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The coming of the saucers

On Thursday, June 24, 1947, Kenneth Arnold, who ran his own business selling and installing fire control equipment in rural areas, was flying a light aircraft near the Cascade mountains in Washington State in the north western United States. Mr Arnold was an experienced pilot for whom flying was a recreational past time. At an altitude of about 15,000 feet he approached Mount Rainier. The sky and air were clear as crystal. In about 1000 hours he saw five saucer shaped objects flying in a V formation at an altitude of 15,000 feet. He described them as light blue and thought I was too close to see them clearly.

Reflected

"I looked every place in the sky and couldn't find where the reflection had come from until I looked to the left and the north of Mt Rainier where I observed a cluster of nine peculiar looking aircraft flying from north to south at approximately 9,000 foot altitude and going, seemingly, in a definite direction of about 170 degrees.

"They were approaching Mt Rainier very rapidly, and I merely assumed they were jet planes. Anyway I discovered that this was where the reflection had come from, as two or three of them every few seconds would dip for the sun to reflect them, just enough for the sun to reflect them on my plane.

"Mr Arnold observed the nine strange objects for about two minutes as they appeared to sweep at high speed between Mt Rainier and the neighbouring peak of Mt Adams. He was struck by their manoeuvring ability as much as their speed, and by the fact they appeared to have no tails.

"This happened for his satisfaction and started a frenzied flight of flying saucer stories. The term 'flying saucer' - being actually used by Arnold - was derived from an unidentified pilot's report, and UFO became the term for the flying saucer. Mr Arnold thought all signs of official investigation were nothing more than a cover-up and several letters received such widespread and national publicity.

The story of the impact of the saucer on popular culture is a fascinating and far reaching one even if you believe they themselves have no existence in reality.

A number of films have used the theme - from Plan 9 from Outer Space to Close Encounters of the Third Kind. Several recent television shows have also used the "Close encounters" theme in different ways, often emphasising the remote, rural back-ground of many of the reports.

The actual form of the phenomenon has changed too. In early days flying discs were frequently reported, but now they are rarely seen. The UFO's of today are more like the downbeat UFO's.

Another feature of the early days was the conviction, which claimed to be true, that had been conducted by a superior civilisation from outer space with a special message for mankind, usually in terms of the interstellar

dimension. The first conviction to come out openly was an American's public secretary called George Adamski. In 1952 he claimed to have met a Venusian (the correct Latin derivation should be Washington State, not Ontario) in Southern California. The Venusian was a beautiful, slender, hair-free young man and for some time the close rapport of the early film and commercialised UFO Adamski through a mixture of celebrity and after language, wearing him, of course, that most popular of headgear for a disc jockey of his own making.

His professed a number of photographs of alleged flying saucers, and later Adamski went on to make even more sensational claims: he obtained the moon, Venus and Mars and he even got as far as Saturn, claiming that he was all inhibited words, but being old NASA was eventually to prove beyond all doubt that they were not, using rather more conventional technology.

Adamski died in 1965, and it is now generally accepted that all his claims were fraudulent.

However, many early sightings were of "Adamski" type craft, which looked like old fashioned lamp shades (hundred some suggested that this is what Adamski used as the basis for his models) with three bulb jet into the flat underside.

But soon sightings on landed craft, often associated with strange phenomena, became persistent. In a typical early case of September 1954, 17 year old Farmer's son John Smith of Colchester, Kansas, was driving his tractor home at 5pm after working late operating a sick harrow in his father's field. On the way he spotted a tiny figure, the size of a five-year-old child with long arms and very long legs. The little man appeared from behind a fence and seemed to fly over a rise in the ground to where a small airplane shaped object was hovering about five feet in the air. The strange creature entered the craft which lit up and moved off rapidly.

Humanoid

"You asked me about the saucer I saw," says Mr Smith, "I was walking in the field with my dog, and I had a tractor nearby. It was about 400 feet, and didn't seem to be on a fence. He was grounded behind it. He jumped up and looked at me and kind of smiled. He jumped into the saucer which he held up and took off. It went out of sight. I told them and told about it. We talked it over. The man called the subject. It came down that night and questioned me. He said he would come back in the morning to look and see if there were any tracks around the house. He sent the reports to Washington DC."

By the 1960s things were looking much darker. The alien had become decidedly hostile towards mankind, and seemed only to show interest in humans when they were required for some purpose. They appeared as "green" - small humanoid creatures with

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Charged & a Fordson TV presenter The Ray Leonard Fairbrooks

the early years of the flying saucer story were surrounded by America. UFO's didn't make it to the other country until 1954. On February 1st, a young astrologer, Stephen Duany, (later a poet) 141 years old was on the OMA News Channel when he saw a disc with a strange colour when he saw a strange object seen from out of a window. He managed to get two photographs of it with his rubber finger Kodak camera. The resulting image is somewhat blurred, but Stephen, in his excitement, may have set his camera incorrectly.

Mary considered that the picture was of an Adamski "lampshade" type saucer with portions and half-shaped landing gear, but this interpretation does require some imagination.

The town of Warrimater in Wiltshire made the headlines in 1965 with several spectacular sightings of "The Thing" in the skies overhead. The area had already been in the news in 1960 when a mysterious crater had appeared at nearby Clatford. Then just before Christmas 1964, came reports of a mysterious noise - a loud humming sound - associated with a humming sound. Sightings of strange objects in the sky eventually followed.

On September 10, 1966 the Daily Mirror (which then had the largest circulation in Britain) published a front page report with a photograph of flying saucer over Warrimater and reportedly taken by Gordon Fairbrooks, a young factory worker on August 28.

The publicity the photograph caused, and the underlying effects of racial prejudice Arthur Shuttleworth (who died last year) who writes The Warrimater Mystery and several subsequent books, ensured that Warrimater was to remain the centre of the British UFO for several years. Unfortunately in 1992, Roger Hoodon, a former Warrimater resident, admitted he had faked the famous picture by the simple means of drawing a small model into the air and having a camera photograph it.

Interviewed

In 1977 it was the turn of South East Wales and the David Thomas to become the focus of attention. Here again there had already been reported sightings, but on Friday, February 4, a domed object with a light on top was seen on the ground near Brompton Primary School by 15 pupils, 14 boys and one girl, aged between nine and 11 during their lunch break.

The saucer seems to have been intermittently visible between 12.30pm and 3.45pm, and some of the children spoke of seeing a large grey humanoid with prominent ears and carrying some sort of apparatus.

One of the pupils, David Davies (aged 11) returned with local UFO investigator and retired vet, Ronald Jones. Pugh at around 10pm, but by then it was raining heavily and there was no sign of the object or any traces visible. David and Michael Webb (11), whose father was a squadron leader stationed at nearby RAF Brawley, were later interviewed by Mrs Jones Pugh.

The following Monday (February 7) the local teacher, who had initially been sceptical, called the 20 or so pupils of what they had seen. The strange phenomenon showed a distinct similarity, too, by then, of course, the children had had plenty of opportunity to discuss what they had seen with one another.

This event was widely publicised and was followed by a series of UFO sightings in the area which lasted throughout 1977, probably being a local, numerous newspaper articles as well as national claims.

UFO's later at national claims, articles, books of articles, the reporting of hundreds of articles, photos, video and of humanoids walking the ground, which, of course, the fortunate men in black, stepped out men (and occasionally women as well) who are claimed to visit flying saucer witnesses to persuade them to retract their statements by behaving in a somewhat hostile and generally intimidating way.

Research

Later investigators have cast doubt on many of the claims, including those made by the children. Not some of the reported sightings remain difficult to explain. On a Radio Wales programme transmitted in January 1997 local businessman Oly Edwards admitted to standing around the area on several occasions dressed up in a silver suit with both in his own, used by specialist oil workers, but he denied any responsibility for the reported claims between Primary School, and Gerald Davies, Philip Jones and David Webb, which stood by the claims they had made as one of the witnesses.

One of the interesting things that researchers like UFO's has revealed is that they are not likely to be seen in any area that is too far from the area where they reported to have seen them. This is a common feature of many of the reports of UFO's sightings and there are examples of this in the United States.

However, the Church Spectrum fault does not dismiss the British. President, near Knight and along the Newport Ridge, and there is another case of sighting in the Llan-droidau (Wales) area.

What is the explanation for all this? As this website is getting rather long I will have to postpone such discussion to another time. Many reported sightings can undoubtedly be explained as perfectly ordinary phenomena - either natural or man-generated - observed, perhaps, under unusual lighting conditions. Venus is an explanation commonly put forward by sceptics, and it is certainly true that people who should have known better have reported Venus as a flying saucer.

However some sightings remain difficult to explain. At one time the "vertical terrestrial hypothesis" or ETH (that is to say being visited by beings from other worlds) was widely accepted by ufologists, but this has now been seriously challenged by those who see UFO's as a rare natural phenomenon, as yet unexplained by science, but ultimately explicable of scientific explanation.