

The day a giant 'serpent' hissed through the skies

June Moore reports on some spectacular UFO sightings before the century.

South
Wales
Argus
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Whether you believe in UFOs or not is entirely up to you. If like me, you follow Brer Rabbit's policy of lying low and saying nothing until the boundaries of science have been pushed back a bit more, it may come as an uncomfortable shock to discover that UFO sightings are not exclusive to the twentieth century

Only fifteen years ago, we were treating people who claimed to have seen UFOs as attention-seekers or boozers or those long overdue for the psychiatrist's couch. Officials gave all sorts of down to earth reasons for the sightings and when all else failed you could always blame a meteor.

However, the nineteenth century was quite rich in its own store of sightings. Its earliest UFO sighting was of an eighty foot long object flying 600ft above Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on the night of April 5, 1800. It radiated light and heat almost as powerful as that of the sun and, after it had disappeared, there followed an explosion and an earth tremor from an area where trees were later found charred and smashed.

This was curiously like a miniature version of a similar object which exploded over Siberia on June 30, 1908, with

such force that it destroyed a herd of reindeer, ripped up eight million trees and sent a shock wave twice round the world.

"Must have been a meteor" you chorus as one. Maybe. But consider the case of the sightings which were prolonged and many, of airships with motors and lights over the USA in 1896 and 1897. At this time, man had not yet invented the aeroplane. Yet on April 5, 1897, hundreds of people in Omaha watched a metal, cigar-shaped airship sailing majestically at an altitude of about 4,000ft, flying against the wind until it disappeared into the clouds. Many of such sightings were reported all over the USA in 1896 and 1897.

I often wonder how they explained that one, for meteors tend to flash by and certainly never sail majestically. They couldn't claim that one of their aircraft was on manoeuvres for they had neither aircraft nor any of the sophisticated avionic marvels of today.

This avalanche of UFOs was not confined to America but was liable to break out anywhere. As early as June 19, 1801, citizens of Hull in this country watched from midnight to 1am as a huge blue-lit sphere hovered in the darkness. Like some modern UFOs it split into several bodies, re-

assembled itself - and vanished.

On July 17, 1806, in daylight, the people of London saw an object like a conical saucer flying rapidly across the sky, shining brightly and shooting sparks. Four months later, a similar object was seen over Swansea.

Green men

Though the modern day sightings of UFOs describe different shapes, they are not so varied as the mixture which apparently blazed across the sky in front of our ancestors. Plate shapes, dome shapes or cigar shapes are quite enough for the average person to adjust to, therefore, the people of Darlington County, South Carolina, must have been close to hysteria when, in May, 1888, they saw an enormous serpent shape object gliding through the air with a hissing noise. This serpent shape was seen many times, but the weirdest sightings of this time happened in 1873 when farmers near Bonham, Texas, reported seeing what looked like a giant serpent drifting over their farms. It later appeared near Fort Scott, Kansas, and went on to frighten cavalry horses at Fort Riley.

Maybe the little green men were experimenting during the nineteenth century for their UFOs

appeared in every conceivable shape, which may be fair enough for progress and evolution but can play havoc with the nerves of everyone watching from down here.

Here are a few examples of the shapes that were seen and they name only a few. There was a thing like a twenty-foot pruning fork over Poland in 1825; a rectangular luminous body over Niagara Falls in 1833; a disc with a tail over the Atlantic in 1870; a triangular shape rising and falling in the sky over Bermuda in 1855 (has this something to do with the mysteries of the Bermuda Triangle?).

Then, in 1880, over Madisonville and Louisville, Kentucky, a complicated object like a man, covered in machinery with a sphere at each end, appeared.

Finally, there is the case of Alexander Hamilton, a former Congressman and much respected by neighbours and officials as a man of integrity. As even the purest among us can have a mad half hour once in a while, I, therefore leave an open verdict on this man, who swore that a three hundred foot-long cigar-shaped airship had almost landed on his farm at Le Roy, Kansas, at 10.30pm on April 19, 1897.

As he and two other men approached the

craft, only thirty-foot above them, they were astonished to see, in the brilliantly lit interior, six strange beings whom they could hear talking in an unknown language. The aliens saw the farmer and took off.

Unknown language

However, if you feel more inclined to take the word of three trustworthy astronomers, you can choose between these people.

In 1883, Mexican astronomer Dr Jose Bonilla saw through his telescope, over a period of two hours, 283 objects like flying plates moving at immense speeds and, later, 48 torpedo-like objects gliding through the atmosphere.

On July 29, 1878, astronomers James C. Watson and Lewis Swift were observing a total eclipse of the sun. They saw two disc-shaped objects, each about half a mile across, hovering at a height of 20,000 miles.

If UFOs are a reality, a debatable point even now, then it's quite a shock to find that they were spinning around in the sky before man had invented planes of any sort. And the thought that extra terrestrial eyes have been scanning us for countless centuries gives you the uncomfortable feeling that maybe Big Brother was watching us long before George Orwell was born.

