

back again in UFO country

Morgan

...and symmetrical circles reappeared in cornfields near the Westbury white stone in Wiltshire, close to celebrated prehistoric sites and the scene of many a UFO sighting.

The circles were first seen seven years ago and appeared every 12 months in the same fields, near Salisbury Plain, until last year when they were absent. This year, on cue, they are back with a vengeance, confounding any rational explanation.

The most concentrated group is on farmland belonging to Mr Peter Gale and his

wife, Angela. The most prominent circle has a diameter of 25 yards, with four smaller circles around it.

The corn has been crushed flat with the tautness of thatch and it has not escaped residents that the shape resembles an H G Wells spacecraft.

Mrs Gale said: "I suppose it could be a practical joke, with people using ropes, but no footsteps have trodden down the corn elsewhere. It seems a freak of weather is more likely, but families have been here for generations and nobody saw the circles until 1980."

More mystery surrounds the circle on the land of Mr

Geoff Cooper, where a flawless shape has appeared on the north side of the Bratton-Westbury road.

Mr Cooper's circle is particularly special because the grain has been crushed in an anti-clockwise direction.

Mr Cooper, aged 50, used to have several circles each year but he sold the most prolific circle land to the Gale family.

Mr Cooper said: "At first, we complained to the Army because we thought the helicopters were doing it on exercise. But they sent an expert round and he said a helicopter could only make that shape if it was flying upside down and stationary."

Mr Cooper listed local theories: herds of hedgehogs rotating in unison, with approximately 40,000 required; rutting deer, sadly out of season; pranksters who, inexplicably, missed out last year; or a freak of the weather.

Mr Bob Moger, aged 40 and farming adjoining land, has been confronted with a circle for the first time. He remains stumped. "In Africa, they call minor cyclones 'dust devils' but they suck up straw while the forces in Wiltshire are crushing", he said.

"The only safe comment is that little green men are not behind it."

Mr Moger 57

J Hitchens