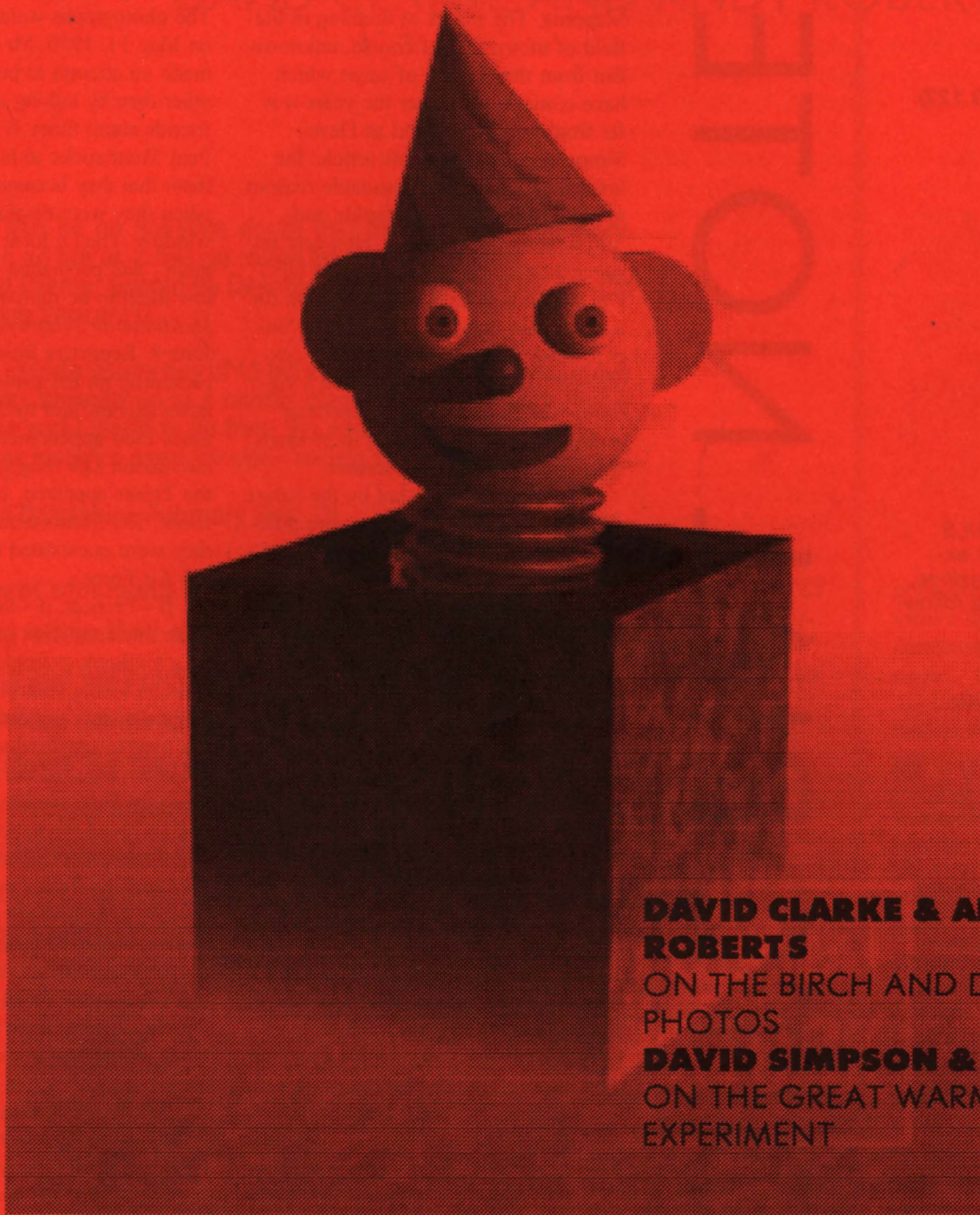


# MAGONIA<sup>75</sup>



**DAVID CLARKE & ANDY ROBERTS**

ON THE BIRCH AND DARBISHIRE PHOTOS

**DAVID SIMPSON & KEN RAINE**  
ON THE GREAT WARMINSTER EXPERIMENT

# HOAX!

LOOKING AT WHAT'S BEHIND THE UFO TRICKSTERS



**MAGONIA 75**  
(incorporating MUF0B 122)

**JULY 2001**

**EDITOR**  
**JOHN RIMMER**  
*jrimmer@magonia.demon.co.uk*

**ASSOCIATE EDITOR**  
**John Harney**  
*harney@harneyj.freereserve.co.uk*

**WEB EDITOR**  
**Mark Pilkington**  
*m.pilkington@virgin.net*

**REVIEWS EDITOR**  
**Peter Rogerson**

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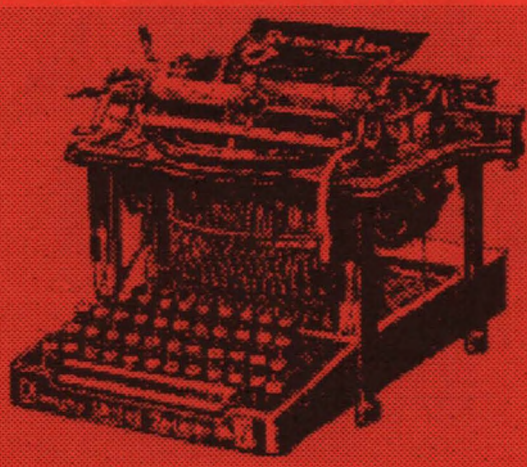
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*John Rimmer  
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5 James Terrace  
Mortlake Churchyard  
London, SW14 8HB  
United Kingdom*

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# EDITORIAL NOTES

We make no apologies for returning to the issue of hoaxes in this issue of Magonia. The extent of hoaxing in the field of ufology is, of course, unknown. But from the number of cases which have come to light over the years it is far from negligible. And as Dave Simpson points out in his article, the hoaxes tend, for understandable reasons, to concentrate in photographic and 'physical evidence' cases. However my suggestion on the Internet forum UFO UpDates that hoaxes might account for a significant number of otherwise 'unexplained' cases (and quite a few 'explained' ones as well) produced a vigorous roar of denial from American ufologists, and I was asked to produce figures to support my assertion.

Well, fair enough, but by the nature of things, statistics on hoaxes are difficult things to compile, and those most opposed to the idea of widespread hoaxing in ufology are strangely reluctant to come up with their own statistics on what proportion of UFO sighting represent 'structured craft of unknown origin' - or whatever this month's artfully worded description is.

One of the problems with discussing hoaxes is that quite a lot of people do not really understand what a hoax is. For a start, it's not necessarily a scam or a con-trick. This seems to be the assumption of people whose immediate reaction to the suggestion of a hoax is to say, "but they had nothing to gain from it". Well, I suppose it depends what you mean by gain. Although some UFO hoaxes have produced a considerable financial reward for their perpetrators (such as... oh well, perhaps not - you never know who might be reading) this is very seldom the main motivation.

More often it is a desire for small-scale notoriety, or just the sheer pleasure of fooling one of the so-called Experts in the field. In many cases it seems to be a practical joke which got out of hand. An example of this may be the McMinnville (or 'Trent') photo from 1950. This well-known photograph shows a saucer-shaped object with a sort of 'conning tower' protruding from the top.

The way in which the photographs came to public attention is interesting. The photographs were allegedly taken on May 11, 1950. Mr and Mrs Trent made no attempt to publicise them, other than by talking to family and friends about them. It was only when Paul Trent spoke to his banker about them that they became public property, when they were displayed in the bank window. Then a local reporter spotted them, and persuaded the Trents to allow them to be reproduced in the local *McMinnville Telephone Register* on June 8. Reporters from outside the town picked up on the story, it then got to a news agency, and by June 26 the photos made their appearance in the mass-circulation *Life* magazine. Subsequently the Trents appeared on a networked TV show. The Trents claimed that after this they were questioned by the FBI and the US Air Force.

If - I repeat, if - the photos were a hoax this escalation of events seems to be a textbook example of the original hoaxers losing control of the situation. Once the story got outside the family, it's hard to see at what point the Trents could have pulled the plug, and stopped the story in its tracks. Once the story had involved the national media it would have developed its own momentum, and the Trents may well have thought their best plan was to go along with it, but try to keep their heads down as much as possible. Perhaps it's for this reason that whilst maintaining that the photographs were genuine, they made no attempt to exploit them financially.

Any suggestion that the photos were faked brings instant denial from the UFO Establishment, with the very clear suggestion that the Trents couldn't have faked the pictures because, well, quite frankly, they were just too thick to pull off a stunt like that. Because, as we all know, hoaxes are always "elaborate" - that's the ones that aren't "cruel", of course - so obviously beyond the capacity of any midwestern farmer to devise. Well, if you believe that you'll believe anything, so are perfectly qualified to be a UFO 'Expert'.

# NO KIDDING THIS TIME...MY FLYING SAUCER PHOTO IS GENUINE!

UFO HOAXING AND THE STORY OF ALEX BIRCH AND STEPHEN  
DARBISHIRE

DAVID CLARKE AND ANDY ROBERTS

"There can be no possible doubt that this is a genuine story. Children do not as a rule go round faking photographs."  
Leonard Cramp, quoted by Desmond Leslie, *Space, Gravity and the Flying Saucer* (1)

"...how could a young boy of 13 tell a lie? Well I was a tremendous liar, I was brought up in a middle class family who were highly religious and I learnt to lie from the age of one! In retrospect, I think was merely a pawn for other people's needs, and I just fitted the bill."

Stephen Darbshire, February 2001 (2)

**Whenever ufologists turn their attention to the subject of hoaxing within their subject the fundamental gulf between sceptics and believers is brought sharply into focus. Those who choose to invest belief in the ETH and other exotic explanations for the UFO phenomenon tend towards the simplistic party line that, yes, hoaxes exist, but they are few and far between and have little effect on 'serious ufology'. Sceptics and more open-minded students of flying saucery are a little more realistic.**

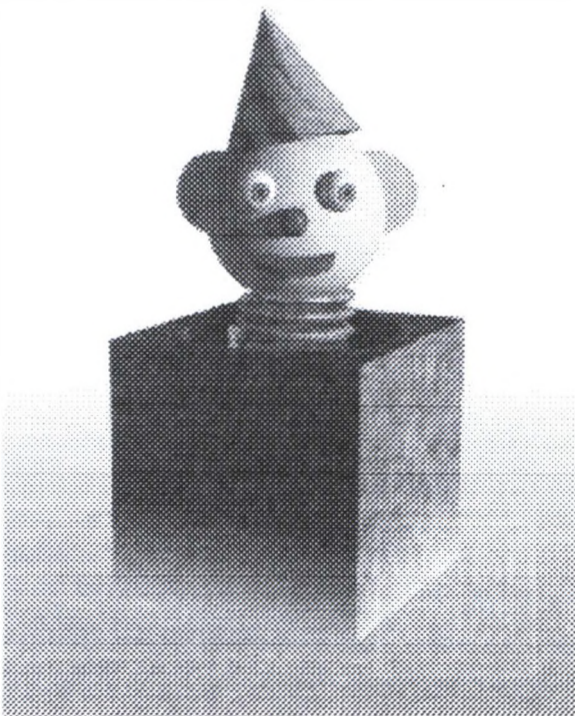
IT'S PERFECTLY true that as a percentage of investigated UFO cases, known hoaxes represent a tiny fraction. But simple bean counting misses the point entirely. UFO hoaxes may be small in number but those which exist have had a massive impact upon the subject, and have been far reaching in their influence.

Hoaxes are rarely just standard UFO reports. They are invariably photographic or document based. This makes them an easily displayable, marketable media commodity. Whereas a single witness sighting of a brightly lit UFO may only get, at best, a few column inches in a newspaper, a UFO hoax photograph, such as that created by Gordon Faulkner during the 1965 Warminster flap, will receive national media coverage. In turn this sort of exposure can add a stamp of validity (however specious) on to a hitherto disparate

collection of UFO reports, turning local a flap into a national phenomenon. And so the cycle continues.

Listing and discussing known hoaxes would be tedious. The information is available in the literature for those who wish to seek it out. Most of you will already be familiar with it and how hoaxes like Gulf Breeze, MJ-12 etc have affected the subject. One small part of our research in recent years has focussed upon those suspected hoaxes that had a huge impact upon the media and ufology but, more importantly, have continued to influence the witness/perpetrator. We all too often forget that people lie at the centre of the UFO mystery and what happens to individuals who are thrust into the public eye, and how their views about their alleged experience/s change and mutate over the years, is often forgotten or overlooked.

The cases under discussion here exemplify the problem in that they are in the borderlands, being neither 100% proven hoaxes or unequivocally from 'out there' but continue to exert a deep influence upon the public perception of UFO



mythology. The Alex Birch and Stephen Darbishire photographs are classic UFO photographs, much written about and much speculated upon. Both these cases impacted hard on British ufology. As we will see they impacted even harder on those involved with them. They also give an important insight into the nature of hoaxing and into the heart of early British ufology.

UFO cases come and go, witness names and case details used like happy family cards to justify one theory or to trump another. Classic cases are repeated by rote, the humanity ripped out of them to satisfy UFOlogical obsessions and facts. It's the frequent cry in internet forums such as UFOupdates that sceptics don't take witness testimony seriously, but how many of these smug internet key-clickers take the trouble to track down witnesses to classic cases and or try to make sense of their stories? We did. Whether there is any sense, whether their stories are true or false only you can decide.

### The Stephen Darbishire photograph

Flying saucers arrived in the British Isles in the late summer of 1950, when two popular weekend newspapers, the *Sunday Dispatch* and the *Sunday Express*, launched a major media promotion campaign. Both papers competed to serialise the seminal books by Major Donald Keyhoe *Flying Saucers are Real*, Frank Scully's *Behind the Flying Saucers* and Gerald Heard's *Riddle of the Flying Saucers*. Behind the scenes, the editor of the *Sunday Dispatch*, Charles Eade, was quietly encouraged to promote 'flying saucer' stories by his friend Lord Mountbatten whom he had served as Press officer during the Second World War (3). Mountbatten, who was at that time a personal believer in the ET origin of the saucers, felt the subject should be taken seriously and wanted to make the public aware of the "evidence."

The *Sunday Dispatch* played an influential role in creating the first real flying saucer invasion of Britain. The popular newspaper featured saucer sightings prominently on page 1 on a number of occasions throughout the early 1950s much to the chagrin of its rivals, but Eade took great pains to protect the source for his original story that he claimed in October

1950 was "bigger than the Atom Bomb wars." Partly as a result of this first tabloid-style hype, the *Dispatch's* circulation rose from a mere 700,000 copies in the late 40s to 2,400,000 when Eade left the editor's seat in 1957. (4)

The flying saucers had arrived and the ground was prepared for ever more bizarre and incredible stories. By the autumn of 1953 when George Adamski's book with Desmond Leslie, *Flying Saucers have Landed* was first published in Britain, the public were already primed to accept the incredible (5). It was an era of rapid technological progress and great optimism that mankind would soon be taking steps into outer space. As a result, the British public eagerly lapped up the stories describing military jets outpaced by saucers and puzzled over the photographs taken by a humble American farmer, Paul Trent, allegedly showing a flying disc (again featured on page 1 of the *Sunday Dispatch*). The next logical step was a story claiming a flying saucer had landed, followed by the first photograph taken in the British Isles. Both events were to follow in the space of little more than 18 months.

"...It had to happen. It has happened. A flying saucer has landed – in the United States!"

This was how science editor Maurice Goldsmith opened the story published in the October 3, 1953 edition of the popular London-based magazine *Illustrated*. Entitled "Happy Landings from Outer Space" the article featured a half-page b/w reproduction of the classic 'bottle cooler' photograph taken by US contactee George Adamski at Palomar Gardens, California, on December 13, 1952. The photo it was said, depicted a flying saucer "Scout Ship" 35 feet in diameter, complete with three portholes and three "landing spheres."

Also featured in the magazine were photographs of 'six flying saucers' and a cigar-shaped 'Mother Ship' taken on March 5, 1951 and an artist's impression of the 'man from Venus' Adamski claimed to have met near at Desert Centre, Arizona, in November the following year. Goldsmith adopted a tongue-in-cheek stance throughout his extended review of the book and concluded dryly: "...unfortunately, Adamski's logic is poor and I am prepared to wager

that if ever I see life from Venus it will not look anything like me, or Mr Adamski or the being he encountered." (6)

Many thousands of people read the article in *Illustrated*, and the follow-ups that appeared in the national newspapers during the winter of 1953-54. Adamski's photographs and claims were transmitted across the world, and the exciting story of visitors from other planets were the very stuff of schoolboy fantasy. So widespread were the stories that news of the arrival of the flying saucers reached Little Arrow farm at Torver, in the beautiful surroundings of the English Lake District, during the winter of 1953-54. Little Arrow was the home of Dr S.B. Darbishire, a GP who had retired to run a small farm in the fells below Coniston Old Man (2,575 ft). He had a son, Stephen, then aged 13, an intelligent, creative boy who had displayed a talent for art that he would eventually develop into a career as an adult.

Dr Darbishire had been brought up as a Quaker and his son Stephen says he had "a good sense of humour and a very inquiring mind; he would accept nothing, questioned everything he was told and loved excitement." More excitement than many people experience in a lifetime was soon to follow. Within six months of the publication of Adamski's book, Stephen became the first person in England to take photographs of a 'flying saucer' hovering near the Old Man.

The story began – as in so many other UFO photo cases – as a result of what Stephen describes as "an accident" of history. On the morning of February 15, 1954, Stephen – then a pupil at Ulverston Grammar School – and his eight-year old cousin Adrian Meyer set off for an expedition on the slopes of the fell below the Old Man armed with an "old fashioned" Kodak box camera recently purchased by his father. To this day, Stephen maintains that at this point he knew "absolutely nothing" about the subject of flying saucers. According to Desmond Leslie's account the youngster experienced "a nagging persistent restlessness" that fateful morning, as if something was urging him that he must go up the hill behind his home "...he could not tell why; he merely knew he had to." (7)

The pair planned to take pictures of birds and other wildlife in a small hill valley on the slopes below the Old Man. Stephen immediately raises doubts about the reality status of the photographs he obtained when, today, he recalls how: "...my cousin and I had been fooling around taking pictures... [doing] trick photography and lots of other exciting things with it, double images, ghosts, jumping off rooftops and that sort of thing..."

What happened next is a little "out of focus" – as were the photographs that resulted from this encounter with 'the unknown.' According to the story told by the boys in 1954 it was Adrian who first drew Stephen's attention to something odd in the sky in the direction of the mountain. The older boy was at that moment looking in the opposite direction, towards Lake Coniston when Adrian thumped him on the back and exclaimed: "Look, what on earth's that?" pointing to the sky above Dow Crag. The 'object', according to the first published account (in the *Lancashire Evening Post*, Preston, February 18, 1954) had a silvery, glassy appearance, shining "like aluminium in the sunlight." It glided towards them from the direction of Coniston, descending until it disappeared behind a piece of high ground, once again coming into view again a few seconds later. It approached within 400 yards of two startled boys, travelling at tremendous speed, and then stopped suddenly and hovered, noiselessly, in the sky.

Stephen told a reporter they could clearly see every detail: "The object was glistening and it was a silvery milky colour. You could tell the outline of it very plainly indeed and see port-holes along the upper part, and a thing which looked like a hatch on top. There were three bumps underneath and the centre of the underneath part was of a darker colour. I took the first picture when it was moving very slowly about three or four hundred yards away and then it disappeared from my view as there was some undergrowth in the way. When it came into sight again I took another picture but then it suddenly went up into the sky in a great swish. As it went upwards it tilted and I could see the underneath side more clearly.



Stephen Darbishire and Adrian Meyer [*Illustrated* magazine, February 12, 1955]

There was some sort of whistling sound as it went up which I think was the wind.” (8)

Immediately the boys ran down to Little Arrow farm where they found Dr Darbishire and the family watching TV, oblivious to the events unfolding outside. Stephen recalls how the two excited youngsters rushed into the farmhouse and blurted out how they “had seen something strange... I think I used the words ‘a flying saucer’ and of course everyone fell about laughing and said ‘oh yes, Stephen, you’ve been up to your tricks again.’” Stephen’s father, according to Desmond Leslie, “frankly did not believe it” but made his son sit down and write a statement and make a sketch of what he had seen within half an hour of the sighting taking place.

Stephen quickly produced some remarkable and accomplished pencil sketches of a classic Adamski ‘flying saucer’ before his two photographs were reproduced in celluloid. They consisted of two detailed drawings of a “Scout Ship,” complete with turret, three portholes and landing gear, almost but not exactly identical to those which had appeared in the magazine *Illustrated* during October 1953. Other sketches depict the craft at different angles, possibly showing its method of departure. In longhand beneath the drawings appear the words: “Drawing by Stephen Darbishire, aged 13 years, of what he saw, done before the two photographs of the flying saucer had been developed.” (9)

Dr Darbishire delivered the film for development to a lab in Coniston village while Stephen was away, staying with his godmother. When the film was returned the retired GP could not believe his eyes. For the final two frames on the film did show a fuzzy, saucer-shaped object apparently suspended above a grassy hillock. Although out of focus, in the best picture it is possible to pick out what appear to be ‘dark portholes’ and three ‘landing domes’ as described by Stephen at the time.

Stephen recalled: “When I came back my father greeted me off the bus at 8 o’clock in the morning and said ‘right, come on inside.’ He was very agitated and he said I’ve got so and so from the *Daily Express* and someone from

1. Leslie, quoted in Cramp, Leonard. *Space, Gravity and the Flying Saucer*. London: Wemer Laurie, 1957, p. 173.

2. Interview with Stephen Darbishire, 7 April 2001. All subsequent quotations are drawn from this interview unless otherwise referenced.

3. Ziegler, Philip. *Mountbatten: The official biography*. London: BCA, 1985, p. 494.

4. *Sunday Dispatch* (London), 14 April 1957

5. Adamski, George and Leslie, Desmond. *Flying Saucers Have Landed*. London: T. Wemer Laurie, 1953.

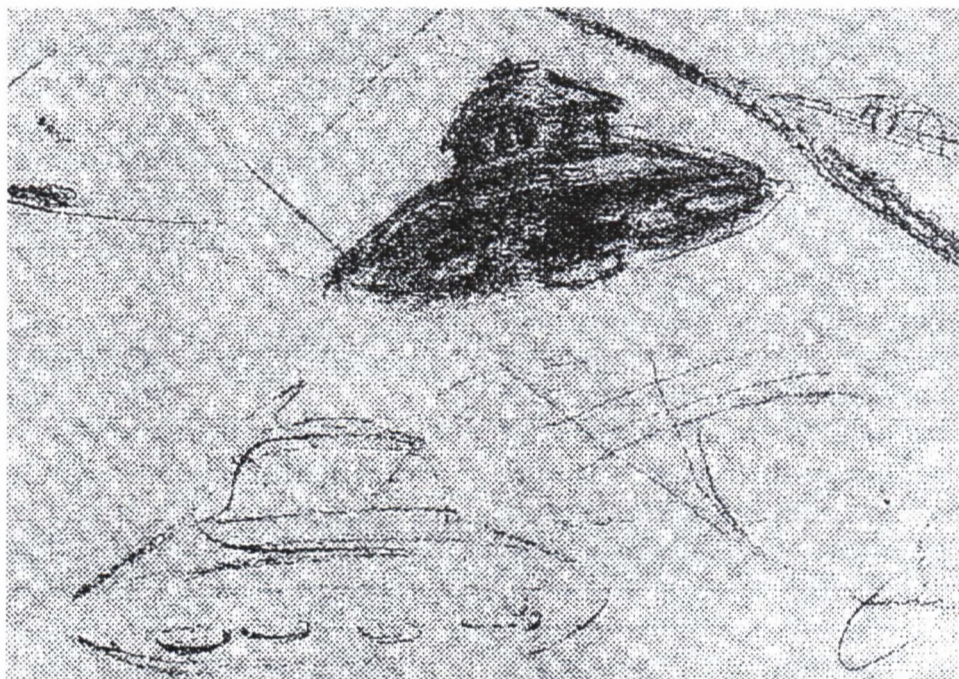
6. *Illustrated* (London), 3 October 1953

7. Leslie, in Cramp, *op. Cit.*, p. 13

8. *Lancashire Evening Post* (Preston), 18 February 1954

9. “Saucers over Britain,” by Waveney Girvan, *Illustrated*, 12 February 1955.

the *Daily Mail* arriving in half an hour. Before I knew it we had half the world's press on the doorstep." What happened next, as they say, is history. Stephen's story and a reproduction of the clearest photograph, the first in the sequence, was published on page 1 of the Preston-based *Lancashire Evening Post*. Within days photos of Stephen, Adrian and the 'flying saucer' had appeared in the national Press. On February 26, 1954, the *Lancashire Evening Post* became the first British newspaper to reproduce Darbishire's sketches and photograph alongside those of the Venusian "Scout Ship" taken by Adamski, having obtained special permission from "the leading British expert on the subject," Desmond Leslie. Al Griffin of the



Stephen Darbishire's original sketch of the UFO he photographed at Coniston, made before the film was developed.

Post noted how "...we are assured... that Stephen had never seen the Adamski pictures" when he produced the sketch. What the paper described as "space travel enthusiasts, flying saucer fans, scientists, scoffers and sceptics" were all left to draw their own conclusions.

During the media frenzy that followed publication of the photographs, Stephen's written statement was overlooked. The original, or what is purported to be the original, was reproduced in Leonard Cramp's book *Space, Gravity and the Flying Saucer* and poses a number of questions. Most important is the sentence that reads: "...Adrian and I were down in a small hill valley so the rising in foreground of photo is due to the position we were in. Some grass is shown under the saucer. [my emphasis]" If these words really were committed to paper within half an hour of the experience as claimed and therefore some days

before the photographs were developed, how could Stephen know what, if anything, was depicted on the negatives that were, at that point, still inside his father's camera? Sadly, no one other than the editor of *Flying Saucer News* felt it necessary to ask this very relevant question at the time. (10)

Equally of interest are Stephen's words describing the point immediately after the photo was taken: "...just as I had finished the flying saucer (which I now thought it must be) shot off up into the clouds..." A curious turn of phrase for a boy who claimed he had "no knowledge" of flying saucers! Desmond Leslie, who travelled to Coniston on February 23 and was a guest of the Darbishire family for two days, soon dismissed the possibility that Stephen had faked the photographs. During his stay "Stephen never once contradicted himself [or] made a remark or inadvertent slip suggestive of a hoax," wrote Leslie who was at that time promoting *Flying Saucers Have Landed*. He saw young Stephen's photographs as corroborative evidence of Adamski's outlandish claims. Leslie notes that Stephen did not make any slip-ups when questioned by four hardened journalists and a crew from BBC TV. The boy's father maintained that he too had cross-examined both Stephen and Adrian thoroughly before deciding to "go public" with the photographs. He said they stuck by their story even when warned about the trouble they could be in if the story was a hoax. He was convinced they were not lying.

But the most suspicious statement of all is hidden within Leslie's attempt to persuade readers that Stephen had never read his book *Flying Saucers Have Landed* or even an abridged version of Adamski's claims: "...he [Stephen Darbishire] admitted he had seen the photograph of the Adamski saucer as published in *Illustrated* on 30th September [sic] 1953." (11)

If Leslie's account is accurate then Stephen clearly had seen Adamski's Scout Ship photo, published four months before his own photographs showing a similar "craft" were taken. Indeed, how else could the youngster have produced such an accurate pencil drawing of an "Scout Ship" complete with three portholes and landing gear? Clearly this left just

two stark alternatives: either Stephen had seen an identical Venusian Scout Ship as described by George Adamski, or he had reproduced the photograph he had seen in *Illustrated* and somehow transferred this to celluloid.

Perhaps realising the problems this admission created for the story Leslie claimed that Stephen maintained "although this saucer picture [published in *Illustrated*] had shown a saucer with three portholes in a row, the one had seen had four in a row." In the drawing he produced immediately after the sighting Stephen drew only three portholes, "but as the saucer went away it turned slightly so that a fourth porthole came into view." For Leslie that was evidence enough, for he knew that in one of the unpublished Adamski photos four portholes in a row are clearly shown.

"He [Stephen Darbishire] did not know this!" exclaimed Leslie with obvious glee. "This, on top of the other evidence, fully convinced me that Stephen was not only telling the truth but also that he had seen the same saucer (or an identical model) as Adamski." (12)

In the heady days of 1954, these problems seemed irrelevant. Through accident or design Stephen Darbishire became a national celebrity overnight. His pictures were flashed around the world, and before February was out the inhabitants of Little Arrow farm had been introduced to what today Stephen calls "the world of sympathetic magic...modern magic" Desmond Leslie was just the first "flying saucer believer" to visit Coniston to experience the vibes of the "Space visitors." Leslie lost no time in proclaiming Stephen's photo as "the second of the Adamski type to be photographed in the world" and told the local newspaper: "I am satisfied that Stephen saw what he says he saw...this visit or contact has been expected for some time." (13)

Before the March was out Stephen had been invited to a saucer-spotters convention in London where delegates scrutinised blurry enlargements of his photograph. He recalls how "it all got rather hysterical and one chap leapt up and said he could see a face in a porthole."

It was during this visit to London in March 1954, that Stephen and his father were secreted into a car and driven to Buckingham

Palace to meet one of the Duke of Edinburgh's private secretaries. It was claimed the invitation came from the Palace via Desmond Leslie who had contacts at 'the highest level.' In fact, the *Sunday Dispatch* got wind of the meeting soon afterwards and reported how Prince Philip had read about Stephen's sighting in the newspapers "and wanted to know more." (14)

The Royal Equerry, RAF Squadron Leader Sir Peter Horsley was at that time involved in his own "saucer" study with the blessing of the Duke, and "the Darbishire boys" became the latest in a series of saucer-spotters who were invited to his office to discuss their sightings. In his autobiography, Horsley says he was "impressed by their story and truthfulness" and notes Dr Darbishire "was not relishing the publicity and notoriety the family were receiving from the newspapers." Horsley sent a report of the meeting to the Duke, who was in Australia at the time, and asked a professional photographer, Wallace Heaton, to examine the negatives. His conclusion said, in summary: "Yes, they could have been faked but they were so good it would have cost quite a lot of money." This left the RAF veteran puzzled: how could an ordinary farming family find the money to finance an elaborate hoax and even if they had, what was their motivation? "Was there a wider conspiracy?" he mused. (15)

Stephen Darbishire's visit to Buckingham Palace was just the beginning of a series of adventures which led him and his family further and deeper into the bizarre world of the 'flying saucer cult.' Visitors called in at the Darbishire family home without invitation, and letters arrived by the sackful including one from none other than Lord Dowding, the Battle of Britain hero – another highly placed saucer believer at that time. In 1959 Stephen was introduced by Desmond Leslie to George Adamski at a meeting held in London during the contactee's lecture tour of Britain and Europe. Stephen, who was by then attending art school, remained "unimpressed" by the contactee who he dismissed as "mad, mad as a hatter...somewhere else altogether." It was at this stage, Stephen told us in 2001, that he asked

himself: "How can I be involved in this, how can I actually be sitting here with these people?"

The teenager was by now feeling increasingly that he was pawn in other people's games, that the photo was no longer his property "...all I was being used for was an instrument of verification." As a result he decided the best way out was to put the word around that his photos were in fact fakes so he could go back to living a normal life.

In a letter sent to UFO author Timothy Good in 1986 Stephen told how "...in desperation I ... said it was a fake." (16) But as Alex Birch and others who followed in Stephen's footsteps were later to find, the "hoax" declaration did not bring an end to the notoriety – rather the opposite: "I was counter-attacked, accused of working with the 'Dark Powers'...or patronisingly 'understood' for following orders from some secret government department."

While Stephen remained "detached" from the strange characters and even stranger beliefs that surrounded his experience, he found the biggest impact of all was upon the lives of his parents. Following the experiences of 1954, Dr Darbishire underwent what his son described as "a mid-life crisis." The visitors and attention his family received from the flying saucer movement opened up a whole new world of possibilities and Darbishire senior became drawn into the world of the occult, collecting a huge library of books on a range of esoteric subjects. The workshop at his farm became a laboratory where he constructed strange machines that utilised revolving lights to detect the human aura and effect alternative cures. Similarly, Stephen's mother was also profoundly affected by the experience and became more interested in the spiritual world.

In 2001 Stephen Darbishire – the artist – prefers to play down the significance of his best known piece of work, growing weary after almost half a century of tiresome questions. Yet the central mystery that eluded Sir Peter Horsley remains: just how could a young boy, who claimed he "knew absolutely nothing about flying saucers" manage to "create" one of most mysterious photographs in the history of the subject? And if it wasn't faked, then what exactly

did the photograph depict? "An object," was the simple but ambiguous answer Stephen Darbishire gave when this question was asked in 2001. What is not in dispute is that Stephen shared his father's inquisitive nature and creative talents – and clearly his sense of humour too, an attribute also associated with another influential personality entwined within this story, Desmond Leslie.

Interviewed in 2001 Darbishire continues to maintain he had never seen Adamski's photos when he produced his drawings and photographs, contradicting his own statement to Leslie in 1954 that he had indeed seen the pictures that appeared in *Illustrated*, the year previously.

How likely was it that the 13-year-old living in the early 50s had never heard of "flying saucers"? Not very likely, it seems. A survey of newspapers published in Cumbria during 1953-54 revealed an earlier saucer sighting, pre-dating Darbishire's experience, made by three Coniston school-boys who claimed to have seen a saucer pass over the village as they waited for a bus. Another sighting followed at the village of Askam. (17) Surely a boy with such inquiring mind as Stephen Darbishire had would have heard about these sightings, if not in a newspaper then on the local grapevine, along with the stories about flying saucers widely published in the national media?

Stephen was in fact quoted in the *London News Chronicle* as claiming a second sighting, just five days after the photograph was taken, of "a cigar-shaped object, again near Old Man" and added "since then I have studied reports of flying saucers and believe in them." (18) Was it entirely coincidental that the second sighting was of a cigar-shaped craft - of the 'Mother Ship' type photographed by Adamski and published alongside the 'Scout Ship' pictures in that widely-read issue of *Illustrated*?

Wherever the inspiration for those sketches came from, what can be said about the photographs themselves? Very little, because according to Darbishire both the negatives and all the surviving prints were "stolen" or "borrowed" and never returned. Although Stephen remained convinced he had correctly focussed upon "Infinity" before the saucer had appeared,

10. See "Coniston Puzzle" in *Flying Saucer News: Journal of the British Flying Saucer Bureau and Flying Saucer Club*, vol 1/9 (summer 1955), 19.

11. Leslie, in Cramp, p.17

12. Ibid.

13. *Lancashire Evening Post* (Preston), 24 February 1954

14. *Sunday Dispatch* (London), 24 March 1954

15. Horsley, Sir Peter. *Sounds from Another Room*. London: Leo Cooper, 1997, p. 180.

16. Good, Timothy. *Above Top Secret*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1987, p.37, 373.

17. *Lancashire Evening Post* (Preston), 19 February 1954

18. *News Chronicle* (London), 22 March 1954

the "object" depicted in both photographs is out of focus. The explanation for this curious anomaly suggested at the time was that "the bellows of his small camera were not fully extended." This theory was disproved when Desmond Leslie experimented with the camera at the place where the photographs were taken, taking a number of exposures using different combinations of shutter speeds and bellow settings. The results suggested the camera was in fact correctly focussed, but Leslie suggested that Stephen had altered the shutter setting by mistake during the excitement of the moment.

The reproduction of the photo featured in most UFO books is in fact the first picture taken as the youngster spun around when alerted to the saucer's presence by his young cousin. In the second photo, rarely published in the UFO literature, the 'craft' appears partly distorted on its right-hand side, as if the craft's angles are 'slewed round.'

It was an effect that a writer in *Flying Saucer News* explained as being the result of UFOs' ability to change shape "prior to warping into hyperspace, or another dimension." (20) This peculiar feature has since been seized upon by Timothy Good as evidence to support the authenticity of the notorious Silver Spring film taken by George Adamski in 1965. In the film the 'Scout Ship' displays a similar distortion of its dimensions. (21) On the contrary, there is no good reason why Adamski could have not been aware of Darbishire's second photo. Darbishire met Adamski in London during 1959 – six years before the Silver Spring film was produced - and would certainly have been shown both photographs taken by the youngster in the presence of his host, Desmond Leslie.

Despite the underlying doubts, believers in the Space People were overjoyed when aeronautical engineer and Saunders-Roc hovercraft designer Leonard Cramp used a method he called "orthographic projection" to demonstrate that the objects depicted in the Darbishire and Adamski photographs were proportionally identical. (22) This should not be so surprising if the "object" photographed by Stephen Darbishire was based upon the photograph of the Scout Ship he had seen in *Illustrated* and so faithfully reproduced in his pencil



Photo courtesy of Alex Birch ©

**"...There is no doubt that the photographs are completely authentic. It is inconceivable that the youngster or parent could have perpetrated a hoax."**

Leonard Cramp, on the Birch photos, in *Flying Saucer Review*.<sup>(26)</sup>

sketches just half an hour following his "sighting."

So what was the "object"? During the writing of his best-selling *Above Top Secret* author Timothy Good approached Stephen and asked if the experience was genuine. Stephen, then 46 and back living in his native Cumbria, would say only: "It happened a long time ago, and I do not wish to be drawn into the labyrinth again." (23)

Today he continues to distance himself from the flying saucer buffs who staked so much of their belief system in the authenticity of those two photographs. After almost half a century Stephen's original account of the Adamski "Scout Ship" with portholes and turret has been replaced by a description more fitting the preoccupations of the 21st century.

"By the time I took the second photo it had gone," Stephen said. "There was nothing dramatic like people at windows or anything...it looked like a cloud to me and when it first happened I thought 'that's a funny shaped cloud.'"

The original glistening, translucent metal had become a "preternatural light." (24)

And what of Adrian Meyer, who despite being the first to see the UFO, faded into the background and never received the attention of his elder cousin? Could he provide the key to what really happened that cold February afternoon in 1954?

"I met him recently for the first time in many years," Stephen told us candidly. "He wasn't involved in it really. He just sort of 'blinked twice.' He doesn't remember anything about it and probably thinks we made it all up. He just said 'that was a load of baloney, wasn't it?'"

The other major player in the Darbishire photo case, Desmond Leslie, passed away in February 2001. His obituary described his extraordinary life as rivalling "any fiction by Nancy Mitford or Anthony Powell, with overtones of a Fifties sci-fi movie, and a little Weimar decadance thrown in." (25) One of his final notes, faxed to Stephen Darbishire, read: "Dear

Stephen, how lovely to hear from you again; you know it's extraordinary that there are still people taking pictures of the old flying saucers... where can they find those 1930s lampshades from, I thought they had all gone out of production." Stephen said of him: "You never knew with Desmond. He appeared to believe completely, but he also had a great sense of humour."

Echoing Alex Birch – soon to follow in his footsteps – and many others caught up in the UFO labyrinth through accident or design, Stephen summed up his feelings of that time:

"It was a one-off experience that lasted 30 seconds but the repercussions are still reverberating ... I don't have any idea about its significance, except that it was one of these things that happen out of the blue that you are caught up in. It's just a type of accident."



The instrument of ufological alchemy was a one-year-old box Brownie 127

### The Alex Birch photograph

In 1962 Alex Birch was one year older than Stephen Darbishire had been when he took the photographs that changed his life. His single black and white picture has since entered the UFO mythology as one of the best-known photographic hoaxes – or was it? Alex's family were considerably less financially well-off than the Darbishires; the Birch parents lived in a modest house at Mosborough, at that time in Derbyshire but actually on the outskirts of the industrial Yorkshire city of Sheffield. Like Stephen Darbishire, Alex had a Catholic upbringing and it is clear that his parents Margaret and Alex senior had an open mind on subjects such as spiritualism and flying saucers.

Alex also had the backing of additional witnesses who initially pledged to stick by the story through thick and thin. They were Alex's schoolpal David Brownlow aged 12 and an older friend, Stuart Dixon, then 16 years of age. The instrument of ufological alchemy was a one-year-old box Brownie 127

camera which Alex continues to treasure, despite a recent bid from the Roswell Museum in New Mexico, who wanted to turn it into one of their exhibits.(27)

It was a grey Sunday morning in March and the trio were fooling around in a field near the British Oak pub five miles from Sheffield City Centre. Today the pub is surrounded not by trees but by modern housing developments. In uncannily similar circumstances to those described by Stephen Darbishire, Alex was taking experimental pictures with his new camera – snaps of a dog, of Stuart jumping into the air, of a stone being thrown and then, lo and behold... a formation of flying saucers! Five in all, hanging in the air, with dazzling white blobs emerging from their dark saucer-shaped fuselages. "I got my camera up and took a shot of them," Alex told the *Derbyshire Times*. "A second or so later they disappeared at terrific speed towards Sheffield." (28)

Alex soon became the centre of a whirlwind of publicity. His photo appeared first in the Yorkshire newspapers, then in the

nationals during the summer of 1962, whilst the part played by the other two boys faded into the background. Alex's father and his English teacher Colin Brook, both sympathetic to ET visitations, played a similar role to Dr Darbishire, promoting the pictures and playing heavily upon the naivety and natural honesty of young Alex. His father in particular played a major part in the promotion of the picture to newspapers and UFO societies. In a letter to *Flying Saucer Review* published in 1963, Birch senior wrote: "...I myself was a non-believer in these objects...[but now] I am firmly convinced that we are being visited by flying saucers of other planets." (29)

Within months

14-year-old Alex was retracing the steps of his Cumbrian predecessor, visiting London to address the inaugural meeting of the British UFO Research Association in Kensington on September 22, 1962. A contemporary account of the meeting described how the schoolboy addressed a crowd of more than 200 members of UFO societies from across the country

"...he seemed dwarfed by the speaker's stand as he spoke faultlessly for four minutes." (30) BUFORA enthusiastically endorsed his pictures following an analysis conducted by one of their 'experts', Alan Watts. He concluded his report with the comment: "If we want the truth I would say we couldn't do better than take these to be fairly normal Adamski-type saucers and argue it out from there." (31) The editor of *Flying Saucer Review*, Waveney Girvan went further suggesting the saucer pilots were interested in Sheffield because "if there is life of any sort inside these flying objects it presumably needs water to sustain it...and Sheffield is surrounded by reservoirs." (32) Predictably, the publicity that Alex's photo received sparked a major flap in the Sheffield and Yorkshire region during the autumn of 1962 with dozens of others 'seeing' UFOs above the city. (33)

But the real highlight of the year was Alex's visit to the very seat of power – Whitehall. Official interest was encouraged by Alex's father who took it upon himself to contact the Air Ministry in July 1962. He informed them of the existence of his son's photograph and said he was "awaiting

20. *Flying Saucer News*, op. cit.

21. Zinsstag, Lou and Good, Timothy. *George Adamski: The Untold Story*. Beckenham: CETI Publications, 1983, p. 171-3.

22. See Cramp, *Space, Gravity and the Flying Saucer*; Zinsstag & Good, *George Adamski: The Untold Story and Flying Saucer Review* vol 10/1 (January-February 1964), 13-14.

23. Good, *Above Top Secret*, p.373

24. Interview with Stephen Darbishire by Peter Hough and Dr Harry Hudson, 1993 (?), by courtesy of Peter Hough. The authors wish to make it clear that the views expressed in this article are not shared by Hough or Hudson.

25. Obituary by Philip Hoare, published in *The Independent*, 10 March 2001.

26. "Alex Birch tells his story," *Flying Saucer Review* vol 9/1, 22 (Jan/Feb 1963)

27. *Sheffield Star*, 9 February 1999

28. *Derbyshire Times* (Chesterfield), 22 June 1962

29. "The Censors at Work," *Flying Saucer Review* vol 9/2, 7 (March/April 1963)

30. *FSR* vol 9/1, 22.

31. Report by Alan Watts in BUFORA case file, 620009 dated 21 September 1962.

32. "Flying Saucers: The evidence runs on straight lines," by Waveney Girvan, *Sheffield Telegraph Weekend Magazine*, 1 September 1962

33. See Clarke, Randles & Roberts, *The UFOs that Never Were*. London: London House, 2000, p 129-30

instructions.” (34) After declining to make a field investigation, the Air Ministry slowly and reluctantly agreed to take a look at Alex’s photo in the face of mounting publicity. Alex and father subsequently paid a visit to Whitehall in a trip sponsored by a newspaper, the *Yorkshire Post*. When the group arrived at the Ministry building the journalist was carefully separated from the Birch family and taken to visit the Public Relations office. Meanwhile, Alex was questioned by the two senior RAF officers whose job it was in 1962 to monitor UFO reports. These were Flight Lieutenant R.H. White of S6 – a predecessor of Nick Pope’s Secretariat (Air Staff) 2A – and a “technical consultant”, Flight Lieutenant

and a Dickie bow. We went down long corridors into a room where there were some men and a doctor. They took the negative and the camera and kept them overnight, taking the camera apart. They asked me all these questions for so long I got muddled, telling me they were not flying saucers but Russians.” (37)

Reading the Air Ministry file on the Birch case, preserved at the Public Record Office, it becomes clear that White and Bardsley did not believe the boy’s story but could not say so publically. In an internal memo dated September 24, 1962, released in 1993 under the “30 year rule,” Bardsley writes to a colleague in S6: “...it is a relatively simple task to reproduce an identical photograph to the one we were shown... the sequence of exposures on the two strips of negatives we saw do not exactly fit the boy’s story. [my emphasis]” Bardsley summed up his exasperation: “...perhaps this brief outline of these doubts will assist you in deciding what on earth you can write to Mr Birch.” (38)

After much deliberation, S6 decided on a classic fudge. In a letter sent to Mr Birch senior, and subsequently released by the family to the Press, the Ministry suggested the objects shown in the photograph were “ice particles in the atmosphere” an explanation that was rejected by just about everyone including the editor of *Flying Saucer Review*, Charles Bowen, who questioned whether the Air Ministry really believed their own explanation, which of course they didn’t! To many observers, including Alex Birch senior, the Air Ministry statement simply confirmed their belief in an official cover-up. Birch claimed it was this statement that actually led him to believe flying saucers were extraterrestrial “and what is more, the Air Ministry knows also but won’t admit it.” (39)

Alex Birch had his brief moment of fame, and by 1972 the bubble had burst. By that time he had moved home several times but was still pursued by people he describes as “nutcases” and their endless questions about the saucers. Newly married with his first child on the way, continual ridicule led him to phone the *Daily Express* and admit the ‘flying saucers’ were simply cut out shapes pasted on a sheet of glass and re-photographed. According to his

story, his father only learned the truth the day before the newspapers carried the story and begged him not to go ahead with the plan. The *Sheffield Telegraph* quickly tracked down another of the trio, David Brownlow, who confirmed the whole thing was a joke which snowballed.(40) And there it stood until 1998 when, in the midst of short-lived UFO revival that accompanied the popular TV series *The X-Files*, Alex – now in his mid-50s and a successful antiques dealer – courted publicity once again. This time his story followed a familiar route taken by Stephen Darbishire as a result of his 1959 ‘confession’: it was the hoax that was in itself a hoax – the photograph was genuine after all!

“I did become internationally famous but I also faced a lot of ridicule and pressure,” Birch told Pete Moxon of Sheffield-based White’s Newsagency. “I decided to claim that it was a fake in hope that it would all go away and the pressure would be taken off me. But it didn’t work out like that... the UFO fraternity didn’t believe me, and they even called a conference in London and came to the conclusion that my change of story was due to pressure [from the Government].” (41)

Why had Alex waited until 1998 to tell the whole truth? “The reason I’ve decided to let the real story be known now is because I think it is important that the public should know.” Unfortunately, Alex’s two former schoolpals didn’t see it that way. David Brownlow and Stuart Dixon were still resident in Mosborough and both were contacted by the *Sheffield Star* before Alex was able to speak directly to them. Both men independently dismissed Alex’s new claim, although Stuart Dixon was later to retract his original statement but only after meeting his old friend for the first time since 1962.

Brownlow, however, was having none of it. “It was a hoax,” he told us. “Alex has always run with it more than we have. It was painted on glass. We were just messing around in Alex’s dad’s greenhouse when we had the idea to do it. We were all into *Quatermass* and *War of the Worlds* at the time. It was Alex’s idea to take the photo but then his dad and a teacher at the school got hold of it and we all got swept along with the hoax which just snowballed. It



“The experiences of the father have now been passed down to his son Adrian [left] who advertises quality hand-crafted wooden models of classic UFOs.”

[Photo: Yorkshire Post]

Anthony Bardsley of the more shadowy Air Intelligence department DDI (Tech). An internal MoD account described the atmosphere at the meeting as “cordial [and] both Mr Birch and his son were prepared to talk about it [the photograph] at length.” (35)

Mr Birch senior seemingly had another agenda. In *Flying Saucer Review* he claimed his son was “sick with fear” when the interview began and said the officials “started what I will call a brainwash...asking him wasn’t it any reflection that he saw and what was the weather like, what were the formations of cloud...the questions they must have repeated at least thirty times...” (36) In the re-telling the length of the interview at Whitehall increased from two hours to three (in FSR) and then to seven hours when recalled by Alex in 1998. He remembered walking up the steps of Whitehall with his father where the pair “met a man in a tweed jacket, flannels

was an incredible experience and we had our ten minutes of fame, but I just want to forget about it now." (42)

The most recent, and amusing, revival of the Alex Birch saga came via the pages of *Flying Saucer Review*. When, in the closing year of the 20th century, Birch's latest claims reached the grand old man of British ufology, Gordon Creighton could not conceal his delight. The Birch photograph, Creighton assured the dwindling band of FSR subscribers, long dismissed as a schoolboy prank was genuine after all. It had been examined by none other than Kodak, who had pronounced it genuine and it was known also that the British Air Ministry and the Pentagon had received copies of the print "and conducted their own enquiries." (43) Not only that, when Birch and his father visited the Air Ministry "the main preoccupation of the officials was to get both of them bundled rapidly out of London and back to Yorkshire before the journalists could discover their presence in the city." In making this statement, he overlooked the fact that Alex's visit to London had been made possible by the Birch's own newspaper, the *Yorkshire Post*, a fact reported in FSR at that time!

Creighton's obsession with the British Monarchy and his belief that they hold 'secret knowledge' of Extraterrestrials denied to the public was woven into this latest twist in the tale. "Although I have no proof of this," he wrote. "It seems pretty likely that Birch senior and his son were also invited to visit Buckingham Palace to discuss their case either with the Duke of Edinburgh himself or with his equerry." (44)

Alex's 1972 confession, Creighton added, had "little if any effect" upon what he called "the serious UFO research fraternity" but it clearly impressed FSR's then editor, Charles Bowen. The implication was that it was not as easy to 'pull the wool over' the eyes of the current editor. Large amounts of energy and money had been put into campaign to ridicule and denigrate witnesses such as Alex who had produced "dangerous photographs" and as a result were coerced or forced to put out "confessions."

FSR's editor could not resist the opportunity to pull out the ace from his sleeve, a case which

supported his claims about the Birch photos in every respect. "Much has been done to try to destroy the authenticity of the other famous schoolboy photo, the Darbyshire [sic] one of 1954," wrote Creighton. "But so far as we know, never without any success, and Stephen Darbyshire [sic] never issued a 'confession' and still asserts that his photo was totally authentic." (45)

Like the saucers themselves the stories never stop spinning. For every person who 'believes' that Birch and Darbyshire captured 'structured objects of unknown origin' on film you can easily find an equal and opposite sceptical view that both photographs were simple hoaxes.

In between there is every shade of belief and tortuous justification such as this example from the *LUFORO Bulletin* of July 1962. Using the logic of the believer the writer suggests that: "on a cloudy day in February 1954, one of these objects sought out Stephen Darbyshire who had a camera with him, and that in February 1962, on a cloudy day (giving cover) a group sought out Alex Birch who had a camera with him. This is a relationship of a group of relationships and is evidence for the following possibility: after the disbelief that greeted Adamski, how logical of these space visitors to give evidence of their actuality to boys of an age not to be considered quite knowledgeable enough to have fabricated evidence, yet old enough to be recipients of it. Both Stephen Darbyshire, at the time, and Alex Birch had the intelligent presence of mind to point the camera, click the shutter, and move on the film. How many adults would have done so well; were these boys selected?" (46)

Join the dots time. From Adamski to Darbyshire to Birch, the saucer neatly squared in just a few words. 'Objects' without objectivity, unexplained photographs as evidence of 'space visitors', schoolchildren promoted as unconscious harbingers of the invaders. Neither Birch nor Darbyshire are teenagers any longer, but they can't escape from the monsters they helped create. Birch chose to follow his calling throughout his adult life whilst Darbyshire retreated as quickly as possible from his creation. Like many others in the UFO cottage

industry Alex Birch launched his own website, [www.ufo-images.ndirect.co.uk](http://www.ufo-images.ndirect.co.uk). Yet in the same mercurial fashion as Birch's sighting, the web site was there one day gone the next. However, its existence and content gave further clues as to just how deeply Birch's 'UFO' photograph had affected his life and maybe some clues towards his original motivation. On his "fantastic site for UFO buffs and everyone else," the web surfer could read about the Birch sighting, see and order copies of the photograph and purchase copies of the Air Ministry report. The experiences of the father have now been passed down to his son, Adrian, who advertises quality hand-crafted wooden models of classic UFOs, based upon those reported by 1950s contactees George Adamski and Howard Menger. It was an uncritical site, designed to market the case and to inform people about the sightings and how Alex saw mankind in the cosmic scheme of things. Echoing the apocalyptic fears expressed by many UFO witnesses and contactees, Birch wrote: "Perhaps we are in the infancy of our species. We peer into the Dark, fearing it, yet seeking within it a reassurance that we are not alone. Perhaps in the black void are beings not unlike us, but maybe wiser, better, who will tell us secrets that will save Us from Ourselves."

Perhaps. But whether Birch's 'dark', his 'black void', refers to deep space or the deeper spaces of the human mind is open to conjecture. As Diane Purkiss writes in her history of fairies and fairy stories, "The human mind cannot bear very much blankness... where we do not know, we invent and what we invent reflects our fears of what we do not know." (47) Birch's evocations from the dark have remained with him since that day in 1962 and now form a mainstay of his world view. Like his UFOs, over the past 39 years he has flickered in and out of the public eye trying to make sense of nonsense, trying to get us to see it his way.

Stephen Darbyshire, child artist extraordinary, is now a sought after artist, living in remote rural seclusion. Our afternoon spent with him was more an exercise in semantics and verbal strategy than witness interview, as the quotes in this article demonstrate. He said

34. PRO Air 2/16918, letter from A. Birch (snr.) to Air Ministry, 2 July 1962

35. PRO Air 2/16918

36. Interview with Alex Birch, 6 Nov. 1998

37. PRO Air 2/16918

38. FSR Vol 9/2, 7

39. *Sheffield Telegraph*, 6 October 1972

40. *Yorkshire Post* (Leeds), 5 March 1999

41. Interview with David Brownlow, 3 December 1998

42. File 7824 Project Blue Book, National Archives, Washington D.C. contains a b/w print of the Birch photo and brief details of the 1962 sighting. The conclusion reads: "Insufficient data for evaluation. Negatives not with prints. No request made for photo analysis." The photo was also reproduced in an article by CIA Chief Historian Gerald Haines "A Die Hard Issue: CIA's role in the study of UFOs, 1947-90" *Studies in Intelligence*, summer 1997, p. 70.

43. FSR vol 45/2 (summer 2000), 9-11

44. "Air Ministry Examines Saucer Photograph," *LUFORO Bulletin*, Vol , July-August 1962.

45. Purkiss, Diana, *Troublesome Things*, Alan Lane, 2000, p.11.

46. See David Clarke and Andy Roberts "Flash, Bang, Wallop - Wot a Picture," in *The UFOs that Never Were*, p 136-41

47. See Cooper, Joe. *The Cottingley Fairies* (London: Robert Hale, 1990) and Sunday Telegraph (London), 12 July 1998.

48. Interview with Stuart Dixon, 6 April 1999

he didn't really want to talk about his experience, but evidently couldn't bear not to. Darbishire had, by his own agency, been to the heart of the ufological labyrinth and returned safely, able to relax in his farm house kitchen and play games with the past. He was luckier than most. He knew that we knew that he knew. But none of us could say it outright. Birch, on the other hand, was more evangelical, still trapped, still justifying, pleased to pose with the original camera and prints.

In 2001 the problems surrounding Birch's photograph are no more resolved than in 1962. Indeed, the case is more complicated not least because of Alex's claims of a lifetime of paranormal phenomena, experiences shared to some degree by his wife, children and other independent witnesses.

(48) If the photo is a fake, then is Alex lying about these experiences too? If so are his family also lying? Why would anyone create such a web of deceit around themselves for no discernable reason? Yet what are the alternatives? Questions tumble over themselves in desperation to be asked, but any answers merely beg further questions. Only blind acceptance or outright accusation seem to offer any relief from the tension they created through the camera's lens.

Maybe it's all as true as both Birch and Darbishire originally claimed, and five strange light emitting objects and one translucent domed Adamaski craft were really, objectively there in the physical sense, visible to the naked eye, trapped on film.

What then? We are still no nearer to divining what either boys actually caught on film. Or maybe - and this is certainly our belief, borne out by the interviews and evidence available - the photographs were both faked. But does that reduce them to mindless schoolboy pranks which got out of hand, or must we look deeper and acknowledge they were the outward expressions of Alex's saucer-haunted life and Darbishire's immense artistic and creative talents. These two photographs have taken on lives of their own, shaping the lives and beliefs of many UFO buffs, leading individuals further into the saucerous labyrinth which is ufology.

The parallels with the Cottingley fairy photographs are almost

too obvious to mention. Again children - two cousins - were involved and again their stories were accepted by adults who wanted to believe. The two girls corroborated each other's story and once it had become an article of faith, they found it impossible to confront the 'truth.' In the Cottingley case it was only 60 years after the event when one of the girls, by then in her 80s, was confronted with undeniable evidence, finally admitted they had faked the photographs. Even then, the other cousin swore that although most of the fairy photographs were hoaxes they were produced to prove to others the reality of the beings seen at Cottingley Beck. One of the group of pictures, she maintained, did show real fairies! (49) The Peter Pan nature of childhood can convince us that our beliefs are as objectively real as the world of grown-ups. Or more importantly that they should be real enough for the adult world to see. So why not a little photographic alchemy to help things along, create a 'reality' of vicarious experience.

Consider also the role of svengali like figures in at least one of the cases we have considered. Whilst the Cottingley Fairies led Conan Doyle, hard-headed contriver of the Sherlock Holmes mysteries, up the garden path, Stephen Darbishire had Desmond Leslie. Leslie comes across as a trickster figure manipulating both witnesses and the subject itself, making random links between unconnected sightings.

Ultimately, no one knows the truth behind the Birch and Darbishire photographs but themselves. And, as we've shown they are no longer in charge of their own teenage narratives, having had them taken away by the adult world of the media and ufology, cut up and fed back to them so many times that their experiences are no longer their own. The original negatives are long gone and both Alex and Stephen have, by their own admission, intentionally blurred the line between reality and fantasy, asking, at various times for both, to be accepted as the truth. As investigators in these cases we find ourselves caught up in the dilemma that anything we write will also affect what others choose to believe, but won't change what happened - and is still happening - to

either Birch or Darbishire.

So, be warned. If your children claim to have photographed UFOs or any other mythical phenomena at the bottom of the garden, or if like Moses they return from the mountains bearing emulsion coated saucer scrolls their lives, and possibly yours, will never be the same again.

We prefer leave the last word to one of the three witnesses to the Birch case, Stuart Dixon, who said in 1999: "I find it far better and simpler to let people think what they want to about that photo. I don't care anymore"

**Acknowledgements:**

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**BOY STARTS NEW PROBE INTO FLYING SAUCERS**

NEWS OF THE WORLD REPORTER

**A PHOTOGRAPH** taken by a 11-year-old boy has started Air Ministry experts on an investigation into a new flying saucer riddle. The picture, of five mystery objects in the sky, was taken by Alex Birch while he was playing with friends at his home in Moor-crescent, Mosborough, near Sheffield.

His dad has taken the Air Ministry in London, both officers, what had happened and showed them the picture. "They are very keen to do the same time and date this work again," Mr Birch said yesterday. "I think it was Monday, February 20, he was there, he was sitting there at 10:30."

**Looked up**

"Three of us, Stewart Dixon, David Brownlow and myself, were in the field at the back of our house taking photographs. "David had a camera and pointed up a stone in front. As he got up he saw five objects in the sky. He shouted to me and we all three looked up. "We must have watched them for about 15 seconds. They were very bright and bright they dazzled us, and we had to look away. "Then we saw some bright white spots coming out from them. They seemed to be all around the objects. Then they began to move very slowly and all of a sudden gathered speed and whizzed away towards Sheffield. I took a picture when they were over head. "Alex's mother said that when the film came back from the chemist there were only two negatives. Neither was the flying saucers seen on film. "We looked at the negative, however, and when I saw what was on it I was Alex back to the chemist to tell him that however but the photographer says he was in place it. "He did and the picture we



Alex Birch, the boy photographer whose camera captured the flight of mystery objects in the sky.

and three showed these five objects. "The saucers have been estimated as being 200 feet up, about a quarter of a mile away and at an angle of 20 to 30 degrees to the sky. "Founded: The British Royal Air Force Investigating Committee to Alex Birch, a 11-year-old boy, for preparing a report for Congress on unidentified flying objects.

**Flu jabs without a needle**

A NEW method of vaccinating children without a hypodermic syringe will soon be in operation in Britain. The vaccine is injected from a jet of water of about 100 psi pressure and it painlessly penetrates the skin without the use of a needle.

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IT'S A WETHERSPOON'S PUB, SO NO MUSIC, AND REASONABLY PRICED DRINKS AND FOOD ALWAYS AVAILABLE

# AN ACCOUNT OF EXPERIMENTAL UFO HOAXING

**DAVID SIMPSON AND KEN RAINE**

It was interesting to read Magonia 74's Editorial Notes about the 1970 Warminster photographic hoax, twenty five years after publication of 'Experimental' UFO Hoaxing in *MUFOB* New Series 2, and we thought that some background information, plus details of a couple of other UFO hoaxes might be of interest for the Hoax Special edition. As recorded in *MUFOB* (1), the photographic hoax was designed "to provide those watching on Cradle Hill with a simple visual stimulus, to introduce photographic evidence inconsistent with the stimulus and to observe the effect this evidence had on subsequent investigation, recording and publicity" - in other words to test the investigators who got

involved. THE MOTIVATION and plan came after about two years of investigation by members of the Society for the Investigation of UFO Phenomena (SIUFOP), which formed in 1967 at a time when such groups

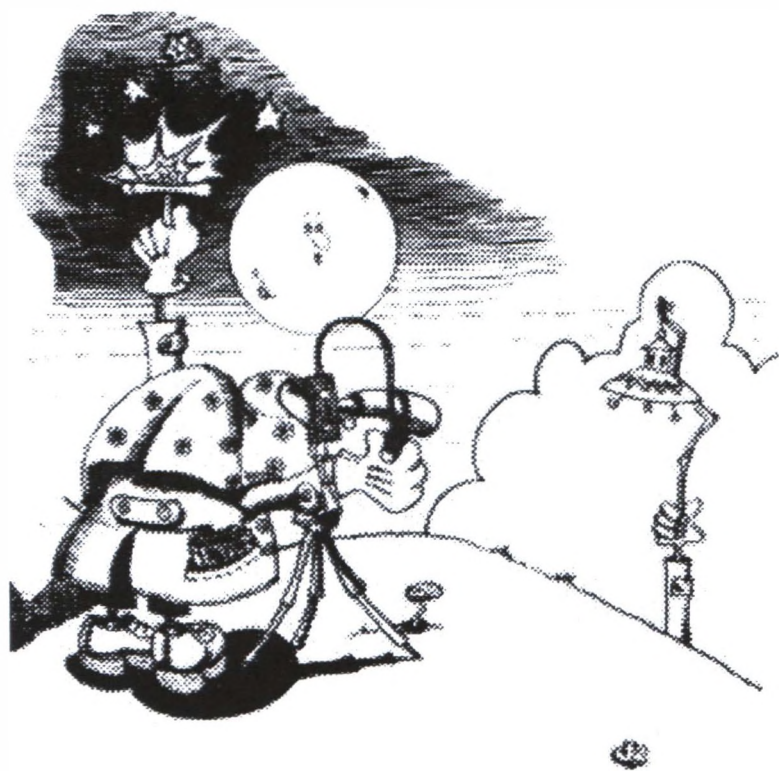
seemed to be forming frequently - due the high level of interest in the subject in the mid-1960s. It all seems very naive now but the society started with about ten members, with an average age around 19 years. Like most of the other groups at the time, its members were aware of frequent press reports which, if taken literally, meant that there certainly were odd things to be seen in the sky - there could not be smoke without fire we believed.

We set about finding and interviewing witnesses, the first near the South Downs in Sussex. They turned out to be interesting but clearly not the most impressive of observers, with stories that got more elaborate with each telling. Nonetheless we still believed, from the sheer number of sightings

being reported, that something really was flying around the skies. So strong was this feeling that we decided to spend a night watching the sky from Chantry Hill, a nearby vantage point on the Downs, with a tripod-mounted camera at the ready. Apart from a few satellites, nothing was seen but we appreciated that statistically it might take more than one night to see something! Undaunted by sub-zero temperatures, four members returned the following evening for a second night of watching. Tired but full of youthful enthusiasm, we drove to the same spot.

## A sighting!

SIUFOP *Newsletter* reported (2): "No sooner had we reached the top of the hill than the driver pointed excitedly to a point of light a few degrees above the horizon. We all saw it. It was a light of a kind that we had never seen before. It moved slowly upwards, across, then disappeared. Two appeared from behind the horizon in the same place as the first was seen, drifting upwards, across, and then darting a little. Up to six were seen dancing around together





## Last year we had a sighting, this year a photograph; next year we will have it in the bag! - Edgar Hatvany

in a random pattern changing colour from time to time. Time exposure photographs ranging between 5 and 20 seconds were taken. After an hour and a half or so, the dancing lights appeared less frequently and we had run out of film."

Convinced that the film contained images of world-shattering importance we rushed home in the early hours to develop it but were puzzled and disappointed by what we saw. Whereas we expecting up to six line-traces to have been recorded (lines caused by photographing a moving light with a long time-exposure) the images all looked roughly the same with no more than two line-traces per frame. The lights were only a fraction of one degree above the visible horizon too, much lower than thought. A week later we were back at Chantry Hill, no longer tired or so fired-up with faculty-dimming enthusiasm, and observed car headlights on a distant hill - a hill that had not been visible in the weather conditions prevailing the week before.

To this day the lights can be seen there; they look so obviously like car headlights it is difficult to believe that tiredness and enthusiasm could have warped our observational skills so much. We had converted the simplest of white lights, moving mostly horizontally, into variously coloured, multiple objects moving vertically. Reasonably good photographs had made analysis possible and were it not for them we would still be retelling stories of the strange lights in the sky; if asked whether they might have been car headlamps we would surely have rejected the possibility.

It wasn't the only time we fooled ourselves either. At around the same period three members of SIUFOP were walking along a dark, frosty, lane surrounded by trees, illuminated only by moonlight and in an area where umpteenth odd lights had been reported. They were heading for an inter-

view with a witness but noticed the silhouette of a tall object through the trees to one side. Fully spooked by the circumstances they thought they had stumbled on a landed machine of some sort. Stumbling over a fence to get a better look they were alarmed to see a red glow at its base and presumed it was about to take off again. They prepared to retreat in haste, although not before taking a photograph with a flashbulb (it was before electronic flashguns were commonplace). The illumination from the flashbulb was enough to identify a sand-washing machine sitting in a quarry; there was also an inhabited workman's caravan near its base with red curtains in its windows! The photograph is still amusing.

### Earlier Warminster photographs

Undaunted - we presumed that others had not been so easily fooled - in February 1968 a party set off for Warminster where, according to reputation, we stood a better chance of seeing the real thing. There we met none other than Arthur Shuttlewood who showed us his collection of photographs, supposedly of lights in the sky over the local hills. They consisted of white lines wandering across a black background; some were single, some dotted and some showed continuous multiple images of wiggly lines.

On returning home we successfully replicated the three broad styles of the photographs. One had resembled the dotted lines produced by photographing tumbling earth-orbit rocket casings as they passed overhead, periodically reflecting light downwards. Most others were clearly not satellites but the second style could be closely imitated using a small neon bulb (similar to those sometimes fitted to the back of 13-amp plugs). Waving it in a dark room, in front of an open-shuttered camera, gave just the characteristics (3) seen in the Shuttlewood collection. The third style of photograph could be produced by mov-

ing the lamp slowly in front of a mirror, again in a dark room in front of an open-shuttered camera. This produced three wiggly lines "flying in perfect formation". The first and brightest image was that of the lamp seen directly by the camera, the second brightest image was a reflection of the lamp from the aluminised (or silvered) back surface of the mirror, and a much fainter third image was a reflection of the lamp from the mirror's front glass surface.

We even developed techniques to help analyse other white-line type photographs. Using an optical microdensitometer (4) made it possible to differentiate between gas-discharge lamps, filament lamps, 'beam chopped' lamps and also the nature of their power supplies. Unfortunately we were never allowed to borrow any negatives!

### Scepticism set in

We had found out how easy it was for us, and presumably anyone else, to be fooled by simple earthly lights, including plenty of non-car-headlight examples (5); we had seen what we were expecting or wanted to see, and did not observe objectively. Few of our interviewees or other investigators seemed to give much credence to this as a possibility; there was always a let-out "...but he was a trained airline pilot!" or more commonly "Ah but you haven't explained this one".

Attending lectures organised by the British UFO Research Association did nothing to stem our increasing belief that, whilst UFOs had undoubtedly been observed by lots of people, scientific evidence that they were observations of something unearthly appeared to be non-existent. Most ufologists disagreed with this viewpoint, siding instead with the then fashionable Extra Terrestrial Hypothesis, claiming that there was plenty of good evidence to support it if scientists would only snap out of their pre-conceived beliefs and take the

evidence seriously. Several SIUFOP members were, or were training to be, scientists and felt that such views could be put to a scientific test - ufologists should be tested for their observational and investigational abilities. We thought that the best way to do this was to give them something to see and then observe how they investigated the sighting; in other words to conduct a hoax with scientific intention.

### First hoax

On 15 July 1968 BUFORA held a National Skywatch, with twenty nine watching points across Britain. One was at Pewley Downs in Surrey; it was organised locally by the Surrey Investigation Group on Aerial Phenomena (SIGAP) and SIUFOP ensured they saw something whose origin was certain. Just before midnight a parachute flare was launched about 3 miles from Pewley Downs in the direction of Godalming. The watchers saw it but no one took a photograph - no one even had a camera ready. Therefore, to be sure that there was at least one photograph of it, David Simpson had to get his own camera out and take it.

Unknown to us, George Hughes, of *Amateur Photographer*, had been a visitor to the skywatch. He reported (6): "I wanted to see how such groups carry out their investigations, and to what extent photography was being used. Sadly, it wasn't, or hardly at all." Richard Beet, secretary of SIGAP, responded indignantly (7), pointing out that "a photograph of a red object was taken by a skywatch official, Mr David Simpson", giving him instant promotion.

On inspecting the photograph Geoffrey Doel, of BUFORA, commented that it could be of a firework. At the following BUFORA meeting, however, the National Skywatch organiser, Edgar Hatvany, dropped this suggestion when he elevated the photograph's status by proudly waving it saying, "Last year we had a

## The trouble with this SIUFOP lot is that they never come down here to see for themselves - Arthur Shuttlewood



sighting, this year a photograph; next year we will have it in the bag!"

### One year later

In June 1969 SIUFOP went to Warminster, on BUFORA's next national skywatch day, equipped with some plastic bags and balloon gas (crude helium). The aim was to launch a number of brightly lit torch bulbs and batteries under a single helium-filled plastic bag from Sack Hill, opposite the watchers on Cradle Hill. Our estimate of the bag's inflated volume and hence buoyancy were not very accurate, however, and it did not take off until we had removed four of the ten battery/lamp packs (8). It then rose slowly into the sky, drifting silently with the just perceptible wind, crossing the nearby army range at treetop height.

Even we were particularly surprised by the stunning brightness and spectacular image of the small bulbs against a clear black sky, even when a mile or more distant. (It was in the days before small quartz halogen bulbs were available and we powered 2.5-volt bulbs with 4.5 volt batteries, making the bulbs very white for a short while.) The watchers on Cradle Hill were even more impressed, and it was generally rated the best sighting ever seen there. A second balloon was launched a while later on the western side of Cradle Hill and it drifted much closer to the watchers than the first balloon. Excitement on the hill was electric and emotional. Telepathic communication was claimed with the light bulb, which was said to be as bright as a searchlight and also to be metallic with portholes.

We were all surprised and almost shocked by the reaction. A few simple components had provoked what seasoned watchers were describing as the best sighting ever made. What did that suggest about the credibility of the other sightings in one of the world's most famous UFO hot-spots?

Over the next few weeks we revisited Cradle Hill - it was invariably populated on a Saturday evening - to listen to the gossip. One SIUFOP member had been less than discrete soon after the hoax, letting it be known what had happened. Oddly this explanation was not generally accepted; apparently the objects had changed direction against the wind, so they could not have been lights on a balloon! Also, another sighting was made by three people the following evening where "the object appeared just like those of Saturday night... raising the question 'Why should any UFO-rigging pranksters hang around Cradle Hill area on Sunday, long after BUFORA members had left?'"

BUFORA acknowledged the balloon theory and indeed described it accurately (10) but the consensus was against it.

### The Warminster Photographs

Thus we designed a new hoax, to be less deniable, and hence the "Warminster Photographs" came about. In summary, during March 1970 a ground-based purple light was shone from the hill opposite Cradle Hill, a colleague appeared to photograph it, a bogus UFO detector sounded and the film was handed to a stranger who agreed to get it developed. The film had been pre-exposed to show frames of airborne UFOs much stranger than the purple light but they also contained enough serious inconsistencies to allow any competent investigator to question their authenticity. The most experienced investigators in the subject, however, repeatedly pronounced the photographs genuine and failed to spot any of the built-in clues.

At a BUFORA meeting some time later David Simpson publicly pointed out that the case was full of anomalies which probably meant it was a hoax. Ivor McKay and John Cleary-Baker, both BUFORA stalwarts, argued otherwise, confidently pointing out that if it had been a hoax the hoaxer would not have made such

mistakes; the very presence of the anomalies apparently made it more certain that the case was genuine. A classical heads they win, tails we lose. John Cleary-Baker then launched Project Warminster adding authoritatively, "which I shall Direct myself". Unfortunately he then asked us if we would investigate the Warminster photographs on behalf of the Project and soon afterwards sent signed pieces of A5 cardboard giving us all sorts of authorisations. We didn't do the job very well.

One evening Arthur Shuttlewood was talking to a group of people on Cradle Hill, unaware that we were there; he was moaning about our "disbelief" in the Warminster photographs; "The trouble with this SIUFOP lot is they never come down here to see for themselves" he complained.

### Kites

It was satisfying to have confirmation of what we suspected was probably going on but it was also disillusioning to find out just how poorly investigations were carried out. We had, after all, started out by presuming that there may be something in the sightings. We repeated the experiments with one or two more UFO hoaxes - repeating experiments is a necessary scientific practice - using kites instead of balloons, and single (hence easier to lift) lamps. Bulbs were coated on one side so they would appear to flash irregularly as they rotated in the wind on a suspension thread. Electronic timers were added to delay switch-on until the apparatus was well clear of the ground (to stop the hoaxer being illuminated!) and we became expert at flying kites in the dark.

### BBC Nationwide

In the summer of 1972 there was considerable publicity concerning a forthcoming BBC visit to a skywatch on Cradle Hill. We reverted to balloon technology, albeit much smaller ones than the originals, each carrying just one

torch bulb. By then we knew that a single over-run bulb was still an impressive sight at a range of one mile or more against a dark sky. But this time we added photographic flashbulbs to the payload, timed to flash after about two minutes.

Two balloons were launched, as usual in complete darkness, about 1 minute apart. The weather was perfect - clear and with just the faintest wind blowing - and the balloons carried their winking lights majestically and in tandem across Salisbury plain. We could see across to Cradle Hill and immediately noticed a row of torches, pointing in the direction of the balloons, being flashed on and off. More torches appeared and they were quickly joined by more powerful lights as motorcyclists upended their machines to use the headlamps for even better signalling.

The watchers were thus looking directly at the little points of light in the sky when one of the flashbulbs was triggered. Presuming this to be a response to their signalling they flashed even more enthusiastically and were rewarded when the second flashbulb ignited shortly afterwards.

The BBC interviewed the watchers who claimed it to be the best sighting they had ever made, some saying that the UFOs had been communicating with their "random yet intelligent" flashings and that the "explosion of light" was in response to the rows of flashing torches and motorbike headlamps.

After the story was broadcast, on BBC Nationwide, we owned up and were subsequently given a studio interview alongside ufologist Rex Dutta. We showed examples of the plastic bags and torch bulbs etcetera but he refused to believe that he had been hoaxed and the BBC therefore asked us to stage a re-enactment. This we did the following weekend, albeit in rather poorer weather conditions. On seeing the balloon-suspended lights for a second time Rex Dutta



## These were obviously lights on a silly little balloon that did not and could not replicate the complex flying patterns seen the week before - Rex Dutta

declared them to be nothing like the lights of the previous week. "These were obviously lights on a silly little balloon that did not and could not replicate the complex flying pattern seen the week before". He had been investigating these things for nineteen years and "any fool could identify a balloon when they saw one".

### Summary

Our experiences and hoaxes of thirty years ago were very interesting, stimulating and disillusioning at the same time but they also demonstrated to us something useful as well - that human beings tend to see what they want, or expect, to see. Very simple stimuli had provoked an astonishing range of entirely imagined attributes including shapes, sizes, colours, motions and other false effects which tended to grow in order to stop a particular belief being disproved. Most disappointing of all was the low calibre of the investigations being undertaken, partly due to a lack of technical knowledge, no desire to be rigorous and a marked tendency to select only those bits of evidence that most suited a particular belief.

### Science and scientists

At the time, UFO sightings were argued to be evidence of extraterrestrial visitations (and still are in some parts of the world). Science and scientists, we were repeatedly told, should be more open minded and look into this possibility. What seemed to be constantly bypassed though was an appreciation of what constitutes a scientific claim. To demonstrate that a scientific conclusion is valid, testable evidence has to be provided and the quality and repeatability of the evidence required is related to the significance of the conclusion being drawn. To conclude that UFOs represent evidence of extraterrestrial visitations is a very significant claim and this requires correspondingly high quality, rigorous and testable data as evidence. But instead we had (and have) a loose

array of unrepeatable sightings which, when scaled against the observational uncertainties and investigative confusion clearly demonstrated by hoaxes, come nowhere near to providing adequate evidence.

It is often pointed out that maybe 90% of UFO sightings are explainable if an investigator looks hard enough but that science should concentrate on the unexplained remainder. This is a false argument: the fact that they remain unexplained does not make them better evidence. The point was well illustrated by Alan Hendry (11) in his *UFO Handbook*. He had good statistical data to show that, apart from them remaining unidentified, there was nothing about the unidentified cases to differentiate them from the identified ones; they had just the same mixture of characteristics.

### Non-UFO hoaxes

We were aware that our hoaxes were illustrating the characteristics of an existing subject and in the mid 1970s thought that it would be interesting to measure just how easy it might be to create an alternative self-sustaining myth, perhaps triggered by a few pump-priming hoaxes. A while later crop circle stories took hold and again we were confronted with strangely illogical statements like "this circle is too accurate to be a hoax" from the investigators. Just like ufologists they argued that hoaxers (who appeared to be able to replicate any circle on demand) merely got in the way of serious investigations. We were certainly accused of being involved but can say that we did not think up the idea or participate at all!

### Conclusion

Hoaxes have been a useful tool for testing observational skills and the investigational abilities of ufologists. They have clearly illustrated that humans see what they want to see and that the quality of UFO investigations is generally very poor indeed.

1. Simpson, David; Experimental UFO Hoaxing, *MUFOB New Series* 2, March 1976

2. Simpson, David; *SIUFOP Newsletter*, 1, March 1968.

3. The intensity of the light from such gas discharge lamps increases and decreases in time with the alternating mains voltage powering them - essentially going on and off 100 times per second. The human eye cannot see this cycling but if the lamp's image is moved quickly across a photographic emulsion it is easily recorded. A tell-tale characteristic of this technique is the 'bunching' together of the recorded dots as the arm of the waver changes direction from left to right; the slower the arm movement the closer together the dots become. This bunching was certainly evident in Arthur Shuttlewood's photographs.

4. Densitometer: an instrument which allowed the optical density of negatives to be measured by scanning a narrow beam of light across them

5. Including searchlights from a film studio reflecting on clouds, aeroplanes at sunset, being in a car 'followed' by the moon, and even a spider's web unusually illuminated by the sun.

6. Hughes, George; Are Ghost Pictures Real?, *Amateur Photographer*, 136, 31, 24 July 1968

7. Beet, Richard; Readers write: Investigating UFOs, *Amateur Photographer*, 136, 34, 21 August 1968

8. The six remaining lamps were suspended close to each other and appeared to be a single source of light.

9. Arthur Shuttlewood; Root Out These Stupid Hoaxers, *BUFORA Journal*, 2, 12, Summer 1970

10 John Cleary-Baker; Editorial comment, *BUFORA Journal*, 2,

11. Hendry, Alan; *UFO Handbook*, New York. Doubleday, 1979

The original article by David Simpson, giving details of the Warminster experimental hoax can be found on the *Magonia* website at:  
[www.magonia.demon.co.uk/arc/70/hoax.html](http://www.magonia.demon.co.uk/arc/70/hoax.html)

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# REPLYING TO THE PELICAN

## PELICAN

**ANN DRUFFEL** REPLIES TO THE PELICAN'S COMMENTS ABOUT DEFENDING YOURSELF AGAINST ALIEN ABDUCTIONS

IN MAGONIA issue 72 The Pelican wrote about my recent book, *How to Defend Yourself Against Alien Abduction* [1]. He also addressed a follow-up article in *Flying Saucer Review* in which I expressed my growing concern about the 'victim mentality' displayed by many so-called abductees [2]. Since certain top-profile abduction researchers in my own United States continue to ignore the subject of resistance techniques against 'alien abductors', I find it refreshing that English colleagues across the sea are interested in the growing evidence that stout-hearted experiencers can fight the abducting phenomenon (whatever it may be) and win. Over ninety such resisters are now in my database, and the number continues to rise.



Anne Druffel

THE FACT THAT resisters can rouse themselves from the altered state of consciousness in which 'alien visitations' and 'abduction scenarios' occur points out the probability that the harassing 'creatures' associated with the abduction phenom-

non are not physical in our earth space-time. Likewise there is not yet one shred of documented scientific proof that there are any hybrid babies, missing foetuses, 'implants' which display extraterrestrial technology, spaceships filled with alien-human embryos, or any of the bizarre claims being presented as fact by many American researchers.

The Pelican admits the possibility that the ETH hypothesis to explain unidentified flying craft in our atmosphere might be logically possible. I agree on this point; some UFO reports, especially regarding pilot sightings which are confirmed by radar, or objects seen from the ground by groups of credible witnesses such as police officers, or occasional photos taken by reliable people such as

the August 1965 photos by Southern California highway engineer, Rex E. Heflin and thoroughly studied by credible investigators [3]. But my working hypothesis at present states that the phenomenon of hundreds (perhaps thousands) of reliable, rational witnesses who claim interaction with abducting, 'otherworldly' creatures is entirely separate from solid reports of unidentified physical craft. Although the abductees describe being taken aboard a UFO there is very little, if any, supporting evidence to prove that this has ever been the case. Since most researchers recognise that the phenomenon which displays itself as 'abducting aliens' displays definite deceptive characteristics, I feel obliged to hypothesise at this time that the abducting phenomenon (which presents itself in various forms) may be posing as technologically and intellectually superior occupants from UFOs. The sad truth is, numerous American researchers and experiencers are being deceived.

As my good friend Erskine Payton, host of the popular radio talk show Erskine Overnight, points out: "What does it matter what the real source of the abduction phenomenon is. Maybe we'll never find out". But if people caught up in the machinations of

the phenomenon can free themselves from it by using one or more of the nine resistance techniques described in detail in my book, isn't that the main issue here? Does it matter what these experiencers believe is happening to them if the harassment they formerly felt from the abducting phenomenon no longer causes conscious stress in their lives? Whatever builds up their confidence to the level where they can feel free of it is surely 'true' for them.

It is in this context that I agree with The Pelican, though I'm having a hard time defining the word 'psychosocial' as he uses it. The word is coming into favour here in America as well, but it's not on my Macintosh thesaurus, neither is it in my admittedly outdated *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*. However, a quick call to the reference department of our local library revealed that the *American Heritage Dictionary* defines it as "involving aspects of social and psychological behaviour; ex. a child's psychosocial development". Not a big surprise, but hardly clarifying the real source (or reason) for the widespread abduction phenomenon. Psychological tests on abductees in various scientific studies in the USA revealed that the majority are rational and honest, but many of them displayed what is described by various researchers as a 'paranoid tinge'. Not that they are paranoid individuals, for if they were they would no longer test as 'rational'. The paranoid tinge seems to spring from the harassment they undergo at the hands of the abducting phenomenon (whatever that actually is). So I cannot accept The Pelican's view that all abductees have somehow been 'psychosocialised' to feel they are being harassed by aliens. Something else seems to be going on.

The Pelican writes that the 'abducting' problem is for the psychologists, psychiatrists and neurologists to work on. In a very important sense I agree with this. But my main concern here is that the psychological differences between the resisters on the one hand, and abductees who believe they are helpless victims must also be studied. This is one of the next things I'll set out to do, since there will soon be enough resister cases in my database to conduct psychological and statistical studies. The

purpose will be to find out what psychological differences there are between: (A) stout-hearted people who think that the abducting phenomenon's harassments are violating their own individual rights and can break the altered state in which the scenarios occur, and: (B) those who are persuaded by the phenomenon that it's useless to try resistance, or are deceived into believing (without proof) that the interaction is for the purpose of 'spiritually' evolving the human race.

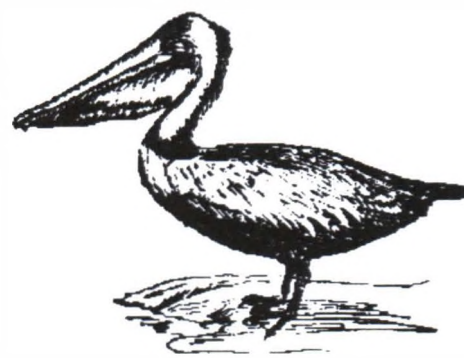
The ramifications of the psychological traits I've uncovered so far in resister cases are complex and will be the subject of a longer article which I hope will appear in *MUFON UFO Journal* and also perhaps in *Flying Saucer Review*. Suffice it to say here that the personality traits (read psychosocial traits) of resisters include: (A) sufficient self-confidence and self-esteem to demand that the abducting 'creatures' leave them alone; and (B) belief (or suspicion) that the creatures are not the technologically superior beings they claim to be. To this I might add that many resisters in my database think that the phenomenon, which reveals itself in the form of 'creatures', might be some other order of being in our vast universe which has no right to harass human beings. It is not up to me to tell them that they are mistaken and that they are experiencing psychosocial disturbances. If resistance works for them, they should use it.

I wish to thank *Magonia* and The Pelican for the comprehensive discussion of my book, *How to Defend Yourself Against Alien Abduction*. Although we may not agree on all points, the opportunity to present one's views is rare in this troubled field.

#### References:

1. Op. cit., New York, Three Rivers Press/Random House, 1998. Also published in UK edition, same title, London, Piatkus, 1998.
2. Op cit., Vol 45, no. 3, Autumn 2000, "Victim mentality in abductions: an unacceptable concept". First published in MUFON UFO Journal, May 2000, under title "Abductee victim mentality unacceptable".
3. "Reanalysis of the 1965 Heflin UFO photos, by Druffel, Robert M. Wood and Eric Kelson, *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, vol. 14, no. 4, Winter 2000, pp 583-622

# THE PELICAN WRITES . . .



The Pelican is greatly encouraged by Ann Druffel's response to his comments in the previous issue of *Magonia*. He would like to begin his comments by clearing up any confusion about the meaning of the term "psychosocial". This simply refers to the fact that people's reactions to, and interpretations of, certain experiences are strongly influenced by their psychological make-up and their social interactions. So far as UFOs and their alleged occupants are concerned, the notion that some people are constantly being abducted by little grey aliens has gradually developed over the years, particularly in the USA.

This belief has not developed from nothing, however. The experiences which form the basis for such beliefs have always been available. They have a number of causes, such as sleep paralysis, insomnia, somnambulism, temporal lobe epilepsy, migraine, etc. It is, of course, not possible to assign causes to particular cases without studying them individually, with the help of persons who are suitably qualified.

The content of such experiences is obviously strongly influenced by the languages and cultures of the percipients, and in recent years is being even more strongly influenced by the activities of certain high-profile abduction "experts", such as Budd Hopkins, David Jacobs and John Mack. In this connection it is interesting to note that Mack, the only one of this trio with formal qualifications in psychiatry, does

not accept the "nuts and bolts" theory favoured by the other two. What he does believe, though, remains obscure to the Pelican, as he attempts to convey his ideas in impenetrable - and almost certainly meaningless - jargon. The Pelican gently pointed out that Ann Druffel employed similar esoteric verbiage in a few passages in her otherwise excellent and useful book.

The Pelican appreciates, though, that it is necessary to reassure people who think they are being targeted by the Greys and to win their confidence before they can be helped in any way. He thus agrees with Ann when she says: "It is not up to me to tell them that they are mistaken and that they are experiencing psychosocial disturbances. If resistance works for them, they should use it."

It is surely possible, however, when writing about this subject, to stick to a more rigorously scientific approach, if only to win the support of mental health professionals with little knowledge of the problem. It should be possible to do this in such a way as to make it clear to abductees that she has a sympathetic and understanding approach to their problems, although The Pelican agrees that it might not always be appropriate in personal interviews with them.

The Pelican wishes Ann Druffel every success in her valiant efforts to relieve the mental distress of people who have come to believe that they are abduction victims.



# BOOK REVIEWS

James R Lewis (ed) *UFOs and Popular Culture: an encyclopedia of contemporary myth*. ABC-CLIO, 2000. \$45.00

Jerome Clark. *Extraordinary Encounters: an encyclopedia of extraterrestrials and otherworldly beings*. ABC CLIO, 2000. \$45.00

These two new encyclopaedias from ABC Clío chronicle the impact of ufology and ideas of extraterrestrials on the popular imagination, ranging from the metaphysical subculture to B movies. Both books give extensive coverage to the contactee subculture and the channelling movement. Lewis's compilation organises its entries around the names of organisations and individuals, while Clark takes the names of the various entities as one of his main set of entries. There is however some fair degree of overlap, often giving interesting and differing perspectives.

For example Lewis and many of his co-contributors regard the contactees and their groups as examples of new religions, and products of the religious imagination, while Clark, perhaps tends to see, at least the well known popular contactees as essentially hoaxers, drawing a very sharp distinction between them and the abductees. Yet the contents of these two books as much as anything else show that the situation is very different. By no means all contactees sought fame and fortune, and Clark relates the interesting story of Keith Macdonald a silent (or at least a non commercial) contactee, who constructed a vast and elaborate cosmos centred around the world of 'Landa'. The story evokes those of 'Helene Smith' and 'Kirk Alore'. These imaginary worlds and personalities appear to have some connection with Caraboo Syndrome. Clark suggests that Macdonald was somehow able to have waking access to hypnogogic and dreamlike states of high creativity. A similar suggestion was made by Peter McKeller in his study of authors such as Enid Blyton.

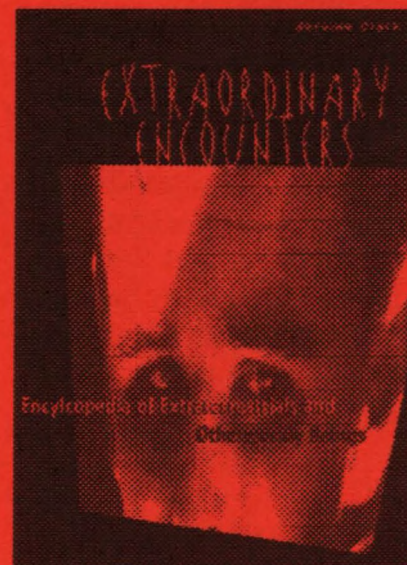
In his foreword to Lewis's compilation Eddie Bullard notes the stereotypical nature of abduction tales, and re-poses his old question of why they don't spread in many different directions and show greater elaboration. The same seems to be true of the contactee-channeller movement. As we go through the names of

imaginary beings from imaginary worlds we see the same pseudo-exotic names, which are often just variants on each other - AFFA, Ashtar, Anoaah, Arthon, Orthon, Ramu, Rama, Khauag, Korton, Mark and Meloria and on and on and on. The narratives and teachings derive from a very narrow subculture. Compared with this, the abduction narratives show more versatility. Other contributors suggest that the mass media nature of the reporting process leads to this flattening. However the main cause is that these are not unmediated stories, they are presented via and through 'investigators' who have been accused of manipulating and editing the stories to suit their own beliefs and conceptions.

Lewis and colleagues' approach to the UFO narratives and modern religious experiences and literature seems an interesting way forward. The narratives aim to make sense of a senseless world. These movements give meaning in particular to extraordinary personal experiences, and give them cultural shaping and expression. As our society tends to either pathologise or paranormalise such experiences, it is not surprising that so often they are given a paranormal explanation.

In his introduction to the Lewis compilation Eddie Bullard shows the folkloric roots of much UFO lore, and argues that whatever the 'real' UFOs are; whether misperceptions or genuinely novel phenomena they are "lost behind the UFOs of belief, to be glimpsed only in distorted versions. No-one can hope to study UFOs without recognising the role of human beliefs and concerns in UFO lore". Which is what we in *Magonia* have been saying for years. Bullard also makes the point that the UFO myth, the beliefs that UFO reports have generated, seeks to answer the big questions of the world and to restore a human dimension.

Jerry Clark makes a similar point, that if there is a signal behind the noise, it is very faint indeed. More likely the other-world is a 'world of dreams', fine to receive visits from, to dip into, but not one to try and live in. "If extraordinary encounters are occurring only with otherwise hidden sides of our selves they are still - or surely all the more so - worth having." We in *Magonia* couldn't

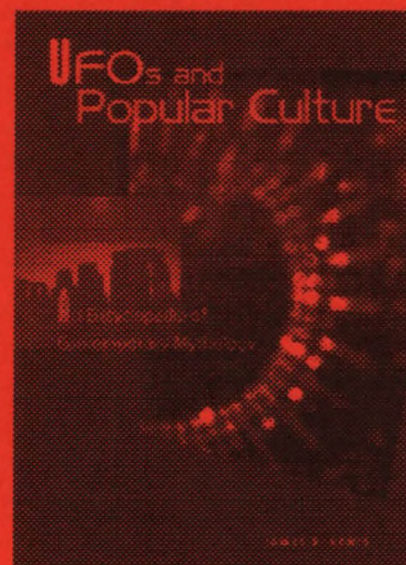


agree more.

Both the Encyclopaedias maintain generally very high standards (the only serious exception being a couple of pieces by one Kay Holzinger in the Lewis compilation), my temptation would be to look the Lewis for broad vision and the Clark for better factual accuracy. There can be the odd grumble: some of the film entries in the Lewis are rather banal comments on banal films, and why no reference to *Village of the Damned* with its missing time, the freezing of whole communities, the hybrid children with hive minds: all themes that would occur in the much later abduction literature.

The absence of reference to Betty Andreasson in either work is a bit puzzling, and Clark's entry on Spring Heeled Jack omits Mike Dash's authoritative treatment and still includes the fictitious story from the Everton district of Liverpool

These are however very small quibbles with what are two excellent works, well above the pop encyclopedia level. The only trouble with such a high standard is that it comes with a high price, one which may deter many buyers. Can one hope for more affordable paperback editions



•• **Jon Ronson.** *Them: adventures with extremists.* Picador, 2001. £16.00

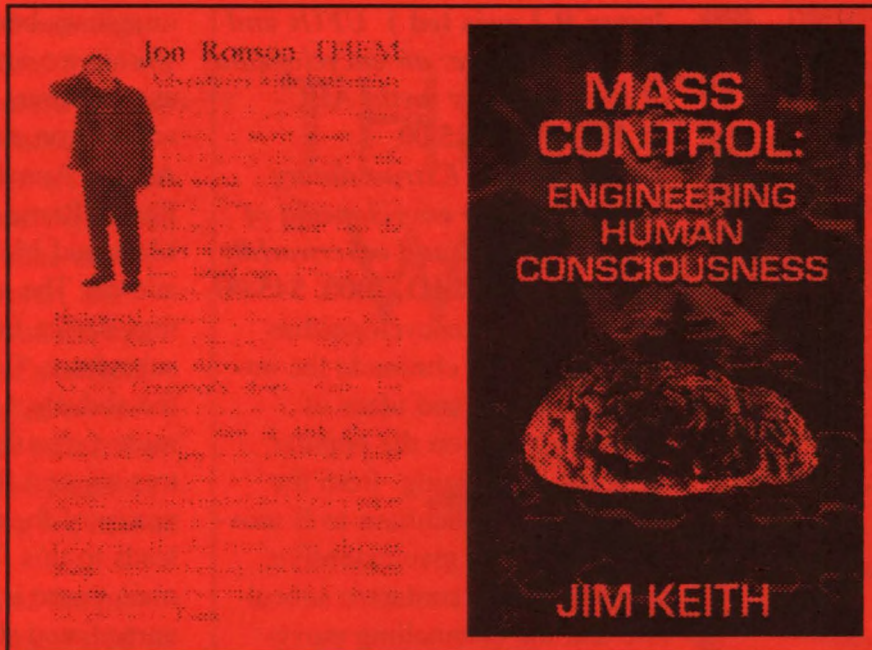
•• **Jim Keith.** *Mass Control: engineering human consciousness.* Illuminet Press, 1999. £11.99

Jon Ronson in his book and the associated Channel 4 TV series took a look at conspiracy theorists and political extremists, or at least that face of them which could be placed in the context of a human interest TV series. The two do not cover quite the same ground, the book includes a section on a wannabe Islamic terrorist Omar Bakri, who one suspects inhabits much the same mental universe as 'Armen Victorian' (why wasn't old Henry A one of Ronson's subjects one wonders), and a tour of Africa with Ian Paisley. The TV series featured a cock-up cum conspiracy theory surrounding the Oklahoma bombing not in the book.

Ronson's main theme is the conspiracy theories surrounding the New World Order, and the often absurd attempts of would-be conspiracy hunters to track them down. One of these conspiracies centres around the infamous Bilderburg club, mention in the last issue. This clearly is the top peoples' Rotary Club, in which its members endure boring speeches by pompous windbags for the social cache of *having really arrived*. However if they find that too boring they can always get invited to the top-peoples Madi Gras, the Cremation of Care ceremony at Bohemian Grove. Of course to pu-

ritanical Americans the idea of world leaders disporting themselves like the contestants in a Rio carnival was deeply shocking. Brits just fall about laughing, but these puritans really think they've come across Lucifer's very own private barbecue.

All this would be funny if people didn't get really hurt, and Ronson's portrayal of some of the participants as harmless eccentrics may be a little disingenuous. Full contexts are rarely given. The magazine *Spotlight* was discussed, but it wasn't revealed that its proprietor, Willis Cato, was one of America's veteran Nazis. David Icke may well be a complete nutcase, but there are people behind him somewhere. It should have been noted that he introduced the infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in his books a good couple of years before he came up with the Annukai. He got the idea of renaming them *The Illuminati Protocols* from American UFO conspiracist and militia leader William Cooper. Not only did Cooper print the *Protocols* in full in his book *Behold the Pale Rider*, but this gave them enough social acceptance for a separate printing to appear in the 'New Age' section of *Waterstones' Manchester*



open to, shall we say, something a little bit stronger than they can find in the adverts.

(Even the Annukai the twelve foot lizards aren't original to Icke; there is an awful lot of deep underground stuff about them which we have barely noticed).

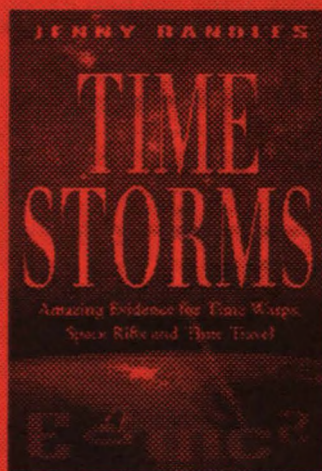
Jim Keith was one of those, had he lived, who might have featured on

branch a few years back.

Come to think of it, where did Icke get his ideas from? He sure as hell didn't just wake up one morning and decide to go down to the British Library and dig up some mouldering pre-war copy of the *Protocols*, and say Eureka! Someone is feeding him at least some of this stuff, a lot of which is feeding off the popularity of the *X Files*. There is great audience of historically illiterate conspiracy-minded young people. You can't sell Hitler and Holocaust revisionism straight, but gift wrapped with all sorts of New Age nonsense, free energy claims, alternative medicine, "the moon landing was hoax", and you could perhaps smuggle it in. Mainstream commentators take a quick look and laugh it off, but perhaps one in twenty of the readers will take enough on board to make them

Ronson's show, and his book shows the same eclectic mix of conspiracies. Keith had the knack of using a good deal of real stuff, and then giving it his own spin. As he traded in fusion paranoia it isn't at all clear what his own political beliefs were, other than perhaps of being the friend of anyone who was opposed to 'Them'. Some clue as to where he was coming from can be found his references, where the names of the writer Anton Chaitkin, the publisher New Benjamin Franklin House and the journal *New Federalist* can be found. These are all associates of the demagogue and would-be US President Lyndon La Rouche.

Yes the people in Ronson's book are funny, but so, I imagine were Mr Hitler and his friends in, say, 1921



**Jenny Randles.** *Time Storms: amazing evidence for time warps, space rifts and time travel.* Piatkus, 2001. £17.99

The first part of this book contains some interesting stories which might relate to atmospheric phenomena which in-

duce neural damage, causing mental confusion and fugue episodes. Tales of strange clouds which lead people astray have a long tradition. In the Scottish Highlands and Islands this was apparently known as *falbh air an t'shuagh*, being carried away by the hosts of the dead. Fr. Allan Macdonald of Eriskay collected a second-hand tale in 1897 of a man transported to a graveyard and back by a mass of men, and felt oppressed as if by the hot breath of many people. His hair was ruffled

as if by a wind. Afterwards he became thin and sickly (see Campbell and Hall *Strange Things*, p.297-9). Similar stories are told by Evans-Wenz in his *Fairy Faith*.

Of course invoking time warps to account for this sort of thing is pretty drastic, though a couple of my work colleagues who live around the Preston Brook area are grateful to Jenny for a novel excuse for being late for work - Sorry, I got caught in the Preston Brook time-warp. Of course such things lead to complications: suppose the time warp meant you arrived at work before you set off; could you then ring yourself up and tell yourself not to bother coming into work because you were already there, in which case you never arrived to telephone yourself. These sort of paradoxes seem to rule out time travel, and there is nothing in contemporary physics to suggest that time warps can occur on Cheshire motorways, far away from rotating black holes and wormholes kept open by exotic matter with negative mass.

There is also the problem which books

like this create; reliance on unverified anecdote, often concerning events that happened many years ago. In one case a woman claimed that after an anomalous personal experience her street looked different and a tree had suddenly grown. Did anyone think to check these claims with the neighbours or local authority. Jenny also relies on some pretty dubious sources, such as a book by Colin Parsons called *Encounters with the Unknown*. This is one of those books, where you don't wonder so much as to whether the stories told therein are fictional - you are pretty sure they are - you wonder if the author himself is a work of fiction, like the infamous 'Professor Colin B Gardener', or our old friend Cedric Allingham.

The danger with this sort of mixture of anecdote and wild speculation is that it tends to be counter productive, and that critical readers may dismiss, along with the dross, some very odd experiences indeed. What the nature of those experiences, whether internal or external, might be is anybody's guess.

A. F. U.  
Box 11027  
600 11 NORRKÖPING  
Sweden