



Graham Knewstub, delegate 1, from the British Flying Saucer Bureau, preparing for a close encounter with other ufologists yesterday. Photograph: Keith Dobney

Nutters and sceptics have close encounter of a terrestrial kind

By Kate Muir

THE SMALL walrus-like man from the British Flying Saucer Bureau shuffled his papers impatiently as he waited for the fifth International UFO Congress to begin. He was clearly rather important, since his plastic badge said "Graham F N Knewstub, delegate 1", and his tie was discreetly patterned with small rockets and stars.

Mr Knewstub, it turned out, had been in the unidentified flying object business since 1952 and showed a certain wariness of the post-Spielberg school of thought.

"All these cases of abductions and contact with extra-terrestrials have grown along with media interest and films. I also wouldn't discount the lasting effect of psychedelic drugs in the Sixties. You hardly ever heard about kidnappings back when I started, but now hundreds get reported."

Extra-terrestrial abductions by Martians were the subject of that afternoon's debate, which was basically a battle between the nutters and the sceptics.

The sceptics were winning 3-0 when Walt H Andrus Jr, director of the Mutual UFO Network Inc of Texas (Mufon), took the podium. "There are tens of thou-

sands of people who have been abducted by extra-terrestrial beings," he said. "I'm not exaggerating. These people are dual victims. They are abducted and abused. They need help."

His point is quickly proved by a glance at the monthly *Mufon UFO Journal*. One abductee, who obviously needs help, writes: "I was abducted from my home in Chicago and taken to a mountain in a country which I will not mention, and shown things that, to this day, I will never forget."

"How dare you tell me that the things I've suffered as a result of these intrusions, such as low-level radiation poisoning, microwave burns, plus things I will not mention, were not real!"

Organisers of the conference at the London Business School, were suspicious of such reports. As they headed for the lunch queue, one warned: "You've got to watch out for the nutters and loonies." She was not, however, referring to the ufologists, but the reporter from *Sunday Sport*.

It was rather an uncharitable remark, considering the sterling efforts of the newspaper in pro-

moting UFOs, with such stories as "Aliens turned my son into an olive", "World War II bomber found on the moon" and "Exclusive pictures of Heaven".

The conference only had exclusive pictures of balls of light, "luminous floating spheres which persistently defy ufologists' efforts to explain them". A man with a Shakespearean haircut stood up and started showing slides with big yellow blobs on.

"There's a lot more to balls than at first appears," he said. The man rumoured to be from *Sunday Sport* perked up at the key word, then fell back into a stupor. The rest of the audience remained in a state of high excitement.

"I saw a ball of light about 15 years ago, you know," Milos Krmelj, a chemistry teacher from Yugoslavia, said. "Then, there was virtually nothing close to encounters with UFOs in the Eastern bloc. Even now, you never hear anything from Albania or Czechoslovakia. But in the Soviet Union, Glasnost has had an extraordinary effect on sightings. They're going UFO-crazy now."

Meanwhile in Africa, sightings among tribesmen have just started to come in.