

# THE AIRSHIP OVER THE STRAWBERRY FIELDS

*Margaret Fry*

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**T**HIS report concerns an experience which my husband Ron and I had in the summer of 1978, when we spent the day strawberry-picking on a farm in Kent.

The date was August 13, 1978, and it was in the morning. The day was bright, sunny, and windless. And we were travelling by car, bound for Beesfield Farm, near Swanley. Our route lay through Sutton-at-Hone, on the A225 road.

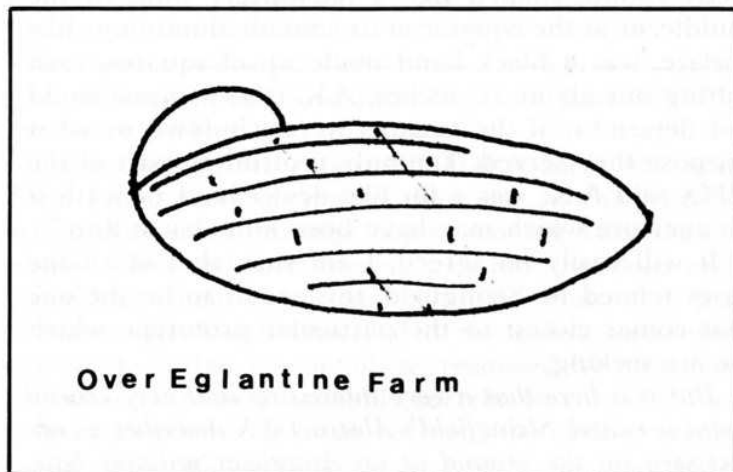
As we came to a cross-road point in the open country, near Eglantine Farm, a huge dull light-grey dirigible passed over the road in front of the car. My husband was the first to see it. Although he was driving and consequently had his eyes strictly on the road, the sheer size of this thing distracted his attention.

I have been investigating UFO reports for a number of years and I think I have learnt to judge pretty accurately the size of more close objects in the sky. This craft which we now saw seemed to be at least 300-400 feet long and about 40 ft. wide at its widest part in the centre. I judged its height to be about 700-800 ft. Ron shouted "What the heck is that!" Then I looked up, by which time the thing was over the area to the side of the road leading from Horton Kirby. It was thus virtually alongside of us, on our left, sailing serenely and majestically on an even course, very slowly and absolutely silently. I shouted: "Why, it's an *airship* — how exciting!" and my husband slowed down to about the same speed as the craft, about 10 m.p.h. Then we came to some hillocks by the road and lost sight of it behind them, so it was pretty low.

After that the landscape fell away to open ground and a wide valley, with hilly country in the near background to one side, a wide sweep of fields and low land with dense trees a few miles further on to the right. The dirigible was now slightly ahead, but still to the side of our route. I noticed several hundreds of people gazing up at the craft from the fields below, and there were again large numbers watching on the hilly slopes to our left, standing by their cars in the car-park on a hill slope in the near distance at Eglantine Farm. All these people (fruit-pickers) were looking up at the dirigible, which by now was slowly manoeuvring around over the open fields, its nose sharply tilting up. It then stationed itself to the right of, and slightly above, something else which I now no-

ticed for the first time. This was the weirdest object that I have ever seen in the sky. It was like nothing so much as a huge television aerial suspended bolt-upright in the cloudless, windless, clear light-blue sky, and below it and attached to it there was what looked like a huge, limp, pear-shaped, light-grey balloon.

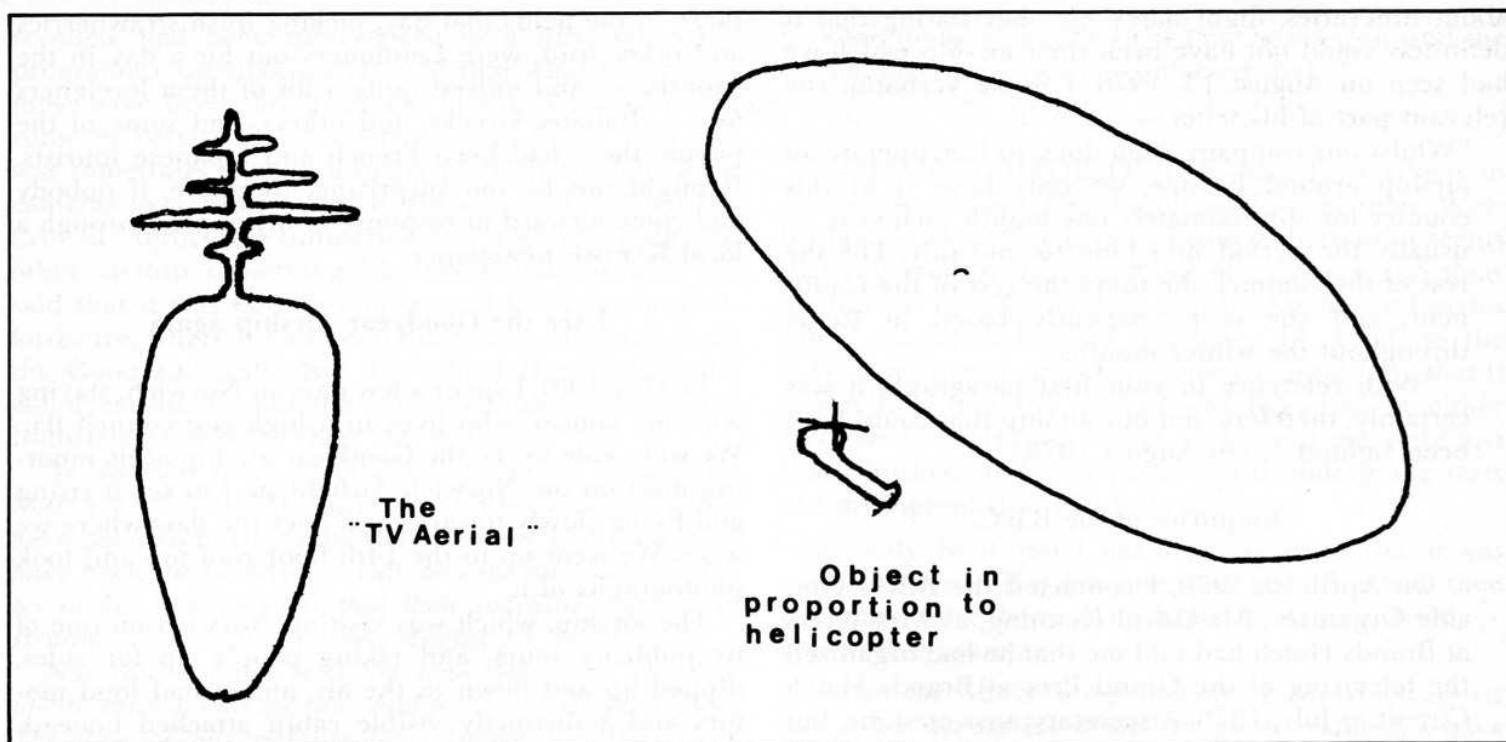
I had already wound down the car window and put my head out. I wanted my husband to stop so that I could take a photo, but he said: "Impossible. Not on a dual carriageway!" But he was going as slowly as he dared, and glancing now and then at the dirigible himself. At this point the road was on high ground, with the fields below perhaps about 200 ft. down from the level of our car, so that in fact the objects were now only a few hundreds of feet above us.



## The Helicopters and Whole Fleet of "Dirigibles"

Helicopters were busily passing to and fro beneath the two objects (they would presumably be on the normal helicopter route between Gatwick and Heathrow Airports?). I wondered if the helicopter pilots were aware of the two objects, which were now both absolutely stationary.

Then, as I directed my gaze higher into the sky, I was startled to see that there was a whole fleet of dirigibles up there, in some sort of formation, stretched out over the distant wooded area right to the horizon, as far as the eye could see. And all were stationary. I was excited, thinking this must be some sort of Air Display, for we were not far from the Brands Hatch Circuit.



I had not seen an airship since before the outbreak of World War II, when I was a child, and I concluded that all this that we were now seeing must be something to do with the Goodyear Company.

We then turned off the main road, on to a subsidiary road, where we were still able to observe the objects for a while, until we turned again to enter Beesfield Farm.

At Beesfield Farm, where we proceeded to pick strawberries, we watched helicopters all the afternoon passing fairly low over the strawberry fields. They were like midges compared with the size of the huge craft we had seen. We left Beesfield Farm early, hoping to see the airships again, but nothing was in sight.

As soon as I got home to Bexleyheath, I sat down and made sketches of what we had seen. Then I telephoned my son and told him about it. He reminded me that the Brands Hatch Circuit is not far from Charlton Farm, where we had last caught sight of the objects, and he said that the BBC do have aerial platforms from which they photograph races etc. at Brands Hatch. So I just accepted his explanations, namely that the first object we had seen was the Goodyear Airship (along with a fleet of other airships no doubt built by Goodyear), and that the second object seen by us was a BBC air platform.

#### A TV programme on airships

One evening in February 1979, however, I came home and switched on the Television to the TONIGHT programme, in which Frank Bough was interviewing a Mr Anthony Smith about airships and balloons. I was amazed when Mr Smith said that he was hoping to build the largest airship in the U.K. He

said that at present the Goodyear Tyre & Rubber Company had the largest (120 ft. long).

As soon as my husband came home from work, I asked him to confirm that he thought the airship or dirigible which we had seen on August 13 of the year before had been at least 300-400 ft. long. He agreed.

#### Our Enquiries about the Goodyear Airship

On February 26, 1979, I telephoned to the Brands Hatch Circuit. A very helpful lady named Mrs Webb answered me. She replied that she was quite certain that the Goodyear Company's airship had not been over Kent on August 13, 1978, and she said that the BBC had also not been televising any show from an air platform over Brands Hatch on that day. She went on: "In fact, I know that the Goodyear airship only came from Rome once last year, and I saw it on July 16." "Oh yes," I exclaimed, "I saw it too!", and I recalled that it had been a very misty evening, and that my husband went off to night-work at 5.45 p.m., and that I had been standing in the front garden waving to him when I caught a glimpse of the Goodyear airship over The Broadway area. Mrs Webb agreed that this was probably so, and suggested that in any case I should telephone to the Goodyear Company and to the BBC about what we had seen.

I telephoned accordingly to the Goodyear Company, and they asked me to send in a letter to Mr. M. J. Whitehouse, their Public Relations Division Manager, giving all details of what we had seen. I wrote to him accordingly on February 27, 1979, and on March 27, 1979 (a copy of this letter is on file with FSR) Mr Whitehouse replied to me, enclosing photographs of the Goodyear airship and other material

about itineraries, flight dates, etc., but stating that it definitely could not have been their airship which we had seen on August 13, 1978. I quote verbatim the relevant part of his letter:—

“Whilst our company itself does, in fact, operate an airship around Europe, we only have it in this country for approximately one month each year — usually the period mid-June to mid-July. For the rest of the summer she tours the rest of the Continent, and she is permanently based in Rome throughout the winter months.

“With reference to your first paragraph, it was certainly, therefore, not our airship that could have been sighted . . . in August 1978.”

#### Enquiries of the B.B.C.

On April 10, 1979, I contacted the BBC's Outside Organizer, Mr David Kenning, as Mrs Webb at Brands Hatch had told me that he had organized the televising of the Grand Prix at Brands Hatch Circuit in July, 1978. A secretary answered me, but she said Mr Kenning was out, so would I telephone again later. I did so in due course. The secretary had asked me a lot of questions, and said she found it all very interesting, and no doubt she had told Mr Kenning all this, because when I spoke to him I found him uncooperative — indeed, I thought, evasive. There was also definitely a tape-recorder on, or some such thing, as it was clicking on and off, and there were other “off-putting” background noises. In answer to my query as to whether the BBC possessed an enormous television aerial that was capable of standing stationary in the air at a height of 700-800 ft, attached to nothing but a limp looking and deflated pear-shaped balloon below it, his reply was “We do have air platforms” . . . and then a hurried confused “. . . some such thing” and a slam-down of the 'phone. This left me perplexed, and set me wondering . . . about the BBC, and whether they and the Ministry of Defence are engaged in a cover-up . . .

And I continue to ask myself this very simple question, which, to this day, not a soul has been prepared to answer for me:—

*“Why and how is it that hundreds of people can watch a whole fleet of UFOs over our British Isles, and nobody or authority, official or otherwise, will say or do anything about it?”*

#### Search for other witnesses

In March 1979, I asked our local newspaper, the *Kentish Times* (published in Swanley), to write something about our sighting, which they did, and to ask other people who had seen the same things on August 13, 1978, to get in touch with me. Nobody did so, and, thinking about this, I realized of course that the great majority of all those hundreds of people who were out

there in the fields that day, picking fresh strawberries and other fruit, were Londoners out for a day in the country — and indeed quite a lot of them foreigners too — Italians, Greeks, and others, and some of the people there had been French and Japanese tourists. It might not be too surprising, therefore, if nobody had come forward in response to my appeal through a local Kentish newspaper.

#### I see the Goodyear Airship again

In May 1981 I spent a few days in Norwich, staying with my cousin, who lives in a high-rise council flat. We were able to see the Goodyear airship at its mooring-mast on the Norwich Airfield, and to see it rising and flying slowly towards and over the flats where we were. We went up to the 14th floor roof-top and took photographs of it.

The airship, which was visiting Norwich on one of its publicity tours, and taking people up for rides, dipped up and down in the air, and it had loud motors and a distinctly visible cabin attached beneath the balloon, in which of course the engines are housed and the people sit, all of which we could plainly see. I judged it to be flying at a height of about 1,000 ft., and subsequently got confirmation of this from the Norwich Airport. It had the name GOODYEAR written in huge black letters along its sides.

A couple of weeks later, I telephoned to the Planning Department of Norwich Town Council and asked them how tall the block of flats was on which I had stood. I explained that I wanted to know this because I was a UFO investigator. They were quite amused, but helpful, and said that the flats were a standard height of 130 ft. This meant that the airship had passed above us at a height of about 870 feet.

#### Conclusions

I then knew definitely that I had *not* seen any man-made airship on August 13, 1978, and that my original estimate of the length of the airship/dirigible seen by us over the Eglantine and Charlton Farms (300-400 ft. I had thought at the time) must have been too little by at least 100-130 ft. It had in fact been lower than the Goodyear airship was over Norwich, and I would now judge that it must have been *at least four times* as long as the Goodyear airship. Otherwise the object seen by us on August 13, 1978, had seemed to be much the same as, say, the R101 and other craft which we saw before the War, seemingly of the same type of material, and *ribbed* — only it was much wider.

#### The opinion of Mr Anthony Smith

Another person to whom I wrote in the course of my enquiries was Mr Anthony Smith, who, as will be

recalled, had been interviewed in a BBC television programme on airships. He said that what I had seen must have been the Goodyear airship because it did come to Britain for about two weeks every year and was sometimes used as a flying platform for television cameras over Brands Hatch. He also told me that the firm of Aerospace Industries had recently built another airship something like the Goodyear one. He said that it was undergoing tests at Cardington, Bedfordshire, where it had been built (as, incidentally was the Goodyear craft also). He added that neither the Goodyear airship nor the new one built by Aerospace Industries was more than 200 ft. long.

As we see from Goodyear's letter to me, dated March 27, 1979, Mr Anthony Smith cannot possibly have been right in saying that what we had seen *must* have been the Goodyear craft, *because the Goodyear letter makes it quite clear that their machine was not in Britain on that date, namely August 13, 1978.*

*Nor can it have been the new Aerospace Developments' airship that we saw, and for a very simple reason. The date of our sighting was August 13, 1978. The Goodyear letter states that these were the only two airships in Britain, and that the one built by Aerospace Developments Ltd., had only just been "produced a few weeks ago". It had therefore been completed and launched after our sighting.*

The concluding paragraph of Goodyear's letter of March 27, 1979 to me reads in facts as follows:

"Up until recently our airship, which in fact was constructed at Cardington in 1972, was the only airship to operate in the U.K. Another company, Aerospace Developments Ltd., have however recently produced an airship a few weeks ago. This

airship was also constructed at Cardington, and the manufacturers can be contacted there."

NOTE BY EDITOR OF FSR. Mrs Fry's efforts to contact Aerospace Developments Ltd. at their Weybridge, Surrey, office proved fruitless, because it seems that this concern has gone out of existence and their airship has now been taken over by Airship Industries Ltd. I telephoned today (February 14, 1983) to the RAF, Cardington, and their spokesman told me that it is not true that the airship was launched in either 1978 or 1979. It has, in fact, so he told me, only just been finished, and is at present still undergoing tests at Cardington. It is 150 ft. long.

Nobody, be it noted, has ever suggested that it was ever over Kent. If it has only just been finished, then it cannot have been over Kent in August 1978 — almost five years ago.

As for the BBC's "air-platforms", from which sports and other events are filmed or photographed, I have also telephoned today to the BBC Television Engineers, who inform me that their equipment in this direction consists entirely of long-shafted or long-armed 'hoists' resembling the machines used in London and other large cities for the servicing and maintenance of very high street-lamps. The idea of anything consisting of "balloons with aerials" evidently makes no sense to them and sounds absurd.

It looks therefore as though we still await a conventional explanation for what Mr and Mrs Fry claim that they saw in the skies over the fair land of Kent on August 13, 1978. G.C.

## UFO REPORTS FROM CHINA (2)

### *Mr. Anthony Lee's reports from China*

This correspondent, Mr. Anthony Lee, has sent me some new material on the UFOs in China, which serves to reinforce the data published recently by FSR in England. I give below a summary which I have made of it.

F. Lagarde, Editor of LDLN.

(Translation by Gordon Creighton from LDLN No. 217/218 (July-August 1982)).

ON the morning of October 28, 1961, several people observed for a period of some seven minutes a strange-looking object flying over the suburbs of the city of K'ai-Feng, in the Province of Ho-Nan. Appearing from low over the horizon, the object was moving slowly, and at times even was stationary. The eyewitnesses all stopped work to look up at it, and one of them, a young engineer named Chang Ching-lai, managed to get several photographs of it. Over the course of the succeeding years this sighting was to be followed by many more.

Although 1980 was the Year of the Monkey according to the Chinese Calendar, it would have been more correct to have consecrated that year to the UFOs, for it was in May 1980 that the *Chinese Association for the Study of UFOs* was formed. This group is affiliated to the *Chinese Society for the Study of the Future*, and is headed by Mr. Cha Le-P'ing, a twenty-five-year-old student of Astrophysics. In due course a number of UFO reports were gathered.

For example, on the evening of July 7, 1977, there was an open-air film-show before an audience of