

PR Thomas

What IS creating those mysterious circles in the cornfields of Wiltshire and Hampshire? Solar energy, magnetic fields, static electricity — or visitors from another world? Three books published this week offer various theories, but JAMES BELSEY remains sceptical

AFTER UFOs and magic mushrooms and ley lines and the Bermuda Triangle, prepare to meet the latest dotty sensation.

It is the Mystery of the Corn Circles, and those who love the bizarre and the unexplained are in seventh heaven this week.

For there are not one but three books published on the subject. The corn circles will be this summer's silly season hit, I predict.

First the facts. Every May and June, mysterious circles appear etched in the waving corn fields in certain parts of England, but most dramatically in western Wiltshire, not far from the Somerset border.

Beautiful things they are too, with clear rings and central discs of well-nigh perfectly flattened corn, some of them single, some in apparently artistically arranged groups.

Just how long these discs and rings and circles have been appearing in rural England isn't certain, or at least it has not been properly recorded so far.

It could be a fairly recent phenomenon or it could have been happening for hundreds, even thousands of years.

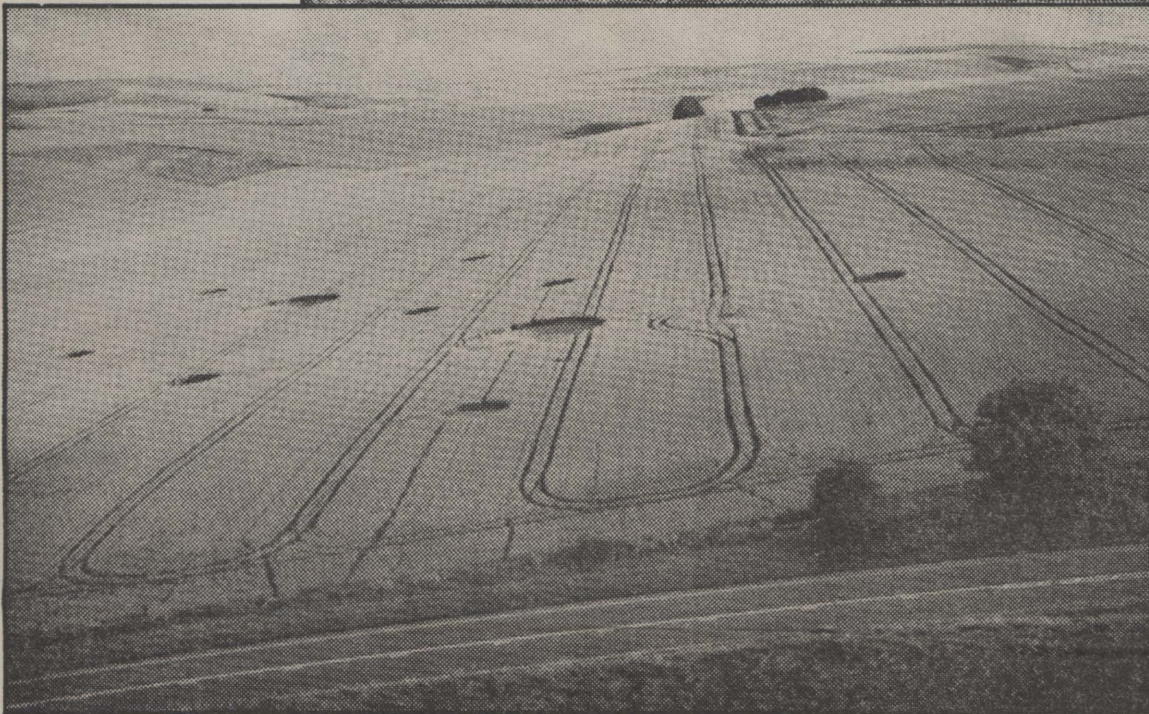
Two historically recent developments have combined to make the circles as clearly visible as they are: the advent of aerial photography and the standardisation and mechanisation of agriculture.

The former makes it possible to see the circles properly. The latter provide a well-flattened field surface and standard, equal-height crops for the phenomenon to be seen in the sharpest possible focus.

Thrilling

So far so good, as you'll find from *Circular Evidence* by Pat Delgado and Colin Andrews (Bloomsbury £14.95), *The Circles Effect And Its Mysteries* by George Terence Meaden (Artetech Publishing Company £9.95) and *Controversy Of The Circles* by Paul Fuller and Jenny Randles (British UFO Research Association).

I couldn't wade through the BUFORA booklet, I found George Terence Meaden's study dauntingly and off-puttingly technical, but did my best to persevere with the more popularly-written Delgado and Andrews tome.



Pat Delgado is a retired electro-mechanical design engineer and Colin Andrews is chief electrical engineer with the Test Valley Borough Council.

Delgado was the chap who started all the fun by reporting the circles to the popular national newspaper back at the start of the 1980s. He saw his first ones in Hampshire.

Since then circles have been found all over the place but most magnificently in the Silbury Hill/Avebury area of Wiltshire, where the landscape is dotted with the things when farmers are obliging enough to plant corn in their fields.

The book has some thrilling colour and black and white photographs of the circles. They certainly are spectacular.

But how and why? It is at this point that we run into difficulties.

The authors put forward many theories — solar energy, magnetic fields, thermal changes, static electricity and, you've guessed it, our old friend the UFO.

Delgado and Andrews tell the story of their visit to a group of three



● Above: Investigators examine a circle at Chilcomb near Winchester

● Left: A series of circles near Silbury Hill in Wiltshire

CURIOUS CORN

circles below the White Horse at Westbury in Wiltshire, when a "strange recording incident occurred" and their tape somehow recorded "a peculiar knocking."

Like the witness of an elderly, binocular-toting woman who saw a "bright, golden object" in the sky and watched it come down "somewhere over Salisbury Plain."

Saucers

When she read about the White Horse circles, "I knew that was it".

Hey-ho, we've been along this road before, I think.

One thing surprises me about the book. Could not the circles be scar tissue on the earth's surface, creating the sort of crop-marks familiar to

archaeologists for many years?

You know the sort of thing: the lines of old walls, the outlines of old ditches, engravings in the ground made centuries ago and shown by different growth patterns in the crops.

The stone and wooden circle was a standard feature in ancient Britain. Surely it can't just be a coincidence that these corn circles appear so frequently on such ancient landscapes.

But no, that would spoil the story.



● Unexplained circles of crushed foliage have been found as far afield as Russia and New Zealand