

REPORT ON A VISIT TO WARMINSTER

by John Harney and Alan W. Sharp

Our contributors are committee members of the Merseyside UFO Research Group*, and Mr. Harney edits the group's lively MUFORG Bulletin. This article was taken from the July 1967 edition of the Bulletin.

WE arrived in Warminster on the afternoon of Saturday, May 27, 1967, and soon discovered that there were other ufologists staying there that weekend.

That afternoon we learned that one party had claimed to have sighted two reddish cigar-shaped objects the previous night from a vantage point on Battlesbury Hill. This sighting took place, we are given to understand, in fulfilment of a prediction obtained during a sort of table-turning session. As we were not present at these events and have no further details at the time of writing, we have no comments to make on them.

During the Saturday afternoon and evening there was talk of a general expectation that "something big was going to happen" that night. We did not share this feeling, so the reason for it remains obscure to us.

Arthur Shuttlewood and his friend, Bob Strong, had organised a skywatch for the Saturday night. Apparently their intention was to take advantage of the Army ranges being open that weekend and to make an excursion to the deserted village of Imber. We joined the convoy in Warminster at the appointed time and soon perceived that some sort of argument was going on. It was not made clear to us what the trouble was, but it seemed that either Arthur Shuttlewood or Bob Strong thought there were too many people in the convoy and, presumably, that the UFOs would be put off by the presence of a relatively large number of skywatchers all concentrated in one group.

The leading cars in the convoy drove off unexpectedly and were soon lost to view, so the rest of us decided to drive up Cradle Hill, which was near at hand and, by all accounts, as good a place as any for observing UFOs. Arriving at the top of Cradle Hill, we found that the rest of the party had gone there after all. A great argument was taking place: apparently some proposed to stay at Cradle Hill and others wanted to go to Imber, and among those who wanted to go to Imber there was a disagreement over which route to take. Also, various wild rumours were being bandied about, one of them being that "the Army would shoot Shuttlewood if he drove on to the ranges". The whole business was very confusing and we would hesitate to pin the responsibility for this muddle on to any particular person or persons.

Distant lightning

Eventually some of us left Cradle Hill and drove up to the ranges. When we reached the guardhouse, Shuttlewood and his friends were already there, having taken a short cut. We then followed some cars across the range to Imber and drew up about half a mile beyond the village to commence skywatching. The sky was

rather cloudy and only a few stars were visible. Nothing unusual was seen for a time until one of us noticed a flash of lightning on the horizon in an easterly direction. The flashes continued to the east and south-east. No thunder was heard, so the storms must have been a long way away.

The other cars went away, one by one, so we finally returned to the guardhouse to see if we could learn if Mr. Shuttlewood was having any luck. There were several cars parked there when we arrived and we were told that Shuttlewood had got quite excited when the lightning commenced and said that it was definitely not lightning, but a manifestation of the "Thing." He had then driven off into the night, hoping to view it at closer quarters.

After some time, Shuttlewood's car returned and he was soon giving the most extraordinary description of what, to us, was mere lightning¹ produced by distant thunderstorms. His car then drove off. We remained a while longer and left about 1.30 a.m., when it began to rain.

Shuttlewood's reactions to the display of lightning did nothing to diminish our scepticism concerning many of the UFOs allegedly seen during Warminster skywatches. If ordinary lightning can be transformed, when seen with the "eye of faith", into something out of this world, one might perhaps be forgiven for supposing that other phenomena, both natural and artificial, are regularly being misinterpreted in similar fashion during such skywatches.

However, when this was suggested, in a review of Mr. Shuttlewood's lecture at last year's BUFORA Northern Conference², great indignation was aroused. The opinions expressed in that review were based on information received from people with experience of skywatching at Warminster. For example, one report received from a reliable source³, was an observation of a certain, very well-known ufologist pointing at a star and calling it "a definite UFO".

Overworked imaginations

That weekend there was some discussion about a report by Arthur Shuttlewood and Bob Strong of a landing at Starr Hill. An account of this alleged incident had been published in the latest issue of SUFOA⁴. We learned that since this incident, different groups of enthusiasts had been to Starr Hill and had investigated a house from which "strange" lights were said to emanate.

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Some said the house was deserted and some it was not. So, on the Sunday (May 28) Alan Sharp visited the place in question and found it to consist of a settlement of several farms and about half a dozen workers' houses. It was discovered that the "deserted" house was merely not regularly lived in by the owner, who has a place elsewhere, but employees keep an eye on the premises and he pays visits. The rest of the dwellings in the vicinity are occupied.

The owner of the nearest farm to the east of the "deserted" house was interviewed and he said that he had never observed anything odd in the vicinity. He regarded the stories of strange lights, etc., with tolerant amusement and seemed to regard the army as the source of genuine unknown "observations".

Various startling incidents are said to have happened in the vicinity of a copse known as Calloway Clump. We visited this area and Alan Sharp enquired at New Farm, only a few hundred yards away from the Clump and in full view of it. The farmer and his son said that they had never seen anything unusual in the vicinity of the copse and suggested that some well-known locals were overworking their powers of imagination. They also said that of all the people who had been poking around in the vicinity, not one had approached the farm for permission to investigate.

A visit was made to one of the houses where strange noises (the "Warminster sound") have been heard. The occupants were interviewed and samples taken from the garden and the gutters⁵. By all accounts, these reports of strange noises appear to be genuine. Some people have attempted to explain them away as being due to the activities of helicopters, but this theory is unconvincing in view of the descriptions given. On the other hand, it would seem to be somewhat rash to accept the popular notion that the noises are due to the activities of alien space craft before other possibilities, such as atmospheric electrical phenomena of an unusual nature, have been adequately explored.

Contact caller

On Sunday evening we learned that Mr. Shuttlewood claimed to have had a "contact" that afternoon. Apparently, one of the "Aenstrians" telephoned him and Shuttlewood told him something to the effect that he would have to see him in the flesh if he was to be absolutely certain that the "Aenstrians" were not just hoaxers, and slammed the phone down. A few minutes later there was a knock at the door and a spaceman was duly admitted. This being had a very high forehead, blue lips, and one or two things to say, including the prediction that a third world war would break out shortly. The apparition was also seen by other members of Shuttlewood's family.

Earlier in the day, Alan Sharp had been treated to a demonstration, by a sceptical Warminster resident, of the technique of making local calls from a coin-box without putting any money in the box. The reason for this demonstration was Shuttlewood's statement that the space people claimed to telephone him from a public box, but he never heard any money going in⁶. However, Mr. Shuttlewood's latest claim would seem to dispose of the necessity of studying the technicalities of

the telephone system. At this stage there is no useful comment we can make on the new contact claim.

Later that Sunday evening we went skywatching on Cradle Hill, accompanied by Ken Rogers and Nigel Stephenson. It was a clear night and we saw one air-craft, four meteors and a satellite, but no UFOs.

To sum up, then, the strange noises which originally drew attention to Warminster were almost certainly genuine observations. Also, it would appear that there have been other observations in the area which are worthy of further investigation. However, there can be little doubt that the majority of UFO reports from Warminster are spurious. Our own experiences and a careful reading of published reports indicate that many ufologists seem to leave their critical faculties at home when they go to Warminster.

NOTES

- ¹ According to the Daily Weather Report of the British Meteorological Office (No. 38538, May 28, 1967), lightning, but no thunder, was reported during the period 2100-0300 GMT on the night of May 27-28 at Boscombe Down. A glance at the midnight (GMT) reports from other stations revealed that thunderstorms had been widespread in the southern half of the British Isles that evening.
- ² *Warminster's Contactee*, MUFORG Bulletin, October, 1966.
- ³ Private communication to J. Harney.
- ⁴ Harry W. Woodgate, *Return to Warminster*, SUFOA, March/April, 1967.
- ⁵ It is hoped to publish more about these observations in a future issue of the MUFORG Bulletin, (J.H.)
- ⁶ Arthur Shuttlewood, *The Warminster Mystery*, page 187.

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