

**Titbits** takes you back to Britain's strangest time

# OCTOBER IS

**The sky was full of flying cigars, fiery crosses and catherine wheels, writes STEPHEN RANDLE**

**T**WENTY years ago this month, the skies over Britain exploded in a series of spectacular bursts of light. UFOs—Unidentified Flying Objects—had been witnessed for many years before, but never on this scale in such a short space of time.

It all began one morning in October, 1967. Christopher Garner was on a long drive home to Hatherleigh, near Exeter. Sleep was creeping up on him, so he parked his Land-Rover on the edge of Dartmoor, a wild and mysterious place at the best of times.

He covered himself with a blanket and fell quickly asleep.

At about 4am he heard a knock and opened his eyes to the glare of a torch beam shining through the window.

The figure holding the flashlight wore a police uniform. Mr Garner gingerly opened the door, prepared for the worst, but the officer was only asking his help.

Climbing out, Christopher joined a second officer who pointed up at the sky. Over the horizon a cluster of lights glowed in the form of a cross. As they watched, it glittered then moved away slowly.

Constables Clifford Waycott and Roger Willey radioed to headquarters reporting the mystery object and set out to chase it in their car. But it outpaced them.

The newspapers soon got hold of the story. Activities at the local RAF station at Chivenor were brought into question, but there were no reports of aircraft flying that night. The following night the flying cross was seen again and reports of other objects came thick and fast.

● A flying cigar was sighted by a bus driver in Brighton.

● A "catherine wheel" was spotted in the sky by a Scottish coastguard.

● Police officers at Glossop sighted a flying object over Derbyshire.

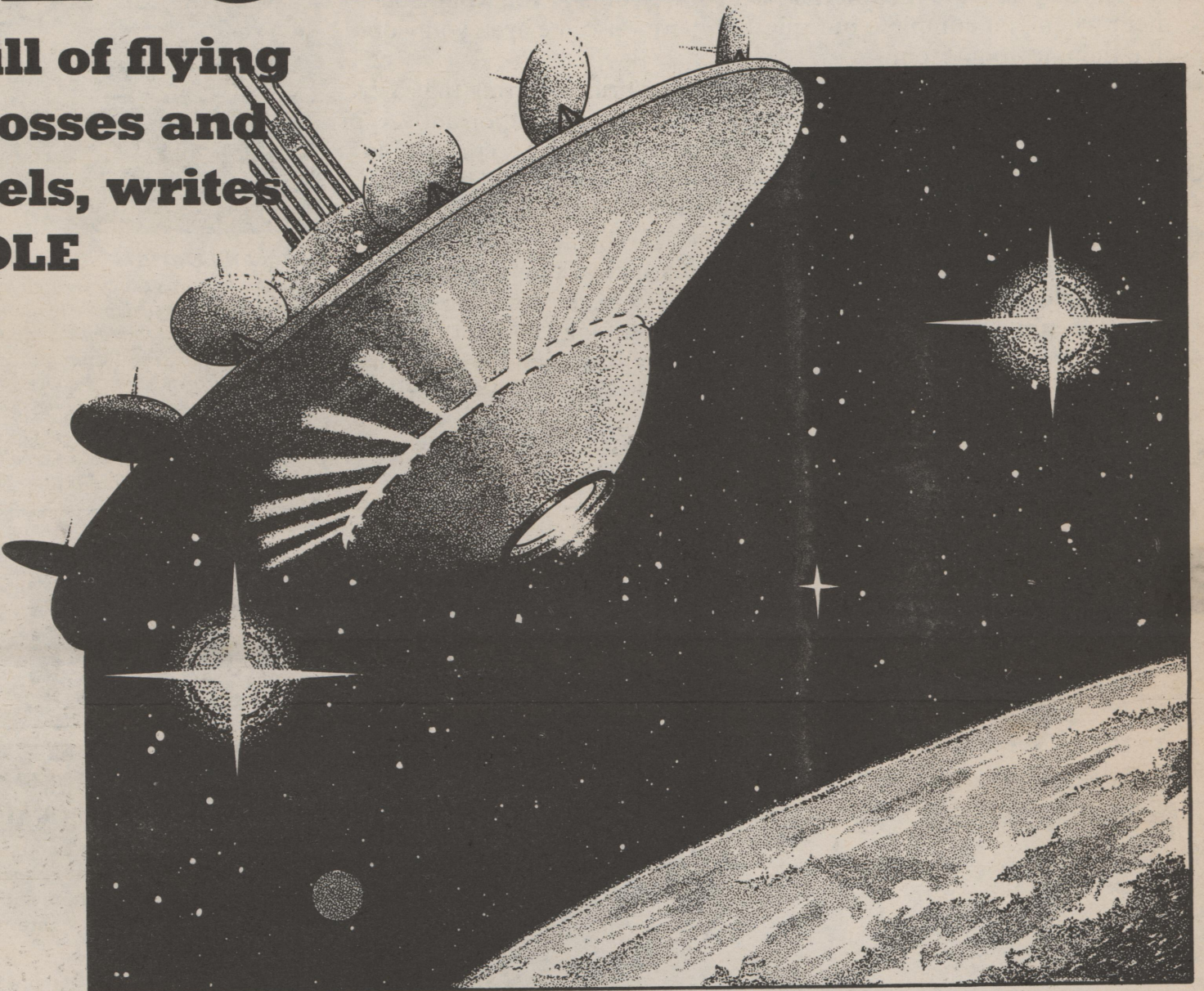
● A formation of lights was seen by an RAF wing-commander in Hampshire.

Astronomers were quick to explain the phenomenon. It was all due, they said, to the bright light of the planet Venus.

But one sighting by a priest discounted this theory. It was at 7pm and Venus could not have been in the sky then.

It was also rumoured that the US Air Force were conducting tanker exercises, but again the timing was wrong.

Mr J. B. Brooks, a BOAC worker, was walking his dogs near Weymouth at about 11am on October 26. In the distant sky he saw a vapour trail. He watched it careful-



ly. Unlike normal trails, this one neither grew nor shrank

Suddenly it dropped steeply down and hovered a few hundred feet above him. Later he described it as a sort of propeller with two of the blades folded back in a flying position. The total rotor diameter, he said, was more than 170ft.

Terrified, Mr Brooks kept quiet, but one dog barked excitedly. Mercifully, the object left as quickly as it had come.

Mr B. J. Collett was driving his minibus near Reading at around 4.30am on a bright moonlit night. Suddenly the radio faded and his headlights went out. The engine stopped.

He got out and looked under the bonnet to see if any leads had come loose. They were all firmly in place. As he checked other parts of the engine it grew ominously dark. Then he looked at the sky and saw

what appeared to be a solid cloud passing before the moon. It hid the stars.

He tried the engine again and it started, but after he had driven a few hundred yards it sputtered to a stop again. This time there was a smell of burning.

Mr Collett jumped out and looked again at the sky. The "cloud" was still there, but now it was triangular in shape. He watched it until it moved out of sight.

When he tried his engine again it burst into life and there were no further problems.

October seems to have been the pinnacle of the 1967 sightings. But, one month before, two objects were seen over Stoke-on-Trent. One made as if to land, then headed skywards. In the same area, a lorry driver saw what he described as a flying "dish" with portholes.

It flew beside him for 10 minutes as he headed along the M6. Suddenly it stopped and reversed at an incredible speed.

Earlier, on August 4, at around 11pm, two married couples were saying good-night when a "shooting star" plummeted out of the sky. It stopped in its tracks and grew into the shape of a disc, more than

80ft wide. Then it shot off to the west.

As far back as July 10, two boys on their way to school on the Isle of Wight noticed a white disc in the sky. In the morning break it was still there.

Their schoolmates joined them and about 12 boys watched the object—more than 30ft long—gliding like a leaf until it went out of sight. Later, strange marks were found where it had hovered.

I also saw a strange object in the sky one night in late 1967. I glanced up to see a cluster of about six or seven red lights spinning round in a tight formation.

I was mildly curious, but later, like a delayed shock, it sank in that I may have witnessed some vehicle from outer space.

Why UFOs should have appeared over Britain in such numbers at that time is still a mystery.

If they were sent by intelligent sources, what was their mission? Any race capable of building such craft must be centuries ahead of us technologically.

Perhaps they are as interested in us as we are in other animals. If so, let's hope they treat us better than we do our fellow creatures.

**Titbit**

TOMATO ketchup was patented as a medicine in America in 1830.