

MORE ON WELSH UFOs IN 1905

Roger Sandell

IN a previous article in *Flying Saucer Review*¹ a collection of press reports indicating that in 1905 several unusual aerial objects were sighted in the area of Egryn, Merionethshire, was summarised. At the time the village was one of the centres of a religious revival, and the objects were generally believed to be a mark of divine favour on Mrs. Mary Jones, a local revivalist preacher around whose house and chapel they appeared to centre. Further research has uncovered several other interesting reports from this wave.

The first is especially valuable because of the standing of the witness and the detailed nature of the account. Interviewed in the *Barmouth Advertiser* of March 23, 1905, the Rev. H. D. Jones, a local Baptist minister, described what had happened when he had accompanied Mrs. Jones (the two do not seem to have been related)

to a revival meeting at the village of Llandebr, near Egryn. After the meeting Mrs. Jones and some of her followers rode back to Egryn in a car, while the Rev. Mr. Jones and others walked beside on foot. Then, according to Mr. Jones:

“After proceeding some distance the mysterious light suddenly appeared in the roadway a few yards in front of the car around which it played, sometimes in front, others behind. When we reached the crossroads the road towards Egryn makes [sic] a sudden turn to the left and, on reaching this point, instead of proceeding straight on, the light at once made its way in the direction of Egryn in front of the car. Up till then it had been a single light but here it changed. After going some

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RUSSIAN CONFERENCE *(Continued from page 30)*

band. But many participants in the Conference disagreed with this way of formulating the question and considered the *Cyclops* method not the right one for the job, although they agreed that the making of a search in the microwave part of the band is promising.

Nobel Prizewinner C. Towns (USA) also drew the attention of the delegates to the new possibilities now being opened up to astronomers by the utilisation of lasers.

The delegates spent much time on the difficult problem of the search for informative signals in the Cosmos. Here it was a question of agreeing on which “windows” in Space should be used, in order to eliminate disturbing influences; what sort of information they would look for; and which wavelengths it would be best to listen on and to emit on. In the opinion of the Soviet radiophysicist N. Petrovich, it is necessary to work at the extreme limit of short impulses. It is probable, he said, that distant civilisations have already discovered a method of generating short impulses of gigantic power, whereas we are using receivers that only pick up long signals. The result is consequently that we are “looking at the book without knowing in which language it is written”. This is why, he said, we must build broad-band receivers capable of picking up extremely short impulses.

Much of what was discussed at the Conference can already be found in the pages of the stories and novels of Science Fiction. But, while the Science Fiction writers project their ideas into a distant future, the scientists are already considering those same ideas as concrete programmes of activity. One of these fantastic ideas, it seems, was outlined at the Byurakan Conference by Professor Minsky of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In his opinion, contact with an advanced civilisation must mean contact with a society of highly intelligent machines. In other words, we should send out into Space not only impulse-signals of call-sign type,

but also special programmes for extraterrestrial electronic computers and televised representations of electronic computations.

The closing day of the Conference was devoted to the drawing up of the first programme of Mankind for the organisation of a practical scheme to try to discover intelligent inhabitants of Space, and for the establishment of contact with highly developed civilisations in the Universe. When the various individual points of this programme were being discussed, we really were able to convince ourselves as to how serious and how important for the future destiny of the inhabitants of Earth the results of such intercourse with “cosmic mind” could be. And our civilisation might be of great interest also to the inhabitants of other galaxies.

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I found that the Royal Astronomical Society seemed to possess no information about the Byurakan Conference, so I asked Professor Crick and Dr. Orgel whether they knew of any plan to publish anything about it in English. Dr. Orgel informs me that it was decided at Byurakan that a brief report on the Conference would be prepared by a committee and submitted for publication in the USSR and in the West. The English version will appear either in *Science* or in *Nature*, and Dr. Sagan is the person who is in charge of this.

The cover-story in *Time* magazine for December 13, 1970 (*Looking For Life Out There*), dealt mainly with the recent probes to Mars etc., but also contained a certain amount of information about the Byurakan Conference. *Time* mentioned in particular that the Byurakan delegates had concluded that there are now from 100,000 to 1,000,000 technological civilisations in the Milky Way. They are considered to be on an average a few hundred light-years apart, and each one is capable of transmitting radio messages.

Yes. It looks as though our thinking has altered quite a bit since the days of Sir James Jeans.

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little distance up the road to Egryn a small red ball of fire appeared around which danced two attendant white lights, and the red ball remained stationary for some time, the other lights playing around it. Meanwhile the car proceeded on its journey, leaving the lights behind. Those then suddenly again combined in one and rushed at a rapid pace after the car which it then overtook. For over a mile did we thus keep it in view."

This report (quoted here word for word as it appeared in the newspaper) is reminiscent of many others in which UFOs are described as chasing vehicles. However another of the *Barmouth Advertiser's* reports is much more puzzling. It comes from Beriah G. Evans, one of the paper's reporters, and is published in its February 16, 1905, issue. Mr. Evans describes how, after interviewing Mrs. Jones, he walked to a revival meeting with her and three of her followers. On the way the manifestations began:

"Having proceeded a little over a mile along the road, all walking abreast, I saw three brilliant rays of light strike across the road from mountain to sea, throwing the stone wall twenty or thirty yards in front into bold relief, every stone plainly visible. There was not a living soul there, nor house, from which it could have come. Another half mile and a blood red light, apparently within a foot of the ground, appeared to me in the centre of the village street just before us. I said nothing till I reached the spot. Then it disappeared as suddenly and mysteriously as it had come.

"Mrs. Jones," I said, "unless I am mistaken, your light still accompanies us."

"Yes," she replied, "I kept silent to see whether you had perceived it yourselves."

"Then I learned to my astonishment that none of my three companions had seen it. That is the simple story of my experience. Why I alone, apart from Mrs. Jones, should have seen the light, I shall not attempt to explain."

This is certainly a curious report, and strongly suggests that some psychological factors were involved.² This is not to say that the object was merely an hallucination, but that it may in some way have been projected into the minds of the percipients. This possibility has already been discussed in several FSR articles.

A far more conventional UFO is reported in the February 23, 1905, issue of the *Barmouth Advertiser*. A reader, who simply signs himself "Miner," writes that:

"At 11.48 on Saturday 11th inst., whilst walking south near Llywyon, with the sky totally overcast, I witnessed in the southern sky a large meteor passing from east to west. It attained its greatest brilliancy whilst over Barmouth, when three or four balls of fire fell out of the main body which showing through the clouds, appeared peculiarly grand, and the light was then so intense that I could distinguish objects more clearly than by the full moon. The meteor was nearer horizontal in its flight and more brilliant than any I have hitherto seen."

The apparent releasing of smaller objects is, of course, a not uncommon feature of UFO reports.

Some interesting data is contained in an article describing visions seen by Mrs. Jones in the March 30, 1905, issue of the *Barmouth Advertiser*. Most of the visions described are those commonly seen by religious mystics, such as Christ speaking from the cross. However, one item is interesting for its similarity to the "Men in Black" reports that have become familiar in our field:

"Returning home long after midnight one night she (Mrs. Jones) dismissed her driver at the head of the lane leading towards the farm. 'My brother always comes to meet me when I am late,' she said, 'and there he is,' pointing to the figure of a man seen dimly approaching. The car drove off and she went to meet her brother, as she thought. She called her brother by name. The figure looked back over his shoulder and she realised it was not her brother. She began to sing one of the revival hymns, when the man stopped, turned on her and became an enormous black dog. 'And then,' she told me (stated the reporter), 'I knew it was the Devil himself. I prayed aloud and, as I prayed, he rushed screaming into this very hillock.'"

This report has interesting affinities with folklore. The ability of the Devil to assume the forms of men and animals at will is frequently described in the witchcraft tradition and many British ghost stories involve phantom dogs.³

Further on, the same article relates:

"In the neighbourhood dwells an exceptionally intelligent young woman of the peasant stock, whose bedroom has been visited three nights in succession by a man dressed in black. This figure has delivered a message to the girl which she is forbidden to relate."

This is reminiscent of various modern contactee reports involving entities that materialise in people's homes.⁴

A case from the past is reported in the *Barmouth Advertiser* for January 26, 1905. Seeking to find some precedent for the events taking place, the paper quotes from *Morden's Atlas of Wales*, published around 1805:

"Tis credibly reported that in the year 1692 a fiery exhalation was seen to cross the sea and set fire to ricks of hay, corn and barns near Harlech, and to infect grass, but it was not dangerous to men though they stood in the midst of it. It proceeded in the night from the same place for some months, commonly on Saturday and Sunday. The only remedy to extinguish it and drive it away was to sound horns and trumpets or discharge guns."

This report is rather obscurely worded, making it difficult to reconstruct what actually happened. In any case an account written in 1805 of something that happened in 1692 is not the most reliable of evidence. All that is safe to say is that this report suggests that unusual aerial phenomena may have occurred in the area before 1905.⁵

What conclusions can we draw from these reports? First of all, most of the sightings fall into what John Keel would call the "soft" category, consisting mainly of small lights seen close to the ground. The entities described (the "gigantic human being" mentioned in the previous part of this study, and the two "Men in Black" described above) seem to have all the characteristics of apparitions, appearing and vanishing instantaneously.

The similarity between one of the entity reports and folk-tales has already been noted. The UFOs themselves resemble the lights that feature in folk lore as the "Jack o' Lantern" or "Will o' the Wisp."⁶ There is also a Welsh tradition of a sprite called the Cyhyraeth, said to haunt the coast in the form of a floating light.

Similar lights are often associated with ghost and poltergeist cases⁷ and some aspects of the Egryn reports suggest a similarity to poltergeist phenomena. Some investigators believe that poltergeist activity focuses on those with hysterical tendencies and the 1905 Welsh Revival had seen hysteria on a massive scale.

It cannot be denied that these reports present many unusual features. However a similar combination of religious hysteria and UFO sightings appears to have been associated with the revolt of the Camisard religious sect in France in 1702. Describing the Camisards, Professor N. Cohn, an expert on religious fanaticism, states:

"They fought in the absolute certainty of divine

support. The Camisards were guided to places of safety by mysterious lights in the sky. Supernatural voices consoled them. Children and women, shaking all over, encouraged them with prophecies of the Second Coming."⁸

These reports serve to underline the complexity of the UFO picture. If we are to make any progress towards understanding it will only be by detailed research conducted with no preconceptions at all.

Notes

- 1 *UFOs in Wales in 1905*, FSR July/August 1971.
- 2 For a similar case see E. Buckle: *What the Children Saw*, FSR CASE HISTORIES No. 6, August 1971.
- 3 See Eric Maple: *The Realm of Ghosts* (Pan 1970) and Dennis Bardens *Ghosts and Hauntings* (Fontana 1972). Sir Arthur Conan Doyle based his "Hound of the Baskervilles" on these traditions.
- 4 See J. Keel: *Strange Creatures from Time and Space* (Fawcett 1970) and C. Bowen: *Strangers About the House* (FSR September/October 1968).
- 5 Wales seems to play an important part in historical ufology. The first part of this article mentioned lights seen in the same area in 1649 and Carl Grove's recent articles on the 1909 mystery airships gave several Welsh reports. There is also the "flying ship" seen at Holyhead in 1743 mentioned in a letter in FSR May/June 1970.
- 6 See Maple, *op. cit.*
- 7 See Bardens, *op. cit.*
- 8 Article in Purnell's *Man, Myth and Magic*.

MAIL BAG

Correspondence is invited from our readers, but they are asked to keep their letters short. Unless letters give the sender's full name and address (not necessarily for publication) they cannot be considered. The Editor would like to remind correspondents that it is not always possible to acknowledge every letter personally, so he takes this opportunity of thanking all who write to him.

Messrs Michel, Vallée, Keel, et al:
why the secrecy?

Dear Sir,—On page 4 of FSR Vol. 17, No. 6, Aimé Michel repeats his declaration of intent not to reveal details of the Dr. "X" case, and adds that such omission is "typical" of such cases. This is confirmed by a cursory examination of the literature, which revealed the following cases of non-publication of data:

1. John Keel, FSR Vol. 15, No. 5, p. 27, speaks of "A Long Island contactee whose story lurks in my files, far too sensational ever to be published."

2. P. M. H. Edwards, FSR Vol. 16, No. 2, p. 23, case 34, states that "a youngster had a traumatic experience with alien beings, which cannot be publicly described as yet."

3. Jacques Vallée, in *Passport to Magonia*, p. 132: "Of course, some details relevant to this aspect of the UFO phenomenon cannot be published." (Vallée's emphasis.)

What could possibly be too sensational, or traumatic, or personal to be

published in the journal that brought AVB to the attention of the ufological world?

A similar sort of thing is Vallée's statement in *Challenge to Science*, p. 165-6: "Certain elements of the answers have already been found, by computer correlation . . . but they are still too new . . . to be published here." After six years this information, as far as I know, is still unpublished. Along with such matters as the repeated postponements of the Hynek and Salisbury books, and an apparent decision never to publish the book James McDonald was preparing, all this adds up to a lot of puzzlement and frustration for the rank-and-file.

A Ph.D. (name and address supplied) of Dallas, Texas.
January 26, 1972.

[And if the rank and file are puzzled by the suppression of our correspondent's identity, then his P.S. should be noted—ED.]

P.S.: If any part of this letter is printed in FSR please do not publish my name or address!

[All too frequently we are subjected, for no good reason, to frustrating hints of the kind which aggravate our correspondent, in the literature on the subject of UFOs. In some cases, however, researchers and authors resort to such hints when they need to make a point, yet hope that expected developments will enable them to present a more detailed picture in the future. Again, there are cases where witnesses and correspondents will not agree to their names being given as, for fear of ridicule, they do not want it known that they are associated with this subject.]

The case of Dr. "X" is very different. The very existence of the affair was made known directly to Aimé Michel, the leading and most respected researcher in the world, a man supported by many professional colleagues. It was imperative that the identity of Dr. "X" was suppressed so that the attentions (and contaminations) of sensation-seekers, etc., could be avoided while the investigation—and the follow-up of any subsequent events—continued—EDITOR.]