

IN this the first of three articles on unidentified flying objects, sightings from the mundane to the spectacular made in Northern skies are listed. The second article will feature a North East society formed to correlate and evaluate sighting reports. The final piece in the series will seek to place the U.F.O. phenomena into a rational context.

Aerial pyramid hovered over High Throston

TWO girls were cycling from Hartlepool to Hart in 1968 when they paused after climbing the incline to High Throston. Upon looking overhead they were astonished to see a huge pyramidal object in the clear summer sky. It had shining surfaces which reflected the sunlight in rainbow shades. There were no port-holes or appendages and as it revolved slowly it also moved from east to west and back again. It then vanished suddenly.

Sylvia Frost, then a schoolgirl of Zeland Road, Hartlepool, was one of the amazed witnesses.

An interest in the subject led me to note the salient details of this close encounter, which was never reported in the Press.

In fact, the number of sightings written up in newspapers would seem to be only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Witnesses are often reluctant to be quoted in cold print for fear of derision from friends and colleagues.

Though newspapers are largely sympathetic in their reporting of aerial mysteries, foolish headlines making facetious references to little green men do little to encourage confidence.

Nor do frivolous comments from officialdom. Not The Mail, but another North-East newspaper, carried a police spokesman's comment about a red flare dropping behind Billingham's Salutation



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public house as: "If it was men from outer space they must have been thirsty."

Of course, a great many sightings would seem to be of misidentified aerial phenomena of a meteorological or cosmic nature. Or man-made satellite debris, sun shining off seagulls, weather balloons, Harrier jump jets, chemical burn-off reflected off cloud, and so on.

Yet anything strange in the sky makes a public talking point and deserves a mention in the Press.

For instance, what may have been a fireball on the night of April 25, 1969, was reported throughout England and The Mail noted that police had received a report that it landed in a field between Hart and West View! They searched the area after a man reported seeing something crash into a field.

Descriptions of the object — or objects — diverged widely as Mail reporters pieced together witnesses reports:

Zeppelin

A resident in The Grove, Hartlepool, described how he saw "an extremely bright light from my lounge window and then made out a cylinder, rather like a zeppelin. It was bright red, orange,

and yellow, and travelling low and quite slowly. It appeared to have a tail and seemed to change course at the top of Park Road."

In a different direction that night, four anglers at Middleton reported an object coming from the Seaton Carew direction at great speed and creating a "tremendous glow".

Also that night an object was sighted by a teenager over Gasington Technical College as being a green light and arrow shaped, changing colour from red to blue to green.

Under the heading "Wingate residents puzzled by U.F.O.", The Mail for June 9, 1972, reported a mysterious "flying electric light bulb" observed the previous night. For shortly after 10-30 an unidentified flying object brought people out of their homes and caused motorists to halt as it lit up the night sky.

One eyewitness, Mr James Anderson, of Lake View, Wingate, told The Mail: "I was driving down through Wingate when the car in front of me pulled up in the middle of the road. The people jumped out and looked up at the sky."

Terrified

"There was a brilliant light in the sky — like an electric light bulb. There was a terrific noise with it. It seemed to fly along, then it stopped for two or three seconds, and then it shot up vertically at great speed. I've never believed in flying saucers and that sort of thing before, but now I don't know. My wife Rita, who was in the car with me, was terrified."

Another witness said: "It had a hell of a rumble with it. It was like a brilliant spinning light, with a centre and a sort of flare around it. It disappeared upwards in a flash and must have been travelling faster than sound."

In rare cases U.F.O.s cause a physical effect to people, as happened on a deserted piece of ground near Carlton, Stockton, in 1961 to Mr John Nicol.

Walking home over a field close to the village, he observed a bright yellow light. He was in a hurry to get home and at first gave it little attention.

Buzzing

"Then I heard this kind of buzzing sound and looked at it more closely," he said. "It was getting lower and lower and the light was really bright. It seemed to hover just over the fields, lighting it up as if it were day."

"I couldn't move. I thought it was going to land but it started to go away and I felt myself being lifted into the air. I don't mind telling you I thought my last moment had come. Then I felt myself falling back to the ground and it was gone."

When he eventually told of his sighting people "thought it all very funny, but they can think what they like. I didn't imagine it. Sometimes I wish I had."

Another extraordinary sighting was made around July 1977, by schoolboy Michael Dickinson, of Comondale Drive, Seaton Carew. He and a friend had been for a bicycle ride and had paused at the top of Claxton Bank by Greatham quarry.

"I was fiddling about with my bike when I saw a silver dome in the grass," Michael told me. "It was about two feet wide and looked metallic to start with before becoming blurred. It was only visible for a few seconds as it jumped about 30 yards high and would land in the quarry. It shot off at a terrific speed and the grass wavered about where it had been."

They were scared and when they eventually ventured to look into the quarry there was no sign of whatever had created the unnerving experience.

In fact, the majority of Hartlepool sightings reported in the columns of The Mail have been by youngsters. A typical one being of an object seen on the night of September 2, 1978, when 12-year-olds Paul Muldown and Anthony Young, both of Spurn Walk, Hartlepool, saw a long silver cigar-shaped object.

Comet

"We were standing near the North Eastern when we saw this bright light heading out towards the sea and was cigar-shaped with a sort of dome on top. It moved slowly over the town and disappeared," they reported.

About five minutes later another light appeared overhead this time.

"This light was travelling much faster than the first we saw and it eventually came down somewhere near the coast. It was like a comet or a shooting star. It was very exciting," they agreed.

Perhaps we can discount many sightings as relating to occurrences explainable to scientists in various disciplines. The ones chosen here merely being a cross-section from a file of North East sighting regarded as being mysterious as far as the witnesses were concerned.

What is of primary importance is that people feel that what has been witnessed is of sufficient importance to be taken seriously. Observers deserve to be heard with understanding and an answer should be sought to account for what has been seen. Most people who feel they may have seen a U.F.O. would, in fact, probably be relieved to be given an assessment which is rational and argues a mundane explanation. Others are of a more complex nature and defy the sifting process which quickly finds a plausible natural explanation for around 90 per cent of reports.

● The next U.F.O. FOCUS report examines the people who examine the U.F.O. reports.

— BY PAUL SCREETON



Not everyone who sees an unidentified flying object is as attractive as Hartlepool model girl HELEN FERGUSON. Her sighting was in 1974 on the first Monday of the school holidays. At the time she lived in The Oval and awakened her mother to share the experience. "I didn't believe in such things," said Mrs Pat Ferguson, "and thought it must be a reflection. However, we opened the window and could see this red ball shape in the sky. We watched it hover over trees and it seemed to be turning slightly. Then it just disappeared. I mentioned it to several people and when I went back to Manor School in the September some pupils who had been camping behind Ward Jackson Park told me they seen it, too."