

15 JUL 1985

Forget the UFOs — it's all down to lightning

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A HIGH incidence of aircraft crashes and vehicle failures in Wiltshire could well be linked with a previously unrecognised atmospheric effect, it has been claimed.

The theory also accounts for the circles in cornfields, UFO sightings, mystery lights and strange noises in the night, says a Wiltshire scientist.

Dr Terence Meaden, from Bradford on Avon, has analysed many reports from reliable witnesses, been to countless cornfields, studied meteorological

By Roderic Eldridge

surveys and reaches the conclusion that it can all be put down to the "plasma-vortex".

This is a species of ball lightning which descends in certain weather and geographical conditions. The spinning cylinder or ball of air which blows down the crop is thought to be ionised and it is the continuous electrical discharge which illuminates it. In some circumstances vapour on the outer surface appears like a shiny metallic

skin, he believes.

Mr Meaden claimed: "Our explanation for the circles effect uses no more than the laws of physics and the properties of the atmosphere. It turns out that an atmospheric effect which has been missed by previous physicists and meteorologists is at the root of the solution.

"One does not have to have to resort to ad hoc hypotheses drawn from the pseudo-scientific and paranormal world. The explanations advanced at this stage are hardly likely to explain everything in any case

because we suspect that there could be more than one species of circle-making vortex involved, but the work should certainly provide a good forum for discussion and encouragement for grant-aided research."

Researchers Pat Delgado and Collin Andrews have been investigating the phenomenon for six years and say there have been a series of connections between the rings and UFO sightings. This week they published a book on their findings.

Aliens landed in Bath and confused city residents on their way home from work last night,

stopping cars and drinking other people's pints.

The egg-headed aliens, alias Bath Technical Students William Mickleburgh, Ginny Adams, and Sophie Brookes, and National Theatre Company members Oliver Childs and Gary Barber, were practising for the City of London Festival later this month.

The technical students are in training with the NTC. Mr Brian Popey, also a member of the NTC, said: "They were practising their improvisation and were spending an hour on the streets."