

Welcome to a break from the usual format, which has been prompted by the extraordinary recent spate of sightings in Mid Wales of Unidentified Flying Objects, - the UFOs. The Chronicle has been contacted on several occasions during the past month, not by aliens, but by members of the public who have recently seen inexplicable objects in the sky. As The Chronicle's "Astronomy & Space" Correspondent, I have frequently returned home to find my answerphone full of putative aliens!

The cases I have been able to investigate via the telephone have ranged from those for which a possible astronomical explanation is available (which currently would include Sirius and Mars, bright meteors, aircraft, artificial satellites and weather balloons) to cases such as the remarkable recent experience of a lady in Presteigne. This was apparently not just a strange light or lights in the sky, but a tangible object with purple, yellow and other coloured lights on it. The object, which emitted a low humming sound, was described as having been about fifteen feet in diameter and with some kind of rail around it like a helicopter. This object was to the south-east ("opposite the comet in the sky") and moving just above tree top level. I have no doubt that all those I talked to were normal level-headed people who had seen something perplexing: (the lady in Presteigne actually found the experience extremely frightening and

has absolutely no ambition ever to see it again!). It is even interesting to speculate that this may have been the same flashing multicoloured



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object which Tom Reynolds and his son reported seeing from a distance in the Brecon area on successive nights just previously - "The object was flashing all sorts of different colours, and through my binoculars I could see separate lights including blue, red, green and purple, quite different from aircraft lights". This was followed by a report from the same area of visitors staying on a farm who have seen something like a laser beam on the sky.

If one sceptically dispenses with sightings which could possibly be of an astronomical origin (eg every time bright Venus appears in the evening sky UFO reports promptly increase) one is still left with sightings such as the above which invite one to consider the man-made - such as

aircraft, artificial satellites, and weather balloons. When these can be ruled out or appear sufficiently unlikely, then apart from some kind of freak meteorological condition (such as ball-lightening), or an organised hoax, only two main options remain.

Option 1: "Something Military"

It is my guess that here is the explanation for substantial numbers of UFO reports. Our technology is advancing exponentially, and it is my expectation that for some time there have probably been two separate kinds of technology - that which is, and that which is not, for civilian consumption. As astronomers have also found, there is much information to be gleaned from the sending of unmanned craft equipped with sensors into the darkness of the night. Areas such as Mid Wales are ideal test-flight areas - especially when the regular aircrews are away on their Easter breaks. As for "laser beams on the sky", I have seen one myself in the late afternoon near Crickhowell - it was

like someone drawing on the sky with a brilliant light-pen, and I stood there with my jaw hanging open, it was pursued within seconds by a jet aircraft which suddenly loomed up from behind rooftops and travelled exactly in the beam's wake. I wrote to the RAFT with a detailed description and an enquiry but received no reply.

Option 2: "Advanced Alien Life":

Fewer and fewer astronomers these days seriously doubt the probability of the existence of extraterrestrial life. Apart from the interesting if inconclusive evidence for primitive life, recently offered from Mars, and Jupiter's moon Europa, the evidence of its likelihood has been steadily stacking up on the positive side for the past thirty years. In the near future I will be devoting at least one (and maybe more) "Night Sky" article to the intriguing question of "Is There Life Out There", but since, (strangely for an astronomer), I am running out of space, I will confine comment here to its relevance regarding UFOs. There remains a curious tendency for everyday folk to snigger and deride the very idea of "Aliens", at least those capable of existing outside the confines of a TV screen. I believe this "little green man" attitude profoundly out of date and worthy of derision itself. Whether we are able to perceive them or not, whether they are there or not, whether Earth has in fact been visited or not, I believe it is quite likely.



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