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By David Barnett

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Are we ready to hit back at alien invasion?

UFO investigator Tony Dodd has had his own brush with a strange craft



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A former Ministry of Defence man says that the Earth is "wide open" to alien visitation because the Government no longer investigates UFO sightings. DAVID BARNETT investigates.

Alien invasion has gone out of fashion, somewhat. We seem to be more concerned with the very real problems of war in the Middle East and suicide bombers in our cities than with any possible attack from outer space.

And it seems that any future sightings of Unidentified Flying Objects will now remain just that - unidentified.

Nick Pope ran the Ministry of Defence's UFO project from 1991 to 1994 - at a time when official investigation into UFOs was a much more credible prospect thanks to the insanely popular X-Files TV show, which saw FBI agents Mulder and Scully chasing aliens all over America.

Perhaps it's a sign of the times, but although our TV is still full of extraterrestrial and supernatural threats - Doctor Who, Torchwood, Afterlife, The Ghost Whisperer - the spooks and monsters don't usually arrive by flying saucer any more. They are much more often inveigling their way into our lives via rifts in time or wormholes, or have been hiding among us all along.

In 1947, when the first documented modern UFO sighting was made, the public consciousness was very much on threats from the skies, be it the Luftwaffe's Blitzkrieg or the Japanese Kamikaze pilots of a few years earlier.

Today we're more worried about the enemy within, and the killers and bombers who grow up on our own streets. All of which notwithstanding, those who believe that there are aliens and that they might well want our Earth for our own have never been in a better position to attack.

Mr Pope said that the consequences of getting our policy over UFOs wrong "could be huge".

He said: "If you reported a UFO sighting now, I am absolutely sure that you would just get back a standard letter telling you not to worry.

"Frankly, we are wide open. If something does not behave like a conventional aircraft now, it will be ignored."

Surely not something to exercise Bradfordians, though. Aliens land on the lawns of the White House or in the Mojave desert or in Woking, not in the heart of Yorkshire's former industrial heartland.

Well, don't you believe it. There have been numerous sightings of apparent alien craft over the years, and Keighley in particular is thought to hold particular attraction for interplanetary tourists.

Some years ago, Keith McNulty of the International UFO Research Network told the T&A: "It is now recognised that the Keighley district - together with Ilkley and Skipton - is a prime area of activity."

He was speaking after a resident of a caravan park in Oxenhope reported "a large object with bright lights shooting from it" hovering nearby.

In 2002 our sister paper The Keighley News reported under the rather under-stated headline "Aliens attack sheep - claim" that cases of the mutilated bodies of sheep found on local farms could be linked, according to UFO investigator Donald Cooper, with a sighting of an unexplained aerial object over Silsden.

And expert Nigel Mortimer said the following year: "The area around Keighley is still very prevalent for UFO sightings. Around 50 a year are reported and these are substantial cases rather than just lights in the sky."

I attempted to poll these three experts for their opinions on Nick Pope's latest statement. One number was no longer available, another was answered by someone who told me I had the wrong number, and at another I received a recorded message saying my call could not be taken.

Simply the case of people having moved away or their telephones not working, or something more sinister and X-Filesy?

Two years ago we interviewed former Keighley and Skipton policeman Tony Dodd, now a renowned UFO investigator, who spoke of being threatened by the CIA, followed by shadowy intelligence spooks and being passed sensitive information by Deep Throat-style authority figures, all following his own brush with the unexplained when he witnessed a craft he described as "disc-shaped with a dome on top and what appeared to be portholes" between Skipton and Steeton in 1978.

He recalled a time when he was lecturing at a UFO conference in the States when he and other researchers were approached by two men: "The men told us they were members of the US government. They said: You want to be extremely careful about what you're doing. We have ways of stopping you'."

As you might expect, the internet has become the natural home for UFO researchers, investigators and believers. Websites documenting sightings and positing theories about the whys and wherefores of these lights in the sky abound and thrive.

And perhaps equally naturally, the authorities continue to deny that our biggest threat comes from the stars. Last month Junior defence minister Derek Twigg said that out of 714 UFO reports since 2001, only 12 had been "deemed to be worthy of further consideration".

Which is perhaps why the government is, according to Nick Pope, no longer going to investigate them at all.

Mr Twigg's comments were in reply to Lynne Featherstone, the Liberal Democrat MP for Hornsey and Wood Green, apparently another area with a Keighley-esque attraction to extra-terrestrials..

He added that: Reports (of UFOs) are analysed solely to consider whether there is any reason to believe that UK airspace has been compromised by the reported activity.' And the conspiracy continues, as earlier this year another junior defence minister, Don Touhig, denied that the MoD had ever run a UFO project' - the body that Nick Pope is said to have headed.

At the beginning of every episode, the X-Files used to flash up a message: The Truth Is Out There.

According to the likes of Nick Pope, that "truth" might well be impending alien invasion. According to the Government, that is extremely unlikely.

With all these conflicting opinions, it's perhaps worth bearing in mind another slogan that the X-Files sometimes used as well: Trust No-One.

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