaic phenomena. Even complicated, multi-witness sightings are often resolved into their component parts (Hendry 1980). Psychosocial ufologists claim that if enough time and effort is devoted to the residue these too can be resolved. The present authors have demonstrated this with many high-profile historical UFO cases in Britain (Clarke and Roberts 1990; 2002). The psychosocial approach is a testable and proven theory.

Alien abduction cases presented a new set of problems for the sceptics. However they argued that many analogous historical and folkloric precedents exist, such as the stories and folk traditions describing the abduction of humans to fairyland. The parallels between these two phenomena are similar, although apologists for belief in physical alien abductions refuse to acknowledge them. They either dismiss the psychosocial view of abductions altogether or reframe it as evidence that aliens have always been visiting Earth but have been interpreted according to the historical context in which they have been reported. (Clarke and Roberts: 1990)

The psychosocial approach was also highly critical of the use of hypnosis by abduction investigators to retrieve memories of alleged alien abduction. At best, they believed hypnosis was ethically wrong and at worst that it represented a modern day witch-hunt. Argument raged as to whether information retrieved by hypnosis was valid and sceptics cited False Memory Syndrome (FMS) as evidence. Research into

Flying Saucerers

FMS has generated a plethora of evidence showing how false memories, indistinguishable from memories of real life experiences, can arise in any individual. Those suffering from false memories include adults who recall false experiences ranging from incest or childhood abuse through to being part of satanic groups where they have practised or witnessed ritual human sacrifice. (www.fmsfonline.org). FMS researchers such as Elizabeth Loftus have successfully recreated false memories in test subjects, indicative of the possibility that memories of alien abduction retrieved from a subject while under hypnosis may also be false. (<http://skepdic.com/aliens.html>)

The early 1980s also saw the development of the crop circle phenomena. Huge circles of flattened crops appeared overnight, mainly in the area of south-west England known as Wessex. At first, they were simple circles, either singly or in small groups. There were no witnesses to the circles' formation and naturally there was speculation about their origin. Because they were only visible in their entirety from above the non-sceptical UFO community hailed the phenomenon as evidence that aliens were causing them. Claims were made that UFOs had been seen in the vicinity of crop circles and UFOlogists assiduously studied the glyphs, which quickly developed from simple designs to complex fractals. Here was evidence that could be seen, photographed and touched. UFO buffs mingled in the crop circles with members of the new age community, occultists and those who came just to wonder. Although sceptics pointed out there was no direct and continuous connection between UFOs and crop circles, nevertheless the connection had been made. The strong new age interest in the circles informed and broadened belief in UFOs with the same cross-pollination of ideas and individuals taking place as happened in the 50s and 60s.

The development of the crop circle phenomenon from small, simple shapes to huge, intricate patterns seemed to indicate an intelligence was behind the mystery, an intelligence capable of planning and implementing the ever complex designs. The vast majority of the UFO community believed that only a non-human intelligence was capable of design and execution. However, within a few years crop circle creators were emerging, publicly demonstrating the techniques of circle creation. Throughout the 1990s there were several crop circle making teams at work in the south of England, each trying to out-do each other in creating the most dramatic crop circle designs, each trying to second guess what the 'believers' thought would happen next in order to engender a wide variety of belief about the circles' origin. In this the circle makers succeeded and even though they have revealed their secrets many times, like the child who refuses to believe a magician's trick is an illusion, there is a large constituency of UFO buffs who refuse to accept that the circles are made by people and not by 'other intelligences'. (Irving, Lundberg and Pilkington 2006)

By the mid-90s when *The X Files* TV series was launched, the subject of UFOlogy was no longer the cosy backwater it had been. Although it was still possible to follow the trajectory of the flying saucerers and their beliefs, UFOlogy had become something else. Opinion polls demonstrate that the reality of UFOs was now

To infinity and beyond?

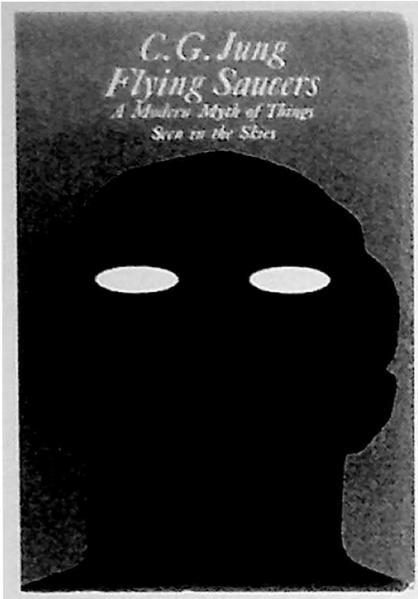
accepted by a large proportion of British society as one part of the wider spectrum of supernatural belief. For instance, when the mainstream press entertains David Icke's notion that the royal family are trans-dimensional extraterrestrial lizards, belief that aliens are visiting Earth seems rather tame by comparison!

Although UFOlogy has broadened to include many other related subjects the same dynamics are still at work. Believers in the physical reality of flying saucers continue to dominate the field, attempting to brow beat into submission anyone who does not share their interpretation of the evidence. At the other extreme debunkers refuse to accept there is a phenomenon at all. Trying to maintain the middle ground, sceptics still doubt there is any physical reality to flying saucers, while conceding complex social factors appear to be at work in the UFO phenomenon.

Science and psychology have thwarted the flying saucerers throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. Initially UFOlogists believed that the sciences, physical and social, would be their allies. There were high hopes that scientists would acknowledge the sheer numbers of UFO sightings and extraterrestrial contacts and in doing so would validate and uphold the beliefs of the flying saucerers. But the scientific method is not congruent with the wide variety of differing and transient UFO experiences, the majority of which involve only one person and which rarely offer any physical evidence for study. Science was also alarmed by the many unsubstantiated theories that UFO believers were spinning, each less provable than the last. The press, too, played their part in trivialising the UFO experience. Whilst some sections of the fourth estate tried make sense of the new belief system that was sweeping Britain, much saucer journalism was lazy, the subject offering easy column inches and guaranteed silly-season filler material. Understandably, the scientific establishment distanced themselves from the flying saucer phenomenon.

When physical scientists did venture into the UFO subculture they were unwelcome guests and treated with suspicion. The social sciences of psychology and sociology were happy to accept there was a UFO phenomenon but the evidence pointed to it being of human and not extraterrestrial origin. UFOlogists resented the intrusion of science because they believed they were being studied like laboratory animals, with the inference being that it was 'all in the mind' and that to believe in flying saucers was to display mental illness. The complex interplay of perceptual and cultural factors was ignored or actively rejected by the saucerers. This situation resulted in a stand-off whereby UFOlogists still yearned for science to take them seriously but did not trust its methodology. This was balanced by the scientific establishment being more than willing to examine the evidence, if any could be produced. The end result was mutual distrust and the stagnation of serious UFOlogical investigation.

Consequently the majority of the flying saucerers found themselves marginalized, fugitive from the scientific process and the beliefs of mainstream society. Consciously and subconsciously, this situation suited many of them, helping to create an 'us and them' situation. Leaders of UFO societies and groups could gather the true believers around them, while denouncing science and journalism as being antithetical to their cause. This became a self-fulfilling prophecy. As the theories of



Cover of Carl Jung's *Flying Saucers* book. Jung's analysis of the subject is no less relevant now than in the year of publication in 1958.

the saucerers became more complex and the witness experiences more bizarre, science withdrew to the sidelines watching the UFOlogical parade go by with increasing bemusement.

The cosmologist Carl Sagan was keenly interested in UFOs, but could find no evidence to support their physical reality. Sagan refers to the reasons why astronomers are not interested in UFOs, discussed in Chapter 4. They have remarked how belief in aliens is more like a faith or religion – for example:

After I give lectures – on almost any subject – I am asked, “Do you believe in UFOs?” I’m always quite struck by how the question is phrased, the suggestion that this is a matter of belief and not evidence. I’m almost never asked, “How good is the evidence that UFOs are alien spaceships?”

(Sagan 1977: 78)

Psychologists too were interested in, but sceptical of the UFO phenomenon. Carl Jung, who wrote one of the earliest books on flying saucers, referred to them as ‘technological angels’. In 1954, a Swiss newspaper quoted Jung, expressing a sceptical view of flying saucers. As a result, he was widely quoted in the world’s press and in the pages of *Flying Saucer Review* as being a ‘saucer believer’. When he issued a statement to the United Press, giving a true version of his opinions hardly anyone took any notice of it. This led him to draw the conclusion that ‘... news affirming the existence of UFOs is welcome, but that scepticism seems to be undesirable.’ Jung went on to state:

To believe that UFOs are real suits the general opinion, whereas disbelief is to be discouraged. This creates the impression that there is a tendency all over the world to believe in saucers and to want

To infinity and beyond?

them to be real, unconsciously helped along by a press that otherwise has no sympathy for the phenomenon.

(Jung 1959: ix)

Apparently, rather than indicating a desire to solve a mystery by the scientific process, belief in flying saucers is a personal search for meaning. As we have seen, the core belief of the flying saucerers is that UFOs and their occupants represent a higher power, one more technologically, mentally and spiritually advanced than us. In the mythologies of the UFOlogists and witnesses aliens have the power to save, destroy or change us. They are no different to the pantheon of gods to which humankind has offered fealty through the ages, offering us personal and planetary salvation or destruction if we do not act in accordance with their wishes. Psychologists interpret this as the UFO phenomenon mirroring and objectifying our deep-seated anxieties. For instance, the insistence by the aliens that humanity will destroy itself if we fail to curb nuclear wars and ecological pollution. We do not need them to tell us that, yet they do and repeatedly so. Jung would have it that this is the unconscious mind finding new and pertinent ways to show us the obvious. Flying saucer literalists believe real aliens are foretelling our real future.

For the flying saucerers belief in the sky people is essentially a search for meaning and certainty in a chaotic, rapidly changing, world in which the individual feels at the mercy of forces beyond their control. This is the religious impulse retooled by the psyche for the technological age. But in the same way that science cannot begin to address the variation in UFOlogical experience, UFOlogy is so disparate that no one religion could ever be based on it. This is why the cults and contactees are the least disingenuous of the flying saucerers, because they believe but neither demand proof nor vilify those who do not share their beliefs. Organisations such as the Aetherius Society, whatever we may think of their outrageous and naïve beliefs, are at least honest and unpretentious.

Ultimately, the flying saucerers represented a strand of individualism and diversity of thought and belief. That they refused to co-operate with mainstream science was to the detriment of the subject, but unsurprising. Each century sees a new round of supernatural beliefs being trumpeted as harbingers of dramatic change. Tales and rumours of second comings, messiahs, planetary catastrophe, contact with other intelligences, inventions that break the laws of science and so on flit through history like a collective cultural dream. They are a yearning for that which is always just beyond our grasp but which, if they could only be made manifest, would change us forever. The flying saucerers held that dream and believed their version of it was going to come true.

During the writing of this book the national media became obsessed with the notion that interest in UFOs had reached an all-time low. In the summer of 2005 one headline trumpeted 'UFO-spotters give up hunt for flying saucers' while a writer in *The Guardian* posed the question: 'Whatever happened to UFOs?' (22 April 2006). A dramatic decline in the number of reported sightings, which began in the late-1990s, was followed by the deaths of a number of the subject's major players such as

Gordon Creighton, of the *Flying Saucer Review*, and Graham Birdsall, editor of *UFO Magazine*, which closed in 2004 after a quarter of a century. The heady days when enthusiastic saucerers gathered for skywatches on windy hilltops appeared to be a thing of the past. The hardcore of UFOlogists who remained tried to play down the claim that interest in their subject was slowly ebbing away. Some blamed the Internet for changing the way the subject was practised, making the social network of groups and magazines that once characterised UFOlogy moribund in the twenty-first century. Others believed interest would eventually revive as it had following earlier UFOlogical 'dark ages' such as the early 1960s. In a forlorn statement posted on BUFORA's website in 2006, chairman Robert Rosamond accepted 'the steady decline of business' had forced the country's premier UFO group to make radical changes to the way the association was run. With interest dwindling, paid membership has been discarded along with its printed magazine and lecture programme. Remaining resources would now be concentrated on maintaining an interactive Web site as 'the sole vehicle for disseminating research, investigation reports, news and articles.' He added:

I guess we finally have to accept that the halcyon days have truly gone for the moment, though as has often been the case with this fascinating and often vexing subject, it retains the option to burst back into prominence at any time.

(www.bufora.org.uk)

Nevertheless, belief in the supernatural, as opposed to UFOs in particular, is clearly no less common today than it was in 1947 when the age of the flying saucer was first born. From a time when a small minority were prepared to state publicly that they 'believed in flying saucers', that belief has now become almost commonplace. An opinion poll carried out in 1998 found that half the British population believe that life exists on other planets and a third believe 'that extraterrestrials have already visited the Earth' (*Daily Mail* 2 February 1998). Clearly, public belief in flying saucers is as strong as it ever was, even if UFOlogy itself is in decline. Significantly, the survey found slightly higher levels of belief in telepathy, ESP and ghosts (38 percent), but more respondents claimed to have personal experience of these phenomena than claimed direct encounters with extraterrestrials.

Public interest in UFOs, as in all other areas of supernatural belief, has always waxed and waned in response to a range of complex social, religious and economic factors. Interest in spiritualism, for instance, grew as a result of the dreadful loss of life suffered by families in the two world wars. At the time of writing, while UFOlogy is said to be in decline, belief in angels and ghost-hunting are enjoying a remarkable revival with a slew of television programmes, Web sites and magazines launched to cater for a new generation of enthusiasts and believers. Like ghosts and spiritualism, UFOlogy can be described as a rather long-lived craze which attracted individuals looking for answers to what they perceive to be a perplexing and unsolved mystery. When the accumulated evidence failed to provide proof of the reality of extraterrestrial visitors, demonic entities or beings from other dimensions some moved on to find the answers they sought in other, more fashionable, areas of the paranormal and within the 'new age' movement.

To infinity and beyond?

In the half century that followed the birth of UFOlogy, the first basic sightings of unidentified flying objects in the post-war skies have evolved into a complex and multi-faceted modern myth that incorporates a range of topics from crop circles to Government cover-ups and alien abductions. Each generation finds its own unique way to express supernatural beliefs and faith in flying saucers and aliens is ultimately a product of our time, as belief in witchcraft was a characteristic of the Middle Ages. For the twentieth century UFOlogy was just one manifestation of humanity's long and lonely quest to find an answer to the vexed question: 'Are we alone?' It remains to be seen if that question will finally be answered in the new millennium which lies ahead of us.

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Index

Entries in **bold** denote illustrations.

2001: A Space Odyssey 70, 177, 185, 193

abductees 90, 190, 208–9; *see also*
Villas Boas, A.

Abercrombie, G. 82

Adamski, G. 35, 38–46, 49–52, 58, 60, 61, 68, 77, 90–3, 94, 97, 99, 100, **100**, 102, 108, 110, 118, 120, 126, 141, 161

Aerial Phenomena Research
Organisation (APRO) 27

Aetherius Society 61, 72–89, 106, 123, 125, 135, 136, 154, 197, 206, 213

Albino, M. 60

Albion 182, **183**

Aldrich, J. 9

Allan, C. 92–3

Allingham, C. 91–2

Alternative London 188

Anatomy of a Phenomenon 186

Anthony, G. 67, 144

anthroposophy 128–9

apocalyptic fears 124, 213; *see also*
Cold War

Appleton, C. 95–105, 130

Arnold, K. 4–6, 5, 10, 23, 169

Arthur, King 182

Atlantis 76

Atlantis and Lemuria 41

Atlee, C. 112

Attingham Group 108–10, 119

Atwill, R. 142–4

Aubeck, C. 4

Auden, W.H. 117
autokinesis 152–3, 176
Avebury 75, 77–9
Awareness 169
Ayto, J. 4

balloons 11, 15, 54, 138, 175

Banbury 195–6

Barker, G. 28–9

Barton, L. 'N.' 35

Bath, Marquis of 154–5

Beatles 185–6, 188

Beer, L. 166–7, 170, 192

Behind the Flying Saucers 24

Bender, A.K. 27–30, 36, 127–8

Benham, P. 76

Bentine, M. 68

Berlitz, C. 199–200

Bermuda Triangle 199

Bernelle, A. 40–3, 48, 50–1

Bernhard, Prince 58, 60

Betteridge, D. 16

Bible and Flying Saucers, The 126

Birch, N. 53, 166–7, **166**

Birdsall, G. 214

Birmingham Evening Dispatch 96–7, 100, 103

Black, S. 152, 176

Blake, W. 128

Bloomfield, I. 109

Bowen, C. 36, 133–4, 161–4, 196–7

Bowie, D. 185

Boyd, J. 184

Bradbury, R. 25

Briggs, F. 56–7

British Flying Saucer Bureau (BFSB)

18, 30–4, **48**, 133, 136, 160

British UFO Research Association
(BUFORA) 62, 133–4, 145, 165–
70, 192, 194–5, 197, 204, 214

British UFO Society (BUFOS) 195

Broad Haven 197–8, 200–2

Broadhurst, P. 180, 182–3

Brooke, A. 121

Browning, F. 58, 60

Burgess, S. 155

Burnett, H. 197

Index

- Byron, B. 195
- Caddy, E. 111, 113, 115, 116
- Caddy, P. 110–16; *see also* Findhorn
- Cahn, J.P. 24
- Camilla, Countess 188
- Campbell, I. 76
- Campbell, S. 92–3
- Carruthers, J. 158, 175
- Cartmel, R. 130–1
- cartoons about UFOs 23, 37
- Castle Leslie 39–40, 52, 188, 189;
see also Lusty Beg Island
- Chapman, R. 92, 161, 163–4, 175
- Chariots of the Gods?* 42, 192, 193
- Chiles, C. 12
- Chladni, E. 63–4
- Christian UFO Research Association
135–8
- Christianity and UFOs 104–5, 124–38
- Church of Aquarius 95
- Church Times* 135
- Churchill, W. 26–7, 39, 54
- Clancarty, Lord – *see* le Poer Trench,
B.
- Clarke, A.C. 45, 62, 68–71
- Cleary-Baker, J. 145, 147, 167
- Close Encounters of the Third Kind* 3,
66, 136–7, 192, 203–5, 208
- Cohen, C. 124
- Cold War 10–11, 15–16, 18, 26, 37,
44, 50, 53, 81–2, 93, 94–5, 113,
128
- Collier, B. 60
- Colorado University studies 62, 162,
192
- Combe Martin 85
- Condon, E. 152
- Contact (UK) 165, 168–70, 188
- contactees 90, 93, 94–5, 100, 105,
106, 119, 124–5, 128, 163, 192–
3, 196; *see also* Adamski, G.;
Appleton, C.; Coombs, B. and P.;
Extraterrestrial Hypothesis; Villas
Boas, A.
- Cooke, J. 94–5, 103
- Coombs, B. and P. 198–201
- Cosmic Botherhood Association 168
- Cosmic Voice* 81–3
- Cove, G. 128–9
- Cramp, L.G. 48, 49, 166
- Creem* 185
- Creighton, G. 36, 98, 103, 132–3,
159–60, 160, 162–3, 196, 214
- Crombie, R.O. 115
- crop circles 210
- Crowley, A. 40
- Cummings, A.J. 22
- Daily Express* 202, 204, 206
- Daily Mail* 178, 196, 214
- Daily Mirror* 78–9, 146, 148–50
- Daily Telegraph* 192
- Dale, J. 97
- Dalrymple, W. 104–5
- Daly, P. 152, 175–6
- Darbishire, S. 46–9, 47, 51, 58, 93,
167
- Davies, D. 202
- Davies, O. 92
- Davies, P. 67
- Davis, A. 196
- Day of the Triffids* 139
- Day the Earth Stood Still, The* 25, 26,
51
- Delair, J.B. 169
- demonic associations with UFOs 106,
124–38
- Dempster, D. 34–6, 36, 158–9
- Dianetics – *see* Scientology; Hubbard
L.R.
- Dickson, P. 103–4
- Dowding, H. and M. 41–2, 48, 53,
59, 60–1, 112, 118
- Downing, B. 126–7
- Doyle, C. 60
- Dr Strangelove* 40
- Dr Who* 40
- Dragon and the Disc, The* 200
- Duke of Earls Court, The* 191
- Duncan, J. 92
- Durant, R. 192
- Dutch royal family 58, 60
- Dyfed Enigma, The* 134, 200

Flying Saucerers

- Eade, C. 20–1, 24, 55; *see also* *Sunday Dispatch*
- Eden, A. 16
- Edwards, A. (N.) 112–3
- Edwards, G. 201
- Eisenhower, D.D. 83
- Elizabeth, Queen 136–7
- Empire News, The* 81–2, 102
- English, M. 186
- Evans, C. 196
- Evans, H. 4, 7, 201
- Evening Standard* 66
- Exorcist, The* 136
- Extraterrestrial Hypothesis (ETH) 11, 67, 124, 132; *see also* abductees; contactees
- fairies 105, 163, 200, 209
- Faithful, M. 185, 188
- False Memory Syndrome 209–10
- Fate* 6, 7
- Faulkner, G. 93, 148–52
- Festinger, L. 124–5
- Findhorn 110–16, 119, 121; *see also* Caddy, P.
- ‘Flying Pancake’ (V1-73) 8
- Flying Saucer Club 27
- Flying saucer clubs 27–33, 158, 165, 193–4, 211; *see also* Aerial Phenomena Research Organisation; British Flying Saucer Bureau; British UFO Research Association; British UFO Society; Contact (UK); International Flying Saucer Bureau; International UFO Research Association; London UFO Research Organisation; Northern UFO Network (NUFON)
- Flying Saucer From Mars* 91–2
- Flying Saucer News* 27, 32, 33–4, 62
- Flying Saucer Review (FSR)* 13, 34–6, 51, 57, 92, 99, 132–3, 152–3, 158–61, 170, 174, 191, 196, 197, 204, 212, 214
- Flying Saucer Service Ltd, The 36
- Flying Saucer Vision, The* 179, 181, 184
- Flying Saucer, The* 15–17
- Flying Saucers* 65, 212
- Flying Saucers and Commonsense* 92, 161
- Flying Saucers and the People Who See Them* 175–6, 193
- Flying Saucers and the Straight Line Mystery* 118
- Flying Saucers and the Three Men* 29
- Flying Saucers are Real, The* 18
- Flying Saucers Have Landed* 26, 35, 38, 40–4, 49–52, 90, 92, 119
- flying saucers, first use of term 1
- flying saucers, 1950s British ‘flap’ 25–7
- flying saucers, first reports of crashes 19–20
- flying saucers, first sightings in 1947 4–9; *see also* Arnold, K.
- flying saucers, first sightings in Britain 7–10, 13
- flying saucers, photographs – *see* photographs
- flying saucers – *see also* UFO
- Flying Saucers: Real and Spiritual Aspects* 128
- foo fighters 8
- Fort, C. 6, 22, 42, 187
- Foster-Forbes, J. 76–7
- Freud, C. 162–3
- From Outer Space to You* 128
- From Worlds Afar* 121–2
- Fry, D. 114, 161
- FSR* – *see* *Flying Saucer Review*
- FSR Publications Ltd* 161
- Fuller, J. 203
- Gainford, Lord 206
- Galley, M.R. 206
- ‘Gerald’ (abductee) 190
- Gibbs-Smith, C. 20, 196
- Gifford, B. 191
- Girvan, W. 35–6, 43–4, 57, 92, 160–1
- Glastonbury 180–4, 182, 187

Index

- Goddard, J. 119
Goddard, V. 61–2, 108–10, 114, 168
Goldsmith, M. 44–5
Goodchild, J. 187
Gorbachev, M. 16
Gosling, R. 201–2
government ‘cover up’ 16–17, 54, 61, 167, 203, 215; *see also* Mantell, T.
Gowan, S. 111
graffiti 155, 157
Graham, B. 126
Grasso, D. 126
Green, C. 124
Green, H. 13
Green, J. 184, 189
Greenhough, R. 20
Greenwell, J.R. 65
greys 94, 208
Guardian, The 213
Guide to the UFO Phenomena, A 194
- Hailstone, B. 54
Harding, F. 174
Harmer, D. 28
Harney, J. 151, 209
Harold, C. 199–200
Harrison, G. 186
Harrison, J. 26
Hart, B.L. 17
Heard, G. 22–3, 43, 130
Hebidge, H. 141
Hesleton, P. 118
Hicks, P. 55, 57
Hill, B. and B. 129, 132, 175, 176, 203
Hill-Norton, P. 137–8
Hoare, P. 38, 44
hoaxing 152–3, 170–2, 171,
Hodges, C. 188
Holliday, T. 200
Holton, D. 140–1, 144, 147–8, 156–7
Hooton, R. 150
Hopkins, B. 208
Horsley, P. 49, 56, 56, 57–8, 60, 112
Houghton-Bentley, F. 109
House of Lords 205–7
House, J. 77, 79
- Howard, J. 58
Hubbard, L.R. 75
Hughes, R. 27, 30, 33–4
Humanoids, The 164
Humphries, C. 109
Huxley, A. 22
Hyde, M. 9
Hynek, J.A. 65, 65, 162, 164, 203
hypnosis 164, 208–10
- Inglesby, E. (P.) 53, 130–2, 135–6, 136, 138
Inside the Spaceships 51
International Flying Saucer Bureau (IFSB) 27–30, 127
International Flying Saucer Day 160
International Sky Scouts 168
International Times (IT) 184, 186
International UFO Research Association 195
Is Another World Watching – see Riddle of the Flying Saucers
It Came From Outer Space 25
- Jagger, M. 187, 188; *see also* Rolling Stones; Faithful, M.
James, M.R. 40
Jones, R.V. 63–4, 63,
Juliana, Queen 58, 60
Jung, C.G. 1, 23, 64–5, 181, 196, 212–13
- Keech, M. 124–5
Keel, J.A. 7, 132, 133, 162–4
Kellar, K. 79
Kent, P. 99
Kenworthy, D. (Lord Strabolgi) 205–7
Keyhoe, D. 18–19, 19, 23–4, 28, 130, 161, 165
Kimberley, Earl 206
- Kinder Scout 87, 88–9, 88
King, G. 72–89, 93, 95, 108, 125, 197; *see also* Aetherius Society
Kneale, N. 25
Knewstub, G. 133, 136, 160, 167
Kubrick, Stanley 70

- Lachman, G. 185
Laurie, W. 35
Lawrence, R. 74
le Poer Trench, B. 61, 99, 109, 114,
137, 158–61, 159, 162–3, 167–
9, 205–7
Leary, T. 22
Lemmings on the Edge 189
Lennon, J. 185
Leslie, D. 34–5, 38–46, 41, 46–52,
48, 54, 57, 58, 60, 68, 77, 90,
118, 120, 159, 188–90
Levin, B. 52
Levitt, Z. 129
leys 117–19, 187, 200; *see also*
Glastonbury
Listener, The 187
Lobrutto, V. 70
Loch Ness monster 170, 192, 200
Loftus, E. 210
London UFO Research Organisation
(LUFORO) 165–7
Long, M. 119
Lovell, B. 44, 45, 67–8, 109–10
LSD 181–2, 184
Lusty Beg Island 188–190
Lynch, D. 191
- Maclaine, S. 111
Maclean, D. 111
'Magic Alex' 186
Magonia 209
Mantell, T. 11, 11, 19, 28, 62
Mass Observation 8–9
Mattam, H. 81
McCarthy, C. 169–70
McCartney, P. 186
McIver, S. 27, 62, 161, 192, 204
Medling, S. 111
men in black 28–9, 98, 127–8
Menger, H. 128
Menzel, D. 65–9
Metropolitan Police 82–4
Meyer, A. 46–7
Michael, C. 127
Michel, A. 118
- Michell, J. 76, 106, 117, 179–85,
179, 187, 190, 191, 207
Miles, B. 181–2, 184, 186, 188
Miller, H. 180, 182–3
Miller, K. 187
Millican, A. 131, 136
Mills, C. 150
Missing Time 208
Montague-Browne, A. 54
Montgomery, D. 35–6
Moore, P. 48–9, 68, 69, 93
Moseley, J. 29
Mountbatten, Lord 21, 55–57, 60,
136–7
Moxon, O. 35
MUFOB 149, 197, 209; *see also*
Magonia
Muley, F. 206
- National Investigations Committee on
Aerial Phenomena (NICAP) 165,
192
Neville, R. 187
new UFOlogy 209
Newman, B. 15–17, 19, 22, 24
News of the World 95, 142
Northern UFO Network (NUFON)
194
- Ohlsson, A. 71
Old Straight Track, The 117–19
Oliver, N. 169, 204
Operation Mainbrace 27
Operation Starlight 86, 89
opinion polls 37, 53, 66, 124, 161,
176, 192–3, 203, 210–11; *see*
also Mass Observation
Oram, N. 115–6, 178, 189–90
Order of the Cross 76
Otter, L. 74
Outer Space Review 107
Oz 187
- Pace, T. 194
Paget, J. and P. 199
Palmer, K. 154, 195–197
Palmer, M. 184

Index

- Palmer, R. 7, 171
Parker, M. 109, 112
Passport to Magonia 163, 209
Philip, Prince 56, 57–60, 83, 109,
111–2, 136–7
photographs of UFOs 25, 43, 44, 45,
46, 47, 52, 93, 148–52, 161, 166
Pilkington, M. 203–5, 210
Pillinger, C. 25
Pink Floyd 184
Pioneers of Space 90
Piper at the Gates of Dawn 184
Pixley, O. 76
Plunkett, D. 27–8, 29, 30–2, 31, 160;
see also British Flying Saucer
Bureau
Plunkett, E. 18, 28, 30
Project 1947 9
Project Blue Book 13, 18, 65–6, 162
Project Grudge 18
Project Mogul 15
Project Sign (Project Saucer) 11, 12,
18–19
Psychic News 40, 72, 87, 108
psychics 30, 60, 61, 109, 122–3; see
also Aetherius Society; Findhorn;
telepathy
psychosocial hypothesis 209
Pugh, L. 122
Pugh, R.J. 134–6, 197, 200–1
Purdy, K. 19

Quanjer, J. 109, 110, 114–6, 168–9,
188–90
Quatermass Experiment, The 25–6, 44
Quicksilver Messenger 179

Rainey, M. 184, 186
Ramey, R. 15
Randles, J. 97–8, 194, 204
Rankin, R. 8
Reagan, R.W. 16
Rees, E. 144, 147
Rees, M. 175
Reynolds News 24, 84
Richard, K. 185; see also Jagger, M.;
Rolling Stones
Richards, G.T. 20
Richardson, C. 108
Riddle of the Flying Saucers, The 21–
3
Rimmer, J. 151, 197, 209
Ripperston Farm 198, 201
Robinson, A. 74
Rogers, K. 168, 195
Rogerson, P. 17, 209
Rolling Stones 185; see also Jagger,
M.; Richard, K.
Rosamund, R. 214
Rose, S. 131
Roswell 13–17, 14
Round Trip to Hell in a Flying Saucer
127
Rump, R. 140
Runcom Weekly News 94
Ruppelt, E. 13
Rutherford, E. 8–9

Sagan, C. 212
Sams, C. 184
Sams, G. 186
Sandys, C. 109–10
Sandys, D. 54
Saucerful of Secrets, A 184
Saunders, N. 188–9
Schulgen, G. 11
science and UFOs 24, 44, 45, 48–9,
62–71, 211
Scientology 75
Scott, M. 111
Scott-Elliott, W.J. 41
Screeton, P. 106
Scully, F. 24, 130
Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence
(SETI) 67–8
Sharp, M. 187
Shuttlewood, A. 121, 125, 135, 139–
57, 195, 197
Silence Group, The 29; see also men
in black
Simon, B. 164
Simpson, D. 195
Sky People, The 167

Flying Saucerers

- sky watches 31, 79, 169; *see also*
Warminster
- Skyways and Landmarks* 119
- Skyways and Landmarks Revisited*
118
- Society for the Investigation of
Unidentified Object Phenomena
(SIUFOP) 152–3, 195
- Southall, C. 171
- Southcott, J. 105
- Space Gravity and the Flying Saucer*
48
- Special Branch 81–5
- Spencer Jones, H. 24, 45, 66, 69
- spiritualism 30, 40, 60–1, 72, 93, 94,
103, 108; *see also* Aetherius
Society
- Sputnik 103–4, 164
- Stack Rocks 200, 200
- Stanway, R. 133–4, 136, 194
- Star Dust* crash 28
- Star of Ill Omen* 17
- Star Wars* 205
- Steiner, R. 128–9
- Stephenson, N. 165–7
- Stevens, P. 205–6
- Stonehenge 185
- Strabolgi, Lord 205–7
- Stranger at My Door* 40
- Stranger From Venus* 50–1
- Sun Trolley 190
- Sun, The* 204
- Sunday Chronicle* 25
- Sunday Dispatch* 21–5, 61
- Sunday Express* 175
- Sunday Express* 23–5
- Sunday Graphic* 130, 135
- Sunday People* 95, 99, 100–3, 147
- Sunday Pictorial* 60, 113
- Sunday Telegraph* 162, 203
- Swedenborg, E. 128
- Taylor, P. 22
- telepathy 43, 46, 50, 61, 76, 92, 97,
100, 112–4, 119; *see also*
Aetherius Society; Findhorn;
psychics
- Terry, G. 174
- Theosophical Society 41, 60
- They Knew Too Much About Flying
Saucers* 28, 30
- Thing From Another World, The* 142
- Thing From Outer Space, The* 25
- Third Ear band 190
- Thomas, R.P. 9
- Thompson, C.V.R. 8
- Thompson, M. 119–23, 120, 121,
123, 125
- Tiley, Rev 98, 104
- Times, The* 194–5
- Tizard, H. 54
- Tomlin, D. 190
- Tredegar, Lord 40
- Trevelyan, G. 61, 108–10, 114; *see
also* Attingham Group; Wrekin
Trust
- True* 19, 24
- Turnbull, H. 200
- Twining, N.F. 11
- Two Worlds, The* 60, 72
- UFO – *see also* flying saucer
- UFO* [1956 film] 125
- UFO Club 184
- UFO Experience, The* 164
- UFO Investigators Network (UFOIN)
204
- UFO Magazine* 214
- UFO memorabilia 33, 34, 165, 193,
195
- UFO Register, The* 169
- UFO, first use of term 2, 19
- UFOlogy, American 3, 5–6, 8, 192–3
- UFOs and Their Mission Impossible*
129
- UFOs: A British Viewpoint* 194
- UFOs: Flying Saucers Over Britain?*
175
- UFOs: Operation Trojan Horse* 132
- UFOs: Unidentified, Undeniable* 194
- UFOs: What on Earth is Happening?*
129
- Uloth, A. 74
- Unexplained, The* 201

Index

- Unger, G. 128–9
Uninvited, The 199
Universal Link 122–3
- V1-73 'Flying Pancake' 8
Vallee, J. 132, 162–3, 186, 203, 209
Vandenburg, H. 13
Vedas 41
Venus Speaks 76–7, 108
Villas Boas, A. 104, 132, 3–164, 164, 190
von Daniken, E. 42, 192, 193
- Wade, G. 188–90
Wales — see Broad Haven; *Dyfed Enigma, The; Welsh Triangle, The*
- Walker, J.S. 45
Wall, P. 53
War of the Worlds, The 25, 139
Ward, G. 53, 54
Warminster 75, 125, 139–57
Warminster Mystery, The 121, 143, 145, 153
Warrington, P. 194
Watkins, A. 117
Watson, N. 193–4
Watson, R. 108
Waugh, N. 10
Waycott, C. 172–4
Wedd, T. 117–9
Weldon, J. 129
Wellbeloved, J. 206
Welles, O. 25
Wells, H.G. 16, 44, 139
Welsh Triangle, The 197, 199, 201
West, A. 169
Western Mail 135, 197, 201
Western Telegraph 200
Westrum, R. 62, 67
Weymouth, N. 186
Wheatley, D. 17
When Prophecy Fails 124
Whitted, J. 12
Who Pilots the Flying Saucers? 128
Wilcox, D. 196
Wild at Heart 191
Wilkins, H.P. 9
Wilkins, H.T. 28
Willey, R. 172–4
Williamson, G.H. 50
Wilson, D. 169
Wood, M. 137
Woodman, R.G.'T.' 144, 145, 153–4, 157
Woolley, R. 66
Wrekin Trust 61; *see also* Trevelyan, G.
Wright, N. 130–1
Wyndham, J. 139
- X Files, The* 208, 210
- You are Responsible* 80
- Zeigler, P. 55
Zuckerman, S. 57

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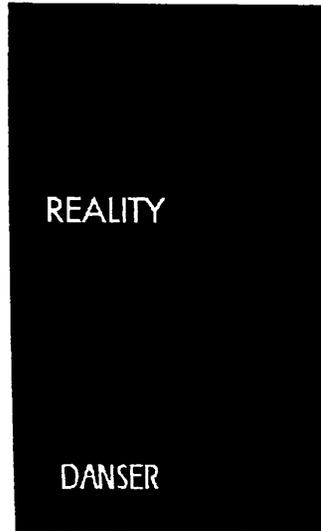
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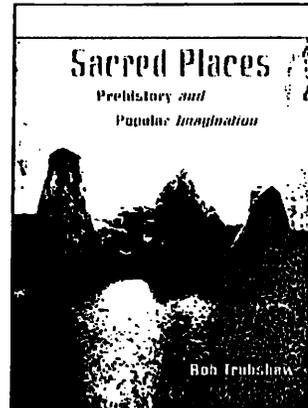


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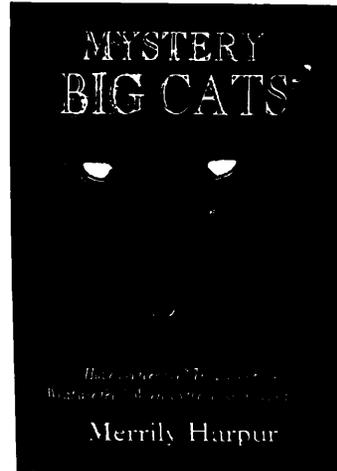
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Merrily Harpur is a cartoonist and writer. She has published three books: *The Nightmares of Dream Topping*, *Unheard of Ambridge* and *Pig Overboard*. She divides her time between Dorset and Ireland, where she founded the Strokestown International Poetry Festival.

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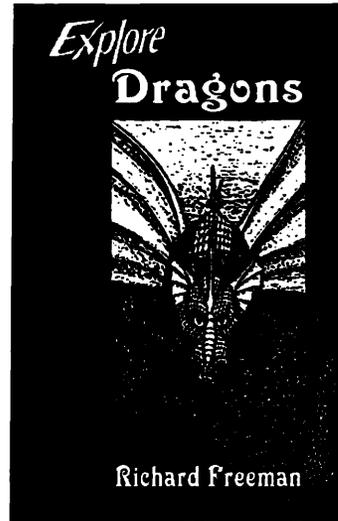
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Richard Freeman is a former zookeeper and has a degree in zoology. He is the zoological director of the Centre for Fortean Zoology in Exeter. A full-time cryptozoologist, he has searched for monsters and mystery animals in Indo-China, Sumatra, and Mongolia as well as in the UK.

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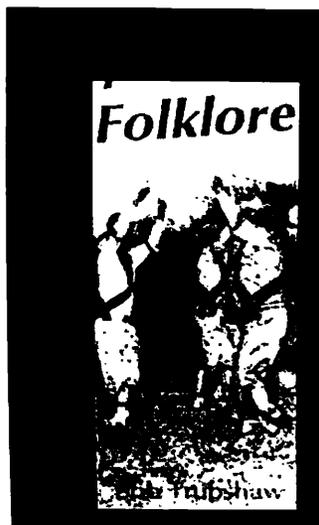
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There have been fascinating developments in the study of folklore in the last twenty-or-so years, but few books about British folklore and folk customs reflect these exciting new approaches. As a result there is a huge gap between scholarly approaches to folklore studies and 'popular beliefs' about the character and history of British folklore. *Explore Folklore* is the first book to bridge that gap, and to show how much 'folklore' there is in modern day Britain.

Explore Folklore shows there is much more to folklore than morris dancing and fifty-something folksingers! The rituals of 'what we do on our holidays', funerals, stag nights and 'lingerie parties' are all full of 'unselfconscious' folk customs. Indeed, folklore is something that is integral to all our lives – it is so intrinsic we do not think of it as being 'folklore'.

The implicit ideas underlying folk lore and customs are also explored. There might appear to be little in common between people who touch wood for luck (a 'tradition' invented in the last 200 years) and legends about people who believe they have been abducted and subjected to intimate body examinations by aliens. Yet, in their varying ways, these and other 'folk beliefs' reflect the wide spectrum of belief and disbelief in what is easily dismissed as 'superstition'.

Explore Folklore provides a lively introduction to the study of most genres of British folklore, presenting the more contentious and profound ideas in a readily accessible manner.

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Flying Saucerers

A social history of UFOlogy

David Clarke and Andy Roberts

Since August 1945 the Western world has been fascinated with the notion of 'flying saucers', subsequently termed 'Unidentified Flying Objects' or 'UFOs'. Numerous 'experts' have offered explanations, often involving extraterrestrial entities. have been intentional 'psychological con men'.

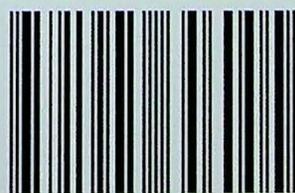
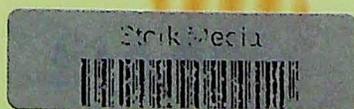
The various opinions of these 'experts' generated extensive tabloid and media attention in the 1950s and 60s with the result that reported sightings became wrapped up in any number of beliefs and legends. David Clarke and Andy Roberts carefully unpick the origin of these beliefs, looking carefully at the key individuals involved. This reveals how the paranoia of the Cold War era generated its own myths and also shows that many aspects of the subsequent 'New Age' ideology had their origins in the UFO cults.

Flying Saucerers is not written for people who believe in UFOs. Readers are not expected to believe in their 'nuts and bolts' existence, still less the prospects of a Close Encounter of the Third Kind. Instead it is both a social history and a history of ideas, revealing how the notions of a few inspired 'experts' evolved into one of the most pervasivemodern day myths.

David Clarke is a British university lecturer. He obtained his PhD in 'Folklore and Cultural Tradition' in 1999, and now teaches Journalism Studies at Sheffield Hallam University. He also lectures on the subjects of supernatural belief and urban legends at the National Centre for English Cultural Tradition (part of the University of Sheffield).

Andy Roberts is a veteran fortean writer, researcher and broadcaster. He has written eight books on the subjects of UFOs and folklore and has contributed to many journals including *The Guardian* and *Fortean Times*.

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