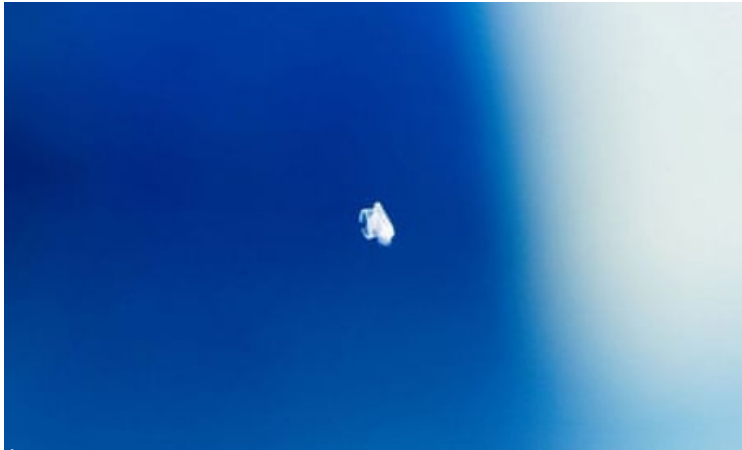


[Skip to main content](#)[Skip to navigation](#)[Skip to navigation](#)



📷 A UFO seen from the shuttle Atlantis in 2006. Photograph: Nasa/Getty Images

📷 A UFO seen from the shuttle Atlantis in 2006. Photograph: Nasa/Getty Images

[Space](#)

🕒 This article is more than 16 years old

The truth is out there: National Archives lifts lid on UFO files

This article is more than 16 years old

- 'X-Files' go public after flood of FOI requests
- Ministerial briefings and witness reports included

· [Science blog: Explore the X-files yourself](#)

James Randerson, science correspondent

Wed 14 May 2008 09.25 BST

[Share](#)

There was the man on a fishing trip who was shown around a flying saucer by aliens in green overalls; another who befriended an extraterrestrial called Algar and wanted to introduce him to the government; and the astonished air traffic controller who watched a UFO land on his airport's runway, then disappear.

Inevitably, the Ministry of Defence papers, released to the public for the first time, will be known as Britain's X-Files. Over the next three or four years, 160 files will be handed over to the [National Archives](#). Covering 1978 to 1987, the first group of eight files, one of which is more than 450 pages long, is available via its website today.

Some of the incidents are truly bizarre, but although some UFO sightings remain unexplained there is no evidence in the files for alien contact. "There simply is no saucer-in-a-hangar smoking gun," said Nick Pope, a former civil servant who worked at the MoD for 21 years, spending three years on its UFO desk.

The MoD has decided to release the files because of the deluge of requests it has received from UFO buffs and conspiracy theorists under the Freedom of Information Act. "They are sinking in a sea of FOI requests on [UFOs](#)," said Pope. "The administrative burden in dealing with them on a case by case basis is horrendous."

The National Archives is expecting huge interest in the release. "This is a subject that interests a vast number of people, believers, sceptics and agnostics. My understanding is that this is possibly the largest launch event they have done since the census," said Pope.

A similar release of UFO files by France's national space agency last year attracted more than 220,000 users on its first day, causing it to crash. To avoid such problems, the National Archives is using an external hosting company which can add extra capacity as needed to handle the web traffic.

The files consist of a variety of documents, including numerous individual sightings, accounts of investigations and briefings prepared by MoD staff for ministers on the subject. "There are a lot of conspiracy theories that have grown up about the military interest in UFOs. What we are getting to see in these papers are the actual facts," said Dr David Clarke, a lecturer in journalism at Sheffield Hallam University, in a podcast prepared for the National Archives on the release.

"The vast majority of them are just ordinary people who have seen something unusual and thought that they ought to tell someone about it." In the great majority of cases, the MOD did very little if anything to follow them up.

At the more colourful end of the spectrum is a letter dated January 1985 from someone who claimed to have been in contact with aliens since he was seven. He said he had visited alien bases in Wirral and Cheshire and had observed a UFO being shot down next to Wallasey town hall. "As I was watching, the front end of the UFO hit the water, then the whole UFO disappeared leaving the water to splash, as if done by an invisible entity." He later tried to arrange a meeting between an alien called Algar and the British government, but said Algar had been killed by other aliens before the meeting could take place.

Other reports are more credible. At quarter past midnight on Christmas Day 1985, three police officers in Woking were surprised by a white light descending on the Horsell area. The officers were worried their report would not be taken seriously, because Horsell Common features in HG Wells's *War of the Worlds* as the place where the first Martians land. The account reads: "Genuine report. Two competent officers slightly embarrassed."

In another credible sighting, from September 5 1986, a civil pilot described a UFO that shot past his aircraft 1.5 nautical miles to its left. He speculated about whether it might have been a meteorite or a missile and then wrote: "If it's a missile, myself and my crew are not impressed."

The files include a damning verdict on the so-called Rendlesham Forest incident, an apparent UFO contact near an RAF base in Suffolk in 1980 which is often referred to as "Britain's Roswell", a reference to a famous UFO incident in the US.

In a briefing document, an MoD official wrote: "We believe the fact that Colonel Holt [the RAF base commander] did not report these occurrences to the MoD for almost two weeks after the event, together with the low-key manner in which he handled the matter, are indicative of the degree of importance in defence terms that should be attached to the incident."

Clarke said releasing the files was a good move. "The very fact that these documents are being released shows that there isn't a cover-up. It's a good move on the part of the Ministry of Defence to demonstrate what they know, which doesn't amount to much, on this subject," he said.

But Pope said that conspiracy theorists are unlikely to be satisfied. "If that's what people believe, absolutely nothing will dissuade them," he said. "If 100% of the UFO material from every nation on Earth was disclosed and there were no aliens, those that believe there are aliens would cry foul."

Close encounters

· Early on August 12 1983, a 77-year-old Aldershot man who was out fishing said he was contacted by the inhabitants of a flying saucer. Four feet high and wearing pale green overalls with helmets and black visors, they gave him a tour of their craft and told him: "You can go. You are too old and too infirm for our purpose."

· On August 5 1985, crop circles appeared in a wheatfield near Andover. An officer in the Army Air Corps investigated and reported his findings to the MoD. The officer said there were no tracks in the wheat: "To have set the holes in such a precise pattern manually would have required a tape measure or string, and the users would have been bound to leave tracks ... none of us could offer any reasonable explanation."

· On April 26 1984, two police in Edgware, north London, investigated a call from a 29-year-old woman who had seen lights in the sky. They watched the object for an hour with binoculars, describing it as circular with blue lights around the middle. "During that time it moved erratically from side to side, up and down and to and fro, not venturing far from the original position."

Explore more on these topics

- [Space](#)
- [Military](#)
- [National Archives](#)
- [Defence policy](#)
- [Politics past](#)
- [UFOs](#)

[Share](#)

[Reuse this content](#)

Most viewed

Most viewed

- [UK](#)
- [US politics](#)
- [World](#)
- [Climate crisis](#)
- [Middle East](#)
- [Ukraine](#)
- [Football](#)
- [Newsletters](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Environment](#)
- [UK politics](#)
- [Society](#)
- [Science](#)
- [Tech](#)
- [Global development](#)
- [Obituaries](#)

- [News](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Sport](#)
- [Culture](#)
- [Lifestyle](#)

Original reporting and incisive analysis, direct from the Guardian every morning
[Sign up for our email](#)

- [About us](#)
- [Help](#)
- [Complaints & corrections](#)
- [SecureDrop](#)
- [Work for us](#)
- [Privacy policy](#)
- [Cookie policy](#)
- [Terms & conditions](#)
- [Contact us](#)
- [All topics](#)
- [All writers](#)
- [Modern Slavery Act](#)
- [Tax strategy](#)
- [Digital newspaper archive](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [YouTube](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Newsletters](#)
- [Advertise with us](#)
- [Guardian Labs](#)
- [Search jobs](#)
- [Patrons](#)

[Back to top](#)

© 2025 Guardian News & Media Limited or its affiliated companies. All rights reserved. (dcr)

