

# BRITAIN'S BUSIEST UFO DAYS

## A preliminary Survey

by Charles Bowen

THE BRITISH ISLES experienced their first flying saucer wave of any magnitude in the late summer and autumn of 1967. From June through to September there had been a "fly-over" series of modest proportions,<sup>1</sup> but this gave little hint of the scale of events which were to cascade upon us during October.

The flap got under way with the now celebrated Okehampton 80 m.p.h. police chase in the early hours of Tuesday, October 24.<sup>2</sup> Constables Willey and Waycott reported that the UFO was large and bright and shaped like a cross, that at times it was no more than 400 yards ahead of them, and that occasionally it was at tree-top height.

Interest shot up to a new high pitch for Britain. Venus, that much-maligned planet, was on the tip of every tongue, and I even heard it suggested that the constables had been deluded by a student "rag." Some hoax, when one considers that the chase took place over something like 15 miles!

By October 25 everybody had something more to talk about: there were no fewer than five sightings of a fiery cross by Sussex police early that day. A perturbed Chief Constable went on record—I watched him say this on television—that his men had almost certainly mistaken the rising planet Venus for a UFO. One of these mistaken policemen, a motorcycle patrol officer, had stated that he stopped to line the object up with a telegraph pole, and was thus able to see that it had a distinct pendulum motion. In view of the Chief Constable's statement, this puzzled me: where, precisely, had the swinging movement been? Which was swaying—the policeman, the telegraph pole, or the object (Venus)?

### Godshill Sighting

Another case that was to cause a measure of controversy was reported on October 25. It appears that on the previous evening, at about 9.45 p.m. a Wing Commander E. Cox of Hyde, Hampshire, was driving between Fordingbridge and Cadnam in the New Forest when he observed seven brilliant lights in V-formation. Three lights moved away and the remaining four re-formed into the shape of a cross and hovered above trees and pylons some three miles north of Godshill.

### Oxfordshire Sighting

Yet another important police sighting was reported by a mobile patrol on the Spelsbury-Chipping Norton Road in Oxfordshire.<sup>3</sup> Two UFOs were seen. They were ovalloid in shape, with an estimated "diameter" of 50ft. The officers watched the objects for two or three minutes before they "flew" swiftly northwards some 500-600ft. above the ground. No colour or luminosity was described in the report I read, and no

explanation was offered. The objects were described as being "very manoeuvrable."

### Explanations

Encouraged no doubt by the Sussex Chief Constable's remarks, members of the Plymouth Astronomical Society drove along the route of the "Okehampton" chase. They then announced that P.C. Willey and P.C. Waycott had chased first Venus (the "cross" effect being caused by the windscreen), and then Jupiter (the "cross" effect this time being caused by breaks in the clouds). The reported speed of the object, they added, was an optical illusion created by fast cloud movements.<sup>4</sup>

This all sounded very complicated, and I was glad I had arranged for Bernard Wignall to interview the officers and to travel the route they had taken. I was not surprised to learn that Messrs. Willey and Waycott were not convinced.

It was left for a clergyman, the Revd. Lawrence Inge, to give the clue for which everyone was waiting. He too, he announced, had seen a fiery cross at 7 p.m. on October 26, and he decided that he was watching a flight refuelling operation, and that this too must have been what Wing Cdr. Cox had seen. Prompted by the Press, the Ministry of Defence (Air) agreed with him, and one could sense the sigh of relief in some quarters. When, on the evening of Friday, October 27, *The Observer* got in touch with me about the various incidents, I commented: "The authorities have waited for a clergyman to come up with the explanation for them. If they agree that he was right, why didn't they tell us before that these operations were going on and thus put our minds at rest." The comment duly appeared in an article by Peter Deeley on October 29.

### Significant Happenings

A whole series of significant events then took place. The first of these—and almost an epoch-making event—was when the Royal Observatory at Herstmonceux in Sussex announced: "There is something up there which is not a star or a planet."<sup>5</sup> It is not clear whether Astronomer Royal "Bilge" Woolley was himself responsible for this announcement, but it seems that the disclosure was inspired by a sighting by amateur astronomer Peter Baker of Hastings, during the early morning of Wednesday, October 25. It should be remembered that this was the time of the Sussex constables' sighting, and Mr. Baker (and the Observatory) stated that the weather was cloudy. The bright object seen by Mr. Baker was on the earthward side of the clouds, and was farther north than Venus.

I am sure the Russians will be glad to know they were right after all, that Venus is probably where they

think it is and *not* below clouds over Sussex or being chased along Devonshire lanes.

The second event was that the U.S. Air Force stated that their refuelling exercises were between 5 p.m. and 9 p.m. on the days in question, and some were over Scotland. As the *Sunday Express* commented: "Back to square one."

Thirdly, the owner of a small transport firm in Sussex rang me—having seen my name, and mention of FLYING SAUCER REVIEW in the *Daily Express*—on October 26. He was worried. His truck, loaded with titanium castings had been stopped twice on a country road near Hook, in Hampshire, and he believed an aerial object was responsible. He shunned publicity for fear of the harm which might be done to his newly-started business. He was also afraid to visit his doctor to report a persistent shaking of his hands, and an uncomfortable feeling in his finger tips. I straightaway put him in touch with Dr. Bernard Finch, and, as I was flying to Ireland for a TV programme, asked Bryan Winder to interview the witness.<sup>6</sup>

Lastly, a reader who is a college lecturer in Southampton, telephoned to say that he and his family were nearly blasted out of their chairs while having lunch at their Winchester home. His son, Timothy Robinson, leaped to the window and saw two RAF Lightning aircraft, with re-heat on, chasing a mushroom-shaped object which had no lights or exhaust. I passed this story to my friend Ronald Bedford of *The Sun* in the hope that he could check with the Ministry of Defence (Air). The Ministry said there were no Lightnings in the area, but Timothy, a knowledgeable aero-modeller, is adamant that he did see this type of aircraft.

#### Another Auto-stop

Other cases, too numerous to include here, have been reported. We hope to "fill-in" on them later. However, after a calm spell for a few days, UFOs were back in the news with a bang on Sunday, November 5, when another lorry driver reported his, and another vehicle, being stopped by a UFO, low over a road near Fordingbridge in the New Forest. Here is an extract from the *Daily Express* of November 7, 1967: "Lorry driver Karl Farlow told the police of a strange encounter just before midnight in the New Forest on the A338 road near Fordingbridge.

"Suddenly, he said, his lorry lights and radio blacked out although the diesel engine chugged on.

"He pulled up—there in front of him, 15 yards away, he saw a 15ft.-wide egg-shaped Unidentified Flying Object.

"Moments later a white Jaguar car came in the opposite direction. Its lights failed and its engine cut out, said 25-year-old Karl, of Dawley, Shropshire.

"He went on: 'Our vehicles were stationary 25 to 30 yards from each other. The object was in between us, hovering just over the road.

"It glowed in the most beautiful green colour I have seen. It was like nothing on earth. I'm convinced I saw a flying saucer or some object from space.

"It hovered quite still for a couple of minutes, then made off at fantastic speed. I could clearly see a whitish-coloured dome underneath.

"I sat in the cab petrified. I don't want ever to

experience anything like that again. This was no hallucination.'

"Karl dialled 999 and police drove to the Forest. Meantime the Jaguar driver had gone on his way—'He didn't want to be involved,' explained Karl.

"Said Constable Roy Nineham who was in the patrol car: 'Mr. Farlow was very frightened.

"The most startling part of his report is that his lights failed and came on again when the object he saw disappeared.'"

#### Postscript

While we are "back to square one"—according to the *Sunday Express*—the Ministry of Defence (Air) is as "square" as ever, and still milling about in the past. When answering a question in the House of Commons about UFO sightings, Mr. Merlyn Rees (R.A.F. Minister) said "Some proved to be aircraft, and some were lights, the majority of which were Venus. The source of a few lights has not been identified. I can say, however, that none of these unidentified lights was an alien object."

Mr. Rees, who made his statement on November 8, added: "Nothing leads us to believe it is men from Mars or anything of that kind." If they can produce denials like this when a Member asks about lights in the sky it would be interesting to see how Mr. Rees and his Ministry would react to a goodly spate of landing with creature reports, let alone the vehicle-interference cases mentioned earlier in this article.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See World Round-Up in this issue.
- <sup>2</sup> See Bernard Wignall's report following this article.
- <sup>3</sup> From the *Scarborough Evening News* of October 25, 1967.
- <sup>4</sup> See *Liverpool Echo* of October 28, 1967.
- <sup>5</sup> *Daily Express*, October 27, 1967.
- <sup>6</sup> See R. H. B. Winder, *Vehicle Stoppage at Hook*, in this issue.

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# THE OKEHAMPTON INCIDENT

by Bernard Wignall

Our contributor is a member of the Cambridge University Group for the Investigation of UFOs. We are grateful to the Police Superintendent at Okehampton for his kind co-operation, and permission for Mr. Wignall to interview the witnesses.

IN the early hours of October 24, 1967, P.c.'s Roger Willey and Clifford Waycott were driving from Holsworthy to Hatherleigh along the A3072 road when they noticed a bright light in front of them, over the trees on the right hand side of the road. This observation marked the beginning of one of the most intense "flaps" in Britain for several years.

They first saw the light at Anvil Corner, some two miles east of Holsworthy. They agree that it seemed to be approximately 400 yards away at about 20° south of east, and appeared to be keeping pace with the car. They wound down the window for a better view, but after a few moments still could not identify it, so they radioed their base and began to chase the light. They went well above 70 m.p.h. but it kept ahead of them, apparently at the same distance, until just before they reached a garage east of Narracott Cross. By this time the light was to the north of the road, and it seemed to accelerate away from them over Black Torrington. They stopped at the garage and got out as they could see a light on or near the ground to the North East. However this turned out to be coming from one of the farm houses in the vicinity.

The constables returned to the car and drove towards Hatherleigh and Okehampton; before long they saw the light again. It was never visible for long periods, often being hidden by trees. About a mile south of Hatherleigh on the A386, at Basset's Cross, they found Mr. Christopher Garner asleep in his car, and when woken he saw the light as well. At this point it was almost due East. The whole sighting lasted 50 minutes, from 04.10 until 05.00.

A brief interview with the two policemen under very difficult conditions yielded the following information:

The light was star-shaped and, according to P.c.

Willey the picture in several newspapers next day was a very good representation. The size was estimated as 3 cms. at arms length by P.c. Willey, but P.c. Waycott gave a smaller size, just under the apparent diameter of the moon. P.c. Waycott described it as brighter than anything in the sky except the sun or the moon.

When the light was first seen the sky was completely dark, but during the sighting there were breaks in the cloud cover and the moon and stars were visible.

The angles of elevation varied throughout, the extreme angles being about 5° and 60°. This latter point, along with the directions mentioned earlier, tends to contradict any suggestion that Venus may be an explanation for the first part of the sighting at least. However, the second part at Basset's Cross could well have been the planet, as its direction and elevation at this time coincide fairly well with those of Venus. P.c. Willey said that he had seen both the light and Venus at the same time, but when asked to indicate the direction of the planet he gave a bearing which would fit the position of Sirius rather than Venus. The motion at this point consisted of a "zooming" to and fro which could be easily ascribable to atmospherics.

The next night P.c. Willey was with his usual colleague P.c. Drouge near the camp south of Okehampton, when they saw it again, much diminished in brightness, in a direction that would put it in the region of Basset's Cross. This time the sighting only lasted 10 seconds. It moved from west to east, dipped towards the ground and disappeared. A moment later it appeared again, climbing rapidly until lost to view.

These sightings are mainly interesting for the publicity they have received. The details of the light and its motion can tell us very little, and are similar to many others throughout the world.

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