

27/12/80  
EVENING ARGUS

# Fireball lights up the sky

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AN INVESTIGATION started today into a "fireball" seen over Sussex on Christmas night.

Spotted shortly after 9 p.m., it was visible all over the county and reports of sightings from as far north as Yorkshire reached police and RAF stations.

Mr John Mason, a representative of the meteor section of the British Astronomical Association, is co-ordinating information on the sighting.

"It was seen clearly for about 45 seconds before breaking up into six pieces and disintegrating over Surrey.

"I particularly want to hear from people who saw it pass directly overhead so we can plot its course and work out its orbit in the solar system," he said.

Mr Mason believes the brilliant fireball was a meteorite or satellite burning up as it re-entered the earth's atmosphere at more than 15,000 mph.

Anyone with information should ring Mr Mason on Slindon 336.

I. LAWES

Man mugged

I. LAWES

14—EVENING ARGUS, Monday, December 29, 1980

# Fireball was a Soviet rocket

by Danny Buckland

EXPERTS have solved the great Sussex fireball mystery.

The object which left a sparkling trail across the sky on Christmas night was at first believed to be a meteor.

But experts from the British Astronomical Association have now established that it was the third stage of a rocket used to launch Russian satellite Cosmos 749 five years ago.

The fireball, spotted shortly after 9 p.m., was visible all over Sussex, and Mr John Mason, of Slindon, representative of the association's meteor section, said he has had 250 phone calls confirming the sighting.

"Because of publicity in the Evening Argus, we were able to identify the rocket within two days, and that is pretty quick," he said.

"The rocket was seen clearly for about 45 seconds before breaking up.

"As far as we know no pieces reached the ground, and it disintegrated in the Uckfield area about 25 miles up," said Mr Mason.

# COMET NAMED AFTER GARDEN ASTRONOMER

The comet seen in the sky over much of Britain on Christmas night is to be named after an amateur astronomer.

Mr Roy Panther, 54, a printer, from Walgrave, Northants, spotted the comet through a home-made telescope in his back-garden conservatory and immediately registered his claim to be the first one to sight it.

A telegram from the Smithsonian Institute in America confirmed Mr Panther was the first to see the comet. "This means it will now be known as Panther's Comet, so my name will go down for posterity," he said yesterday.