

The night of bright lights over Britain

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By Ronald Kershaw

Nocturnal dog walkers, sober and responsible air traffic controllers and normally coherent citizens of good standing leapt to their telephones in the early hours of yesterday to seek advice and ask for an explanation of trails of fire, flashing lights and incandescent glows which filled the night sky.

In Manchester, 40 people telephoned the police to tell of bright lights illuminating their bedrooms and in Stockport there was a report of "an object" landing in a field. Investigating police found nothing. At Manchester Airport, air traffic controllers saw the sky illuminated by an unexplained bright light and at Hucknall, near Nottingham, an object with a fiery tail whizzed past a local resident to land in a field. Again, nothing was found.

From Bristol and North Wales to the Scottish border, reports of unusual happenings in the sky flooded into police stations. A woman at Allerton Bywater near Leeds told of a white flare in the sky which lit up her bedroom. When she looked out she saw "a trail of fire". A man walking his dog through Adel Woods, Leeds, saw a "maroon flare" which lit up the sky and another man in Adel telephoned the police to say he had seen a white flare at about 500 feet in the air between Adel and Yeadon.

North Yorkshire police said they received nine separate reports from different parts of the county of sightings in the sky. Mr John Ward, of Newlands Drive, Acomb, York, reported "something like a large white flare" passing overhead.

The multiplicity of reports made it fairly clear that some sort of galactic phenomenon occurred and that this was not a purely imaginative rerun of Star Wars.

Early reports that the night lights had been produced by falling space debris entering the atmosphere were quickly discounted by an unusually confident explanation from the Ministry of Defence.

Two showers of meteorites entered the atmosphere at 12.30 am, the ministry said, and disintegration caused the lights in the sky.

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