

TONY CHALLIS looks out for passing UFOs



● Gary Rowe keeps a careful watch on the night sky.
Picture: Terry Williams.

ONLY nutcases believe in UFOs, right?

Sensible, level-headed people, and those who like to be thought that way, dismiss it as pseudo-science, barely credible as the plot for a mopey-spinning Spielberg movie.

I could buy that. But if they aren't there, why don't they go away. Why do sightings pour in from all over the world year after year?

American radio hams claim to have heard the space shuttle Discovery telling ground control it was being buzzed by "alien craft" on its last flight. They reported loss of power and control.

Wish

The theory that there is an organised cover-up within the air defence systems of the advanced nations, is fuelled by their steadfast denial of what others have seen, and failure to follow their safety first brief of identify or destroy.

It is normal to gaze at the pale brilliance of the night sky, feel its lonely magnitudes, and wish for the comfort of knowing there were others like us out there somewhere. Hopefully, rather better than us in some respects.

Gary Rowe, of Blyth, was bitten by this bug 25 years ago; the love of astronomy and a scientific fascination with unexplained phenomena.

This sober-suited cash register salesman, now 46, married with a son at Manchester University, overcame his own secondary modern school education, to become one of Britain's leading experts on the unknown. If it sounds like being at the forefront of ignorance, he is not dismayed. At least he knows there is something to be learned.

This ordinary looking family man in his conventional home, complete with passionate Labrador, told me: "I never see little green men. I'm wary of ridicule. Not so much for my ego but because it impedes the work."

"No-one will contact a crackpot with information, and I value the co-operation of many serious, scientific people out there. I don't want to risk losing it."

I'm one of a tiny majority of UFO investigators who believe in a logical note and bolshie explanation for all but a fraction of sightings.

Hazes are surprisingly few. Most of the lights in the sky at night are aeroplanes, reflections off the underside of birds, un-

Believing in the unbelievable

"The evidence of these machines is evident and I accept them, absolutely....." Air Chief Marshall Lord Dowding, former head of Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain.

sual shaped clouds - in particular the scarce lenticular clouds that look like saucers.

"I hate to think how much I've spent on my hobby. But I now have some very sensitive equipment for measuring, photographing, picking up any unusual readings in magnetic fields, static, sound. I've even got a geiger counter."

Gary was called in to investigate the para-normal happenings at Dodleston near Chester, where a former schoolteacher has written a book based on his computer linking him in communication with people who inhabited his cottage four centuries earlier.

Missing

He will not be drawn on his conclusions there, but points out that not all unidentified phenomena have been the flying variety.

Mentioning the lengthening list of missing persons, he tells of the young farmer who went missing on Parys mountain, Anglesey, some years ago. He left his car with the doors open and despite an extensive air and sea search was never seen again.

The mountain was once the site of a huge copper mine. Gary was called in to investigate UFO sightings on the other side of it

at Llancerrymedd. In September 1978 people had reported "landed objects and humanoids," according to Gary's voluminous files, with their detailed sightings formally ordered.

He said: "At that time two children independently drew and described saucer shaped craft, with unusual details of the underside. They were at Fensarn. Both had been terrified."

Common UFO spotters are country policemen, not a breed normally famed for either intellectual agility or their imaginative flights, but certainly in a job where a hint of the fruitcake could damage career prospects.

Gary is convinced we are not alone and that evidence of wrecked alien craft does exist. The mathematical odds on us being the sole tenants of the universe, are overwhelmingly against.

"They say the distances are too vast," said Gary, "but look at the speed of progress. In 1949 it took a covered wagon 166 days to cross America. The Shuttle took eight minutes in 1980. And who is to say our visitor's life spans mirror ours. Here on earth some creatures exist for an hour and others for a 100 years, trees for 2,000 years."

"Our ancestors came from outer space..." Maurice Chatelain, designer of Apollo.