

# On the trail of those elusive UFOs

**EARLY** in December last year a number of people claimed they saw a most unusual object in the sky above Elvington, near York.

An investigation was carried out by the York Astronomical Society, which concluded that the object was a very bright fireball. But others were not quite so sure. Mark Birdsall, co-founder of the Yorkshire Unidentified Flying Objects Society (YUFOS), believes that there were two quite separate objects in the sky that night.

**UFO SPOTTERS** have been the subject of the public's derision for many years. They have been pilloried for having over-active imaginations and blasted for inducing innocent people to believe that the meteorite they saw was really a flying saucer complete with armed extra-terrestrials.

But is this fair? Nobody knows for certain just how large the universe is; what it contains; and how it was created.

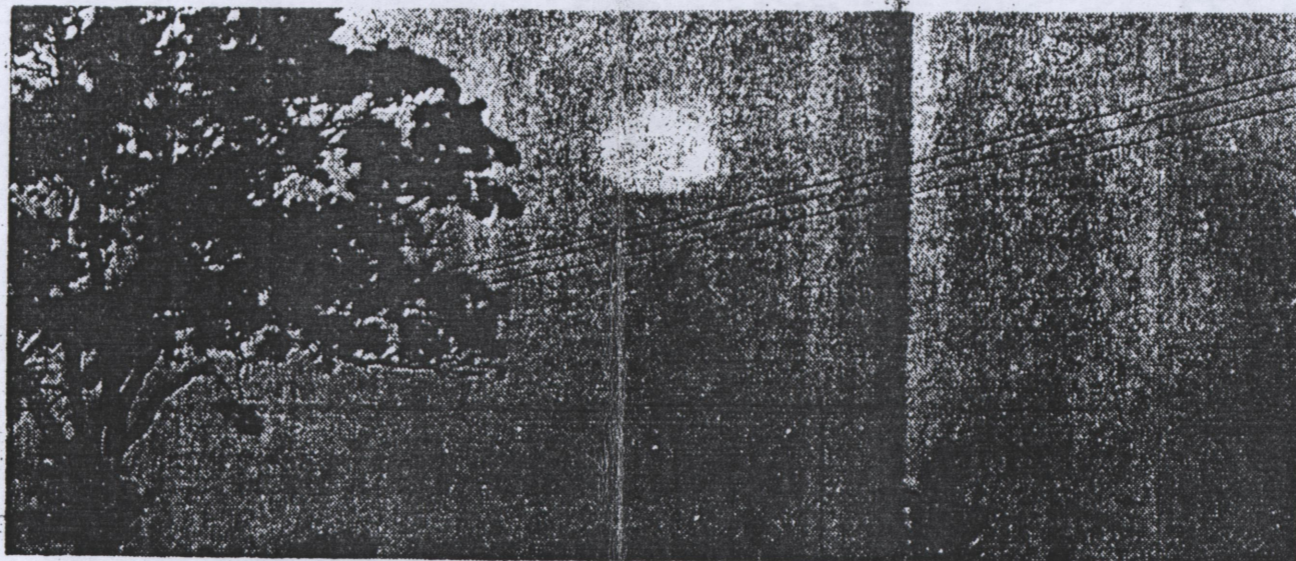
We all have our views on this eternal and inexhaustible subject so why do we deride those who happen to believe that there are forces about which are beyond our comprehension?

So — bearing this in mind and determined to keep my incredulity in check — I ventured out into the unknown to interview two men who have dedicated their life

to proving that unidentified flying objects do exist.

The venue was amusingly bizarre in the circumstances — on the eleventh floor of one of those massive high-rise blocks of flats so beloved by planners of yesteryear.

Yes, 87 Lovell Par Towers, Leeds, seemed the appropriate place for the nerve centre of one of Yorkshire's newest societies: The Yorkshire Unidentified Flying Objects Society (YUFOS).



The mystery object seen near York in September 1971.



Mr Mark Birdsall and Mr Bill Tree of the Yorkshire Unidentified Flying Objects Society (YUFOS).



By  
**Robert  
Beaumont**

Certainly, it is a good vantage point from which to study any extra-terrestrial phenomena that happen to be passing!

There, waiting for me,

were Mr Mark Birdsall and Mr Bill Tree. Mark is the research director of YUFOS and Bill is an investigator.

Bill told his story first: outlining the day he "saw" a flying saucer, which changed his whole life.

"I was about 12 years old and was helping my father in our allotment on the New Wortley Road Recreation ground on the outskirts of Leeds. The allotment was at the highest part of the ground and from there one can see for several miles over Leeds," he explained.

"It was a sunny afternoon and my father and brother, aged 10, were on their knees I was digging about 10 yards in front of them. As I was stretching my back, I looked up to my left and there in the blue sky was what appeared to be a very fast moving star or shooting star," he said.

"He thought the police might think I was odd and told me to keep the incident to myself," said Bill. "But he changed his mind when he saw the local paper on the Monday."

For there was an article saying that about 200 people in different parts of Leeds had seen a UFO flying over the city. Even two policemen had noted it down in their books.

"But I was the only person to see it at close quarters. I think it was a privilege," he said. "I can hear all you cynics saying that Bill dreamt up the whole incident; that nothing of the sort ever happened."

But, having talked to Bill, I am convinced that he is convinced that he saw a flying saucer. He is a sincere, responsible man who runs a successful television rental business. He is certainly not a crank.

Neither is Mark Birdsall, an articulate 25-year-old who set up YUFOS with his

with a less prominent dome below. All the way round the centre of the outer edge of the saucer were round portholes. This part was slowly rotating, whilst the top dome was spinning," Bill explained.

Bill could not believe what he was seeing and shouted to his father and brother: "Look, look a flying saucer, right behind you."

But, by the time they turned round, the flying saucer had gone.

Not surprisingly, Bill's father was rather sceptical and when Bill suggested reporting the incident to the police, his father said no. "He thought the police might think I was odd and told me to keep the incident to myself," said Bill. "But he changed his mind when he saw the local paper on the Monday."

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ting enough feedback from Contact and it would be better to branch out on our own," he said.

One quite extraordinary incident and its aftermath persuaded Mark that Yorkshire needed an independent society.

"It concerns a lorry driver who was driving through Yorkshire from the south. He was married but he was visiting another woman, which is why he remains anonymous. It was early in the 1970s," recounted Mark.

## Frightening

"Having left his lady friend early in the morning (about 5am, he walked across some dense woodland to get back to his lorry. It was a cold, misty summer's day," he said. "Suddenly the driver saw something really frightening."

"A long black cigar-like object landed in an opening in the wood and humanoid figures, dressed in black got out. Apparently there were about 36 of these men with one leader, who was shouting instructions in what sounded Dutch or German," he said.

These "people" were equipped with what appeared to be torches or guns and they were tapping the ground with them.

But the figures ran back into their black machine the moment they saw the driver and his lorry. One of them dropped his (or her or its) instrument in the panic but dashed back to collect it. Then the machine moved off at a terrific speed, making no noise at all.

The lorry driver kept quiet about his experience for a

"This is where the story gets really interesting," said Mark. "I firmly believe that there was some military involvement here and that Contact International were told to hush the whole incident up."

So eventually Mark and his brother decided to go it alone and they founded YUFOS.

Mark is convinced that there is a lot of top secret military activity going on behind the scenes, which explains UFO sightings. But Bill disagrees.

But, despite their differences, Mark and Bill are working towards the same goal: To find out as much as they can about every reported UFO sighting.

One such sighting, which occurred at Elvington, near York, on December 12, has fascinated Mark.

Many locals saw an object described as a glowing blue and red ball of light which exploded into a multitude of colour. It was later identified by the York Astronomical Society as a fireball — part of the so-called Gemini stream.

"We accept this," said Mark, "but I am convinced there was something else over Elvington that night. The fireball was seen at about 8.30pm but we have a witness who saw something much bigger and more inexplicable at 7.00pm."

The witness is a 39-year-old farm labourer who says he saw a huge circular object in the sky with numerous coloured lights and a triangle of light on the underside. It was about the length of five aircraft and made no noise at all.

time later," said Mark. "For one thing they were travelling in different directions."

To get my feet firmly back on the ground, I then visited Mr Trevor Wood, last year's chairman of the York Astronomical Society.

Trevor was sceptical of the story of the Elvington farm labourer.

"I find it incredibly difficult to believe there were two different sightings on the same night. That would be an incredible coincidence," he said. "But I can confirm the fireball incident."

"We have very little contact with UFO societies and I personally believe that 99 per cent of sightings can be explained naturally," he said. "What about that remaining one per cent?"

"That can be put down to lack of scientific knowledge," he said. "I cannot subscribe to flying saucers or undercover military operations."

"Personally I think some UFO societies do a lot of harm by misleading people. Many of these so-called sightings of flying objects can be so easily explained."

"And," said Trevor, "why do we so rarely get sightings of UFOs from amateur astronomers? Is it because they can explain rationally exactly what they have seen?"

And so the arguments rage on: arguments which, taken to their logical conclusion, arrive at a question that has puzzled man from the very start. Is there a force in the universe so immense that we are totally unable to comprehend it?

Naturally, I don't know so I'll end with a delightful

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