

OBSERVATIONS ON THE HUMANOID ENCOUNTER AT RAINFORD

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IN concluding her report of an alleged encounter with a "humanoid" at Rainford, Merseyside (*FSR* Vol. 23, No. 6, 1978, pp 3-6), Jenny Randles expressed the opinion that the four witnesses saw "something very unusual," for which neither police or ufologists can discover any "plausible explanation". In view of the particulars presented in the article I find this conclusion rather astounding, and can infer from it that no real thought was given to the case or, perhaps, there was a strong desire to create mystery where none actually existed.

The investigation of the case, which was not undertaken by Miss Randles, leaves much to be desired. Vital information is completely omitted, including, for example, data concerning the weather. Questions which should have been asked of the witnesses appear not to have been put, thus leaving the reader to make assumptions when such should not be the case. Scant attention is given to the physical and psychological state of the witnesses, even though a superficial examination of the factors involved reveals this to be of crucial importance. The investigation is said to be a UFOIN report, but I fear it does that organisation little if any credit. One does not wish to be hyper-critical, but if ufological investigation reports are to be treated seriously they must be as full as possible.

The sighting, we learn, took place while a party of four men were driving home after an evening out. We are not told what they were doing during the earlier part of the evening, but from the context of the story we can infer that it was social in character. We are told that during the journey, and before the sighting, they had stopped for a drink. However, despite what is known about the effect upon individuals of drink, we are not given any information as to whether the individuals concerned had taken any intoxicants earlier in the evening. We gather from the report that the police "...were able to confirm that the men were not in any way intoxicated." To this we may ask whether they were tested, but we search in vain for the answer. Perhaps the investigators imagine that drink does not impair an individual's mental and physical faculties, indeed the report states that it does not, at least in the case of a single drink, but as we do not know whether the men had been drinking earlier the observation in the report is useless. However, even if only one drink had been taken it has to be born in mind that the hour was late, sometime after 11.15 p.m., the men had been out all evening, it was probably cold — the report does not mention the weather but in a reference to another sighting said to have taken place in the area

the previous day, January 1st., mention is made of it being cold and moonlit. In all probability the car's heater was on, so we have a combination of factors which make for fatigue and drowsiness on the part of the occupants of the car, not excluding the driver. This much we can gather from the report, despite the investigators' claim to the contrary, and so the level of awareness of the witnesses is, to say the least, highly suspect.

The route taken by the driver to get home was through a desolate area, being a "little used" coach road. This implies that the driver was familiar with the area otherwise he would have opted for a better marked road; nevertheless, during the drive he made a wrong turn. Miss Randles ascribes the reason for this to the featureless geography of the surrounding land, although one would not have expected to see much of this on any road so late at night at this time of year. The driver quickly became aware of his mistake and braked hard, after which the car skidded and ended up in a small ditch. This suggests that the driver was rather tired, and the wrong turn was due to this fact. It was immediately after the car had halted that the occupants saw what they described as "a figure," and what the report depicts as "basically humanoid." The total time of the sighting is given as twenty seconds. Specific details are given of the figure, from which we must gather that the people in the car were giving it their rapt and undivided attention. However, I contend that the report indicates that this could not have been the case and it is doubtful whether any real attention could have been devoted to the object. What does seem to be indicated is a measure of panic followed by a rapid retreat, and the subsequent collective build-up of a vision of something far removed from what it was in all probability that was actually seen. I do not suggest that the description owes more to imagination, stimulated in rather chaotic conditions, and fuelled later by an element of fear, than it does to actual fact, and I contend that the report as given supports this conclusion.

I have already shown that there is every likelihood that the people in the car were tired and probably dozing off during the journey. The car makes a wrong turn, the brakes are jammed on, there is a skid, and the car ends up in a very minor ditch. This would have rapidly awakened the car's occupants, and, if reference is made to the photographs illustrating the article, we see that the car stopped very near a line of trees and a hedge. It is highly probable that within the car the situation presented to the

minds of the passengers was one of the possibility of an impending crash, in short, an element of shock was introduced, and not something to permit of clear thought. Shock takes some time to overcome, so if in addition something else unexpected and odd-looking looms up, the sum effect would probably be an element of panic. And significantly this is exactly what the report tells us. The driver was asthmatic, and at this point had an attack of asthma; Miss Randles suggests that this was brought on by fright caused by seeing the figure. I think not, but suggest instead that it was brought on by thoughts that the car might hit the trees. We must bear in mind here, and the photographs emphasise this, that the road was very narrow, and added to this was the darkness with, perhaps, moonlight which, as we know, can play tricks with the vision.

Did the people in the car actually see anything which could have appeared like a "humanoid figure," or were their imaginations playing tricks on them? I think they did, and furthermore I feel the report to give some strong clues as to what it actually was. Of course this cannot be demonstrated beyond doubt, but I would submit that it is a "plausible explanation," something which the report said evaded both police and ufologists.

The description of the setting presents the area as "open mossland," with little human habitation other than farms. In short, it is farm land. An examination of the photographs used to illustrate the *FSR* report shows very narrow roads bounded by hedges and trees, with one, however, which shows part of the road to be unhedged and unfenced on both sides, while the ditch is far too shallow to present any obstacle. It so happens that the present writer is not unfamiliar with the area from childhood, and thus I am aware that it was used for grazing cattle. The investigators did not see fit to mention this, nor is there any indication of them having looked into it. So one cannot exclude the possibility that what the rather shaken-up individuals saw from their car was a cow which had strayed on to the road. It is not too difficult a task to envisage the figure depicted in the report as a cow observed head on, particularly when we consider the circumstances in which it was seen. The light source was car headlamps and possibly moonlight, which would produce an interesting combination of light and shade, plus some sinister shadows. Remember too that the witnesses were in a car which would set them low down, thus making the figure appear larger. However, this does not explain the flashing lights mentioned, and by no stretch of the imagination can a cow be said to possess the ability to create this effect. How can this be explained, then? In point of fact there is no real difficulty here, for if we remember we shall call to mind the fact that the car had just turned a corner, and it is highly probable that the turning indicator light had been flicked on. What the passengers saw could very easily have been the reflection of this flashing light in the beast's eyes. We are told in the report that the "box" which held the lights "stood out in relief." Now cows frequently stand viewing something with their heads lowered, which certainly would explain the position. The flashing lights are

said to have been red; direction indicator lights on cars are amber. The arms were very short — the report mentions eight inches — so could they have been the cow's horns emphasised by a combination of light and shadow?

In short, the more one thinks about it the more the similarities start to emerge. As cows would normally be part of the scene in a country area it would not be unexpected if the police, when later visiting the site, ignored any in the fields, for the beast on the road had had ample time to wander off back into the field. Cows are curious beasts and will approach objects which arouse their curiosity, thus it is not without some significance to note that Miss Randles refers to the "figure" as taking "three or four steps" towards the car in a hesitant manner.

This case presents a whole series of factors which, if reflected upon, help to provide a natural and simple explanation of the sighting. In the light of them I feel it to be highly unlikely that the passengers in the car saw a "humanoid," and certainly the case has no connection whatsoever with UFOs. What we have is nothing more than a rather blown-up instance of mistaken identity, plus ufologists who fail to investigate the case as thoroughly as they should.

Postscript

Although Jenny Randles excludes the possibility that this incident could have been a hoax on the men in the car, and I feel her reasons for doing so are sound, she does not examine whether or not they could have invented the story themselves. As an alternative to the sighting being a case of misidentification I cannot rule out the possibility that it is fiction.

The people in the car had been drinking. They admit this, but they deny being drunk at the time (*Daily Mail*, January 4, 1978), and this must itself arouse suspicion in that to witnesses at the time they could well have *appeared* to be drunk. Miss Randles quotes the police as stating that the men were not intoxicated, but she fails to mention the time factor between the incident and their first encounter with the police. The nature of the events during this period could well have helped to sober up the people concerned. The police appear to have conducted no tests on the men, so a denial of intoxication is based simply on appearance, which is hardly acceptable as a reliable method on which to draw conclusions in a case of this nature.

I do not think that we can rule out the possibility that on the way home the car was being driven faster than admitted, took the wrong corner at speed — the skid marks on the road are consistent with this idea, almost crashed into the hedge, and so shook up the occupants that the driver had an asthmatic attack. This aroused so much concern on their part that they stopped at the farm for help, and invented the humanoid tale to divert attention from their condition. There are strong penalties against drinking and driving.

All in all, then, I would suggest that this case be treated with extreme caution, and the possibility that it was invented by the people involved should not be excluded when considering it.