

WEEKEND EXTRA

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TV GUIDE

Not so elementary when
imagination plays tricks

UFO? Call Sherlock of space!

HE DOESN'T WEAR a deerstalker. He doesn't smoke a huge curved pipe. But Tony Mann is a sort of Sherlock Holmes — of space! See a light in the sky... a cigar-shape on the horizon... luminous blobs at owirise... then Mann's your man.

He's the BUFORA co-ordinator for South Wales which means the gnat who checks out your sightings before returning the verdict.

Which so far has inevitably been: "Sorry, but you saw Venus." Or, "No, it wasn't a space ship from Sirius. It was a plane refuelling."

And in the case of one entranced lady who heard Voices just like Joan of Arc, an overheated imagination, combined with a somewhat eerie atmosphere around her isolated home.

In the four years since he's been local co-ordinator for the British UFO Research Association (BUFORA Ltd) Tony Mann has investigated a couple of dozen claims of sightings which the slightest were convinced had no earthly explanation.

Poys own expenses

It doesn't sound a lot — but these were the people interested enough to write or telephone him. Most people who see something, he observes, simply let it rest.

"I follow up every report, always hoping that this time... But 'this time' has not yet come.

By DAN O'NEILL

Except, perhaps, once. And the sighting in that case — or rather those cases for there were two — was Tony Mann himself.

"About 15 years ago I was fishing with some friends at Redwick just outside Newport when I saw a glowing white ball coming in from the sea. It

Sharon. And those sightings triggered an interest in the paranormal that in time took him to BUFORA.

He got in touch with the organisation and agreed to be their representative in South Wales. It's a voluntary post, no pay, and Tony even pays all his

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looked as big as a football held at arm's length and was about 300 feet high."

Tony's friends were too late getting to him to see the ball but for three hours, he swears, "something like cobwebs fell from the sky, covering us and our fishing rods."

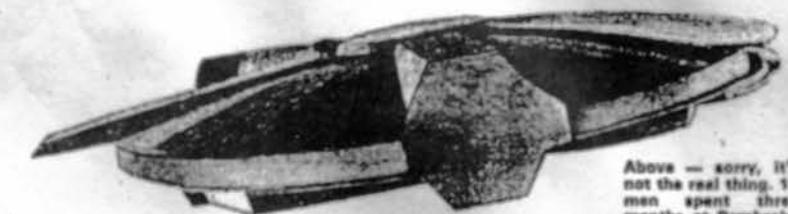
He was alone when he saw the next object — "A cigar shape, floating over the mountains, very slowly, with no windows."

That was near his Pontnewydd home, a big, rectory-type building, where he lives with his wife Linda and daughter

own expenses through plenty of travel and telephoning is involved.

"I suppose I do 10 or 11 hours a week on BUFORA work. I used to do a bit more before I became a security guard." He sold his coal business a couple of years ago and now works mainly Saturdays and evenings.

Jenny Handley, director of investigations for BUFORA insists that nine out of 10 of all UFO reports have a conventional explanation. Tony Mann concurs. His first "case" was in the Blackwood area, a 62-year-old woman



Above — sorry, it's not the real thing. 15 men spent three months at Pembroke Dock making this 10 ton mock-up, for George Lucas' The Empire Strikes Back. Left, Tony Mann surveys the sky, hoping for a repeat of the unexplained sightings that first got him hooked on UFOs



bombing which was, naturally, under wraps.

No one has yet claimed a Close Encounter. If they did, Tony admits, "To be perfectly honest I'd be very suspicious."

But, he adds, you've got to keep an open mind. And he's heard all the rumours of crashed UFOs and their occupants being kept preserved in bases in Russia and America. Not to mention the mysterious Men In Black whose function seems to be the maintenance of secrecy.

Incredible claims

The trouble with UFOlogy, it seems, is that it offers what we might call the fringe element carte blanche to make the most incredible claims.

The Aetherius Society, for example, speaks of Jesus piloting a UFO and of their founder, George King, transmitting messages from outer space.

Serious researchers, says Jenny Handley, "abhor the way this religious group abuse their subject."

BUFORA, she maintains, accepts that most sightings are explained naturally. But for some there is no explanation — yet.

Some, she suggests, "represent things on the borders of scientific understanding that one

who saw a glowing light over her isolated home — and who was supported by a couple of young relatives.

But, contrary to the popular notion that investigations are so eager for the right result that they will accept anything, Tony followed his usual checkout routine, which is pretty thorough.

"You find out what they read — people can get ideas from books, even subconsciously. And look into their general background. This lady was very religious and linked things to the Bible."

When she began speaking of hearing Voices when telephoning some time later, and when the young relatives changed their descriptions of the object, Tony crossed her off his list.

More hopeful was the claim from St. Mellons of a number of lights in the sky. But Tony followed "usual procedures," which means finding from the RAF and local airports — or even London — what air activity was taking place.

In the St. Mellons case it was a series of "circular and blurring" an exercise that sees planes come in from the sea and touch down momentarily, before flying out on a curve again.

Tony Mann at work in his volunteer post as BUFORA investigator

Satellites are often confused with UFOs, although Tony is careful never to call them anything but objects or sightings. To say UFO, he explains, would plant an idea. "You don't put words in their mouths."

But he thought the Big One had at last arrived

'Most sightings are explained naturally. But for some there is no explanation — yet'

when reports came in from several areas of triangular formations of lights over the coast. The RAF and USAF denied that any night refuelling was going on although the pattern of the lights made that look the logical explanation.

But the denials altered things. Until Tony got word later from a sympathiser in the Service that there had indeed been such exercises, in readiness for the Libyan

day will be understood just as we now understand electricity. Remember that that form of power existed for thousands of years before we "discovered" it. UFOs are no different."

It's still Tony Mann's dream, though, to come up with the Big One. And if you think you've got it he'd like to know. His address is 14 Firelocks Road, Pontnewydd, Cwmbran NP44 1AP. Telephone (0533) 2702.

