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Sunbathing in her garden one day last month a Kidlington woman saw a bright blue light shining down on her. A spark flashed across and it turned red.

On July 25 a woman saw a bright object hovering over a barn on Otmoor with lights shining downwards.

These are the two most recent UFO sightings in Oxfordshire to be investigated by the Oxford-based organisation Contact International UK.

The group is run from a house in Ouseley Close, New Marston, where its chairman Mr Michael Soper lives. It records and investigates UFO sightings worldwide.

Recently it was involved in researching mysterious circles found in fields of wheat near Aylesbury, but could find no evidence of UFOs.

Since the organisation was set up in 1967 they have recorded 80,000 reports, of which more than 3,500 were of landings, more than 600 were of people in America being taken aboard

Looking for lights in the skies

by Sarah Dixon

'alien craft' and more than 400 were of vehicles being affected by something overhead.

Mr Soper estimates about nine-tenths of the sightings are false alarms which on further investigation turn out to be nothing unusual.

"People report seeing the planet Venus or switching operations at Didcot Power Station," he said. "But the remaining one-tenth are very interesting and totally inexplicable."

Reports come in from the general public, from pilots and from the police who often have sightings reported to them in the first instance.

Contact International sends out a form asking for details of what has been seen, where and when.

It produces a quarterly magazine *Awareness*, which reviews local data and yearly register which lists sightings worldwide and includes statistics and analysis of what has been seen.

Mr Soper insists that it is scientifically proven that there are inexplicable objects flying about the skies.

"The official view is that they are machines capable of transcending the usual space-and-time continuum," he said. "My personal view is that they are a scientific phenomenon piloted by intelligent beings which don't necessarily come to us from other planets."

From the evidence he has seen he believes these beings are doing some kind of survey of the flora, but not the fauna of the earth.

"They are particularly interested in hedgerows," he said. "In 1986 two salesmen had parked their car in a layby on the A420 Swindon Road

when they saw an object hovering 50 ft above the hedgerow with bright beams shining down."

Mr Soper first became interested in UFOs in the late 1950s. He was walking in the Malvern hills in Worcestershire when he saw an object flying just ahead of a plane.

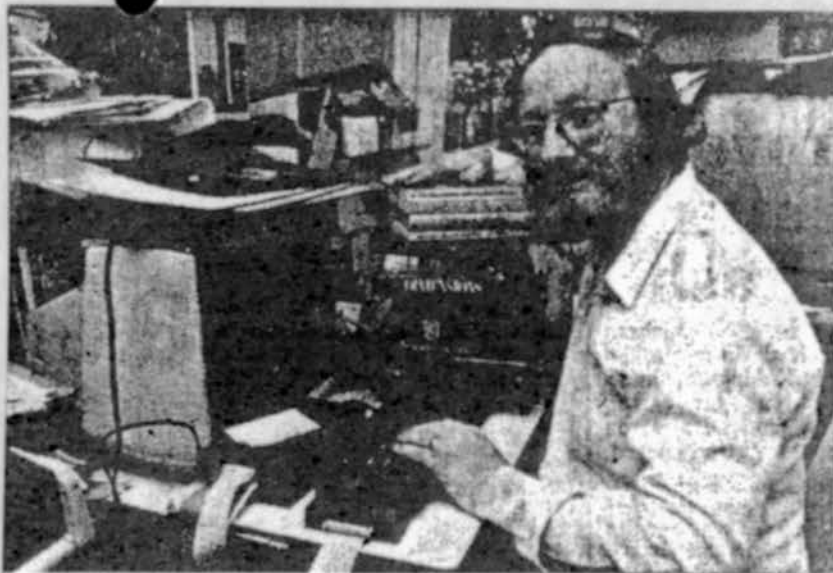
"It was oscillating very rapidly and easily outmanoeuvred the plane and disappeared into the clouds.

"At that time I was very interested in aviation and I knew it was too fast to be a plane and so I started reading up about UFOs."

He joined Contact International in 1982.

"They appealed to me because they went in for serious research, not just sitting around haunted houses trying to feel scared," he said.

The organisation has a substantial library stored at Mr Soper's home.



Mr Michael Soper, surrounded by his UFO-spotting files

This includes CIA papers which have only recently been made available under the 25-year rule which list sightings by US pilots and indicate that a great deal of research has gone into the matter.

"There is a phenomenon, we don't have to prove it, it has been acknowledged by the CIA," he said. "There are boffins who check out these sightings very carefully indeed."

"Some people are very scornful of the idea that UFOs exist, but the fact remains that there is no logical explanation for many incidents."

He refers in particular to cars having their engines turned off by objects hovering overhead.

"There is no scientific explanation for how that can happen. If we can find out how these UFOs function, then science will be tremendously improved."