

# Something in the

The "Flying Saucer" mystery deepens as sightings over Britain reach a new peak

by

**GEOFFREY  
NORRIS**

IT HAPPENED AT London Airport on Friday, March 22, this year.

Sheila Manning, a dark-haired secretary in BOAC's Constellation Fleet Technical Officer's office, was looking out of the window in front of her desk. The office was on the southern edge of the airfield and Miss Manning was looking south, away from London Airport. She was puzzled by what she saw.

"What's that?" she asked of the others in the office. Pointing, she indicated a strange object which appeared to be floating above a bunch of cumulus cloud some three to five miles away towards the south. It seemed to be a shiny, metallic object. Its apparent size was not great but, if the distance estimation was correct, it would have been considerably larger than any aircraft now flying.

Its shape was that of a Yo-Yo seen from the side—two bowl shapes, the upper one inverted, joined by a short centre section. No one in the office had seen anything like it before.

"It's an aircraft catching the sunlight," said somebody at last. This was possible. Aircraft from the airport were taking off in that direction. The sun was slightly to one side and could be catching on and reflecting from the flying surfaces. But most people in the office were not satisfied. They were well aware of the strange atmospheric effects possible at times and this was unlike anything else they had experienced. And anyway, the object was not moving.

Not until almost ten minutes after Miss Manning had first seen it did the unidentified object vanish when obscured by a cumulus cloud. It had neither moved, nor diminished in size.

By this time about a dozen people had gathered in the office. They had all seen the phenomenon. A quick check revealed that radar had reported nothing in the area—nor had the control tower staff.

All the evidence seemed to point to a freak reflection of some type. But this did not satisfy those who had seen it. It was no reflection, they said. To them it was an Unidentified Flying Object—a UFO for short.

This strange event occurred at a time when there were many similar happenings. In April, a radar station at West Freugh, Scotland, reported a mysterious object which has remained unidentified. Mysterious explosions were heard over Epsom and Glasgow. Craters appeared but there was no sign of fragments or explosives. A little later, people living at Gravesend and Hendon, and many places in between, reported strange lights in the night sky performing strange antics. These are only a few of the reports which came in. All of them remain unexplained.

But some people had an explanation which fitted all these and many similar reports. They recalled a phenomenon which has been with us for the past ten years. These recent mysteries, said these people, could be explained away by Flying Saucers.

Flying Saucers were back in the news again.

How it all started is, of course, a well-known story. In the year 1947, Kenneth Arnold, an American business man, was piloting his private aircraft in the region of Mount Rainier, Washington, when he saw a formation of strangely shaped objects. He estimated their speed as some 1,600 m.p.h.—fantastic at that time. Their motion he described as "saucers skipping across a pond." The press seized on this descrip-

tive phrase and so the Flying Saucer was born.

The fact that strange objects had been reported in the skies regularly ever since the turn of the century—and before—escaped most people's notice. 1947 became known, incorrectly, as the year when UFOs began.

Within weeks "saucers" had spread throughout the length and breadth of America. Reports came in from everywhere. The craze caught on in other countries—including Britain.

Now, in the short space of ten years, the saucer enigma has snowballed beyond expectation. Every known type of theorist has jumped on to the saucer bandwagon. Spiritualists, oculists, theo-

sophists, professional forecasters of doom and many other mysterious persons have put forward their theories and explanations. Several have even claimed contact with beings from other worlds.

Between them these often well-treasoning people have

so be-fogged the UFO field with their astounding theories that it is small wonder that the general public is inclined to grin sceptically when Flying Saucers are mentioned.

This was the situation I found when I began an investigation into the UFO mystery for *RAF Flying Review*. My object was to discover whether the UFO was something peculiar to America or whether the same type of thing was happening in this country. I also wanted to find out whether the UFO was something which deserved to be laughed to scorn or whether it should be taken seriously.

It would be quite easy, I discovered, to pour ridicule on the whole proceed-

• This is an independent investigation into one of the greatest mysteries of our age. The views expressed are the personal conclusions of the writer after a long period of research.

# SKY

ings. A quick glance at the activities of the many hoaxers was enough to prove that. Take what happened in Jersey just three months ago.

Several people there saw an object in the sky. It was nothing very definite. It could have been a balloon, an aircraft catching the sun or a mere freak of the atmosphere. But it was peculiar. And it was also, according to a newspaper report, sufficient to give Mr. Reginald Queree of St. Helier, the idea of throwing a model Flying Saucer into the air and photographing it. The resulting picture was, he is reported as saying, the strange object which the others had seen.

But it was not until the picture had been published in good faith by a national newspaper, that this story was published.

## "Large White Disc"

We could also laugh at the strange goings on at Wardle, in Lancashire. Here the hoaxers appear to have been at work again—but this time they operated in reverse, as it were.

It was the evening of February 15 this year when Mrs. Dorothy Fitton, a 45-year-old civil servant, looked out from her rather isolated cottage and saw a strange object moving in from the south-west. Flying quite slowly, it moved in a dead straight line.

As the object drew nearer, Mrs. Fitton could see that it was a light flashing alternately red and white. Above the light she could just make out in the darkness a large white disc—"as big as a cartwheel."

The object stopped, hovered stock-still for some five minutes, and then moved off, just as slowly and surely in a dead straight line towards the south-east. This was exactly ninety degrees from its original course. No noise at all.

Others in the village saw it. Mr. J. A. Leavey, the local M.P., heard about it and questioned those who had seen it. He was impressed and decided to ask a question in Parliament.

When the question was asked it caused quite a bit of hilarity in the House. Mr. Orr-Ewing, Air Under Secretary, said that the object did not emanate from

space but from a laundry in Rochdale!

He went on to explain that a man working at the laundry had contacted the police and told them that, on the night in question, he had released two children's balloons filled with hydrogen. Below, he had rigged up a system of flashing lights. This, said the Under Secretary, was what had been seen.

And so the matter was apparently neatly tied up.

Or at least it was until a local newspaper interviewed the man who claimed to have released the balloon and discovered that he had no idea of how to fill a balloon with hydrogen nor how to fit lights to it. In fact, said the newspaper, he had nothing at all to do with the UFO. He had not released any balloons. This supposition was given added weight when the people who had seen the UFO insisted that it was not a balloon of any type.

Now, after officially debunking this sighting, the Air Ministry have confirmed that an investigator has been sent up to Wardle. After his researches the Air Ministry still maintain it was a balloon.

It is small wonder that the public are both bemused and amused at such complicated events.

But, in spite of all this, I do not think that we should laugh at UFOs. During my investigation I have sifted through hundreds of sightings. Many could have been anything from balloons to meteors, from aircraft to spots before the eyes. Yet, wrapped up in all these have been some which stand out. They stand out because they have been reported by reliable people and because it is difficult to see how they could be any of the things which are often mistaken for Flying Saucers.



"Saucers are interplanetary," says the Hon. Brinsley in Poor Tranch, editor of Flying Saucer Review . . .

*Evidence, muddled as it is, indicates that there are unexplained objects in our skies. They may not be manned or sent by beings from another planet, but they are there.*

Flight Lieutenant J. R. Salandin saw something that he could not explain on October 4, 1954. In fact, he was so shaken that he had to fly around for ten minutes before he could tell Control what he had seen from the cockpit of his Meteor fighter.

He had taken off from North Weald in Essex at 4.15 p.m. Climbing towards two other aircraft which he could see high above him, he was surprised to see two small objects, one silvery and the other gold, pass near the two aircraft. Salandin had hardly recovered from his surprise and was still wondering whether he had been victim of hallucinations when he happened to glance ahead.

He received one of the biggest frights he has ever had. Streaking straight towards him at tremendous speed was a disc-shaped object. In the brief time Salandin had for observation, the thing appeared to have a flange in the centre and two bulges above and below this.

The object was so near that it overlapped his windscreen. A collision seemed inevitable. Then, at the last moment, the object swerved and flashed past on the Meteor's port side.

Salandin had never before given a serious thought to Flying Saucers and even now he keeps an open mind on the subject. All that he knows is that he saw something very real up there over Essex on that October afternoon—and that it gave him a hell of a fright.

There have been many other nonsense sightings. Again in 1954, a



UFO photographed over Rouen in March, this year. Photos of UFOs are rare, never very clear. This is one of the few which seem authentic.



"...but where is the concrete evidence?" asks Dr. Clifford Thornton, scientist and independent UFO investigator



Shining discs (in left-hand top corner) seen by Scandinavian scientists in 1954. Still from a colour film taken by a member of the party

group of Scandinavian scientists were returning by air after observing an eclipse of the sun from the polar regions. They were on their way back, but still taking photographs of the sun, when their attention was taken by something else. Several shining disc-like objects appeared to be shadowing their aircraft. What they were, none of the scientists knew. They were no aircraft such as we know them and none of the scientists on the trip had ever seen anything like them.

And this year there have been a whole spate of sighting reports. One private researcher has collected 149 reports from Great Britain for the months of April and March alone. No doubt many of these could be discounted if a thorough investigation were made. But others remain a mystery.

Before any of these can be truly labelled "unidentified," however, a very thorough investigation must be made. The would-be investigator would have to know, among other things, the movements of all aircraft or balloons likely to have been in the area at the time. He would have to have a very sound knowledge of weather phenomena and astronomy—and of human nature.

But there are people willing to undertake this task. To find out who they are and how they go about the job, it is necessary once more to dip briefly back into saucer history.

In the early years soon after 1947, "saucer" clubs began to spring up all over the country. Their objects were not always well defined but generally it was to investigate saucer sightings.

Since this time there has been a general movement towards amalgamation and most clubs now regularly exchange views with others in this country and abroad. At the hub of all saucer activities in this country is the magazine, *Flying Saucer Review*.

### Inside a Saucer

This is a small, well-produced magazine which sells about 1,300 copies. It attempts to cater for all degrees of saucer fans and so it is not surprising to read in a recent issue, an article by a "high ranking Tibetan Lama" telling how he went for a ride in a Flying Saucer!

But it would be quite wrong to dismiss all readers and contributors of this magazine as cranks. The editor is the Hon. Brinsley le Poer Trench and he is far from the general public's idea of a Flying Saucer crank. Tall and amiable, Trench is, by an odd chance, a space salesman by profession. When he is not selling advertising space for another magazine,

he sells interplanetary space through *Flying Saucer Review*.

Trench admits that he is working on a "sticky wicket." He realises that many of his readers want to see "astounding saucer news" but, at the same time, he tries to keep reports of actual sightings as objective as possible.

Among his readers are some who act as investigators. These men Trench entrusts with the task of looking into sightings. Two such men are Jack Ibson, a Yorkshire business man, and Wilfred Daniels, a technical writer from Stafford.

These two, like most other of Trench's investigators, are enthusiastic about their task and believe implicitly in Flying Saucers. They also believe that they have an interplanetary origin. How far is this theory justified? Let Trench explain:

"UFOs have been timed," he says, "travelling at fantastic speeds, far in excess of anything earthmade. And, again, many UFOs have been seen performing manoeuvres, such as a right-angled turn at high speed, which would cause any normal material or crew to disintegrate under the excessive g loads."

Prominent experts, such as Professor Hermann Oberth, the guided missiles expert, have also expressed these views. Oberth says: "My own explanation of UFOs is that they are machines built in some place other than on the Earth. I believe that they originate exclusively from outside the Earth because observations suggest that Flying Saucers are able to suppress the force of gravity, and I do not think that anyone on Earth has yet found the means to do so."

*But, if we grant the reality of these objects, then it seems to me that the interplanetary idea is only a theory. Admittedly, it seems the most likely one, but nowhere during my investigation did I come across evidence proving that Flying Saucers were interplanetary.*

One failing which appears to be general among the most enthusiastic of saucer fans, is lack of a critical approach to their subject. Bear in mind the deceptive nature of human observation and the many atmospheric freaks that are possible, and it is easier to see how important it is to be critical.

A typical report received by Trench is that which came from Miss K. Connor, a member of the Royal Observer Corps, who lives at Truro, Cornwall. Last October, while on a ROC exercise, Miss Connor and her crew saw a UFO.

"The object appeared as a small, silver round one like a ball," said Miss Connor in her report. "Then it turned sideways and was seen to be oblong. The side away from the sun glowed pink and a sort of translucent blue." Estimated height was 45-50,000 feet. The UFO appeared to be "standing still against the wind" and disappeared when it rose into the upper haze.

Trench regards this as a good and reliable sighting. Admittedly Miss Connor should be a reliable observer and

I have no doubt that she reported exactly what she saw. But the great question of what this was remains unanswered. It could have been a weather balloon. *Flying Saucer Review* made no attempt to investigate this possibility. But, without official co-operation it would have been difficult to do so.

But not all UFO investigators lack criticism. There are many people investigating the mystery who prefer to remain in the background. They feel that the subject tends to be ridiculed by the general public and prefer to carry out their work on their own without publicity. Some of these people are scientists.

Men like Doctor Clifford Thornton, a 37-year-old doctor of philosophy who works as a scientific and statistical consultant. He also runs a business which specialises in developing special equipment for mineral prospecting. Dr. Thornton, of Hampstead, London, is a short, perky man who walks with a limp acquired while serving with the Armoured Corps during the war. One of his great interests is gravity. Through this he was brought into touch with Flying Saucers, although he is one of the many who abhor this term for UFOs.

### Gravity Theory

In 1950 Thornton wrote a thesis entitled "The Unified Field Theory" which dealt with many aspects of gravity which had never before been examined. This had a great success and is still used in many universities all over the world by students in this field of research. It was in 1950, too, that he first became interested in UFOs. "Many aspects of this phenomenon," he says, "have a very close bearing to my work on gravity."

His first delving into the literature written on the subject of UFOs was not encouraging. He still has no hesitation in describing all of it as "science fiction." He makes one exception. This is the book "The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects," by Edward Ruppelt, one-time head of the USAF "Project Blue-Book" investigation into the mystery. This book is, indeed, one reliable volume on the subject. It does not state that UFOs are interplanetary, but it is the most convincing book ever written to prove that they exist.

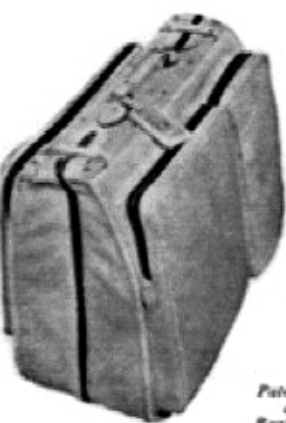
Since 1950 Thornton has himself reached the conclusion that UFOs exist. He has done more. Helped by many friends, some of them scientists like himself, he has been able to classify these objects into fourteen different categories. They range from small "saucers" only ten inches in diameter, to huge, cigar-shaped objects up to a mile in length. These never descend lower than the very fringes of our atmosphere.

Dr. Thornton has also found out that UFOs have a periodic frequency and that sightings reach a peak every 2½ years. It was in early March that he told me that we could expect a crop of sightings towards the end of May. The recent spate of reports has shown how right he was.

"There is no positive evidence that UFOs come from outer space," says Thornton, "but all the available evidence seems to indicate that they do not come from this earth."

If pressed, he will advance the theory that UFOs may come from a solar system other than our own. "Our sun is a very

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# SOMETHING IN THE SKY

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common type of star," he explains, "and there are many others like it in the Universe. It seems most likely that these stars will also have planets. UFOs could come from these planets."

Gravity still remains Dr. Thornton's main interest and he continues his researches. He has told me that it should soon be possible to build a device which would enable man to overcome gravity without recourse to wings or jet lift. If he has any success with this, then Dr. Thornton may be well on the way to building a Flying Saucer of his own!

Is there no official inquiry into the Flying Saucer mystery?

Two years ago the Air Ministry pronounced: "About ninety per cent of the reports (of Flying Saucers) have been found to relate to meteors, balloons, flares and many other objects. The fact that the other ten per cent remain unexplained may be attributed to nothing more sinister than lack of data." And it has said very little else until May of this year. Then, Mr. George Ward, Secretary of State for Air, said, in answer to a question in the House, that there had been so far this year five objects sighted which could not be explained. This compared, he went on, with six in 1956, none in 1955 and six in 1954.

The Air Ministry will not elaborate on this statement. We are left to presume that the unidentifieds this year include the Wardle mystery and the radar sighting from West Freugh.

But there are many people, other than the ardent saucer fans, who would like to know the answer. People like ex-Squadron Leader Ernest Booker of Lower Hillmorton Road, Rugby. Just after 9 p.m. on Tuesday, October 23, last year, Mr. Booker, now a schoolmaster, saw a strange sight in the night sky.

"There were two lights," he said, "about twice the size of aircraft navigation lights seen from 1,500 feet and a light amber in colour. They were different from anything else I have ever seen." During the war Mr. Booker was a pilot—an instructor at the Central Flying School.

"The most mysterious thing about these lights was that they made no noise whatsoever," he continued. "They were moving fairly slowly against a light breeze from east to west, quite low, about 1,500 feet up. As they moved the lights seemed to oscillate a little, both lights moving together as if they were at front and rear of some object which I couldn't see in the darkness."

Many other people in the Rugby district saw them. The ex-Squadron Leader was quite sure that they were neither balloons nor gliders; neither an aircraft nor a searchlight reflecting on a cloud. What they were he does not know, but he would very much like to know.

And so the saucer mystery moves on. Perhaps by August, 1959, when according to Dr. Thornton's theory, another peak period of sightings is due, we may know something more about these things. Perhaps some major discovery may have been made. And then UFOs might break into the biggest sensation of the century.

But today there can be no doubt that UFOs remain, very much, a mystery. ●



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