

Sad News From Britain

The year 2003 will be forever remembered as a very tragic one for British UFO publishing. First came the news of the passing of Gordon Creighton, the legendary publisher and editor of England's *Flying Saucer Review*, on July 16, 2003. Sad as death usually is, Creighton's can't be seen as a surprise or untimely; he was after all 95 years old and continued to publish his beloved *FSR* up to the last.

On the other hand, news of the tragic death of Graham Birdsall last September 19 was both shocking and certainly untimely. With his excellently produced *UFO Magazine*, Birdsall represented the best of the new generation of British UFO publishing. He was only 49 years old when he passed away in a hospital in his home city of Leeds after suffering a cerebral hemorrhage a few days earlier on September 11, that most ill-fated date. Let's review briefly the careers and legacies of both men—the old and new generation.

The Erudite Polyglot Ufologist

Gordon Creighton was born in Rickmansworth in 1908 and had an impressive, old-style education which included Cambridge University and the École Libre des Sciences Politiques in Paris. This led to a long career in the British Foreign Office,



Graham Birdsall

including several posts in China during the crucial period of World War II, where he served as First Secretary to the British Embassy in Beijing and consul in Nanking and Shanghai. It was here that his interest in UFOs was first triggered by a sighting in the summer of 1941. It was, he later wrote, "a white disc with a piercingly bright bluish light on top racing through the sky in the far west of China, near the eastern marches of Tibet."

After the war, Creighton served as consul-general in Recife, Brazil; Antwerp, Belgium; and New Orleans. According to *The Times Register* obituary reprinted in Birdsall's *UFO Magazine*, "his expertise took him into government research on maps in

Oriental and other languages with the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, and he spent eight years as an intelligence officer on Russian and Chinese affairs at the Ministry of Defense." But it was Creighton's uncanny abilities with languages—he studied 20, including Russian, Chinese, Arabic, and Sanskrit, not to mention the Latin tongues—which he eventually put to best use at *FSR*; first as contributing editor from the magazine's inception in 1955, later as editor beginning in 1982.

It's hard to comprehend the importance of *FSR* today, when anybody can check instantly on the web for the latest news on UFOs (or anything else) in Bangkok, Caracas, or just about any major city in our global village. This was unthinkable two or three decades ago. Reports of sightings around the world were very difficult to monitor even if they were published in the local press abroad. And if you did receive a rare clip from an acquaintance or colleague, could you read the language? *Flying Saucer Review* remained for decades the one constant, reliable source in English for a truly global perspective of ufology. Creighton did most of the translations and digesting of the for-

eign news and analysis. This was his great contribution.

Gordon Creighton was also one of those highly educated, eccentric Englishmen with a quirky sense of culture and humor. This comes across in a quote from a recently declassified Ministry of Defense (MOD) document dealing with a 1972

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BBC documentary on UFOs. According to a BBC News story posted last June, "in 1972 the Ministry of Defense was agonising about a televised debate on UFOs—on one hand they feared they would fuel UFO hysteria—but on the other hand they feared conspiracy theorists would have a field day if they refused to take part in the

show." Eventually the MOD designated Air Commodore Anthony Davis as the ministry's official UFO spokesman, and his appearance prompted the following letter from Gordon Creighton:

"It was not only epoch-making for its treatment of the subject but the star performer of the evening was a gentleman who, if my memory is not at fault, holds a government certificate of proficiency in the more exotic branches of xenoglossy and speaks fluent Uranian or Plutonian." MOD was not amused with the comments



and replied that "this department has no knowledge of the person you mention."

Graham Birdsall, the New Beat

Graham W. Birdsall was born in the city of Leeds in Yorkshire in April 1954. In the 1980s, together with his brother Mark (who currently publishes the slick magazine *I Spy*) and policeman Tony Dodd, he ran the Yorkshire UFO Society (YUFOS) and began publishing what was at first a humble bulletin. Over time it became the slick, full color, 84-page *UFO Magazine* of today, which is generally considered the best commercial publication of its kind in the English language. Graham also ran the Leeds International UFO Conference for 21 consecutive years, as well as many other events throughout the UK.

Quest Publications, the Birdsall's family company, also ventured into book publishing and distribution of UFO videos and other products. He managed to run one of the most successful ufological business ventures, which from my own personal perspective is quite an achievement. In fact, the last issue of the magazine he edited (Vol. 23, No. 10, October 2003) features a long interview by Birdsall of Matthew Hurley, author of *The Alien Chronicles: Compelling Evidence for UFOs & Extraterres-*

trial Encounters in Art & Texts Since Ancient Times, just released by Quest.

In the last editorial he wrote, Birdsall stated that, "like most religions of the world, I too believe that some form of outside intervention was responsible, but of a kind that is never likely to be taught in schools or at church. *The Alien Chronicles* may be considered blasphemous by some, and ridiculed outright by theologians, academics, and art historians alike,

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but for the first time in our relatively short history, you can at last see and read a part of that history that has long been denied you."

Readers of this column well know that the historical approach to ufology is one of my own favorite topics. I haven't seen Hurley's book yet, but I'm certainly familiar with his research, posted and devel-

oped all along on his website. Birdsall must be congratulated again for having published the first book in English containing the pictorial evidence for UFOs in history and art. (A book on this subject was published in Italian a year ago by Dr. Roberto Volterri, a professor at the University of Rome.)

Graham Birdsall had wide international contacts, attended numerous events out of the UK, and was extremely well liked by everyone. There was an immense wave of sympathy after his death, and dozens of messages from all over the world were