

Mystery of lights in sky is solved

THE mysterious lights seen by hundreds of people on Christmas night have been positively identified as being part of a Russian satellite, the Echo was told today by the British Astronomical Society.

The assistant director of meteor section of the society, Mr. John Mason, said the brilliant lights were caused by the rocket section of Cosmos 749 breaking up on re-entry into the atmosphere.

"The rocket, which launched the satellite, had slowly been spiralling to the earth over several years," he explained.

The lights, which were described as looking like a big star that exploded, were originally thought to be a meteor. But Mr. Mason said as they started getting phone calls about the occurrence they were able to piece

things together and discovered what it really was.

When it was decided it was a rocket there were four possible satellites it could have come from, Mr. Mason said. "But from its orbit before it burnt up we were able to make a final identification," he said.

A Needles coastguard unknowingly gave a very accurate description of what he saw. He was quoted in Saturday's Echo as describing it as being like a huge rocket. "It could be seen for more than 25 seconds — longer than a meteor," he said.

The Russians launch satellites at the rate of about one a week, Mr. Mason said, and the last one to break up over Britain was two years ago.

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