

# THE GATWICK AIRPORT SIGHTINGS

*John Judge*

**GATWICK AIRPORT** is situated in West Sussex, roughly half way between London and Brighton. It is the capital's second airport, being the starting point for many overseas charter flights as well as a large number of scheduled international services. It is therefore one of the major airports in the United Kingdom.

News of the happenings there was broken by the Independent Television News on Tuesday, August 8, 1978, and the Brighton *Evening Argus* for that date. The reporter, John Ellis, had researched the story and, when contacted by Alastair Prevost, was very helpful. When Alastair was put in touch with the original sources that day, he too found them of great help, often putting through calls to staff who were on duty on the day in question. However, it seems that as soon as the story was made public a clamp down was enforced. In his original story "A close look at those Close Encounters," Mr. Ellis had quoted a Ministry of Defence spokesman as saying "Every possible explanation will be looked into. It is a long and involved process. Trained investigators will want to study the position of stars at the time, the weather conditions and the possibility of an aircraft or balloon being mistaken for a UFO." This was, not without some justification, termed a "government investigation" by the press. When I came to pick up the pieces about a month later I found that not only was no real assistance forthcoming, but that John Ellis had also encountered deadlock in his efforts to discover what the "government investigation" had concluded.

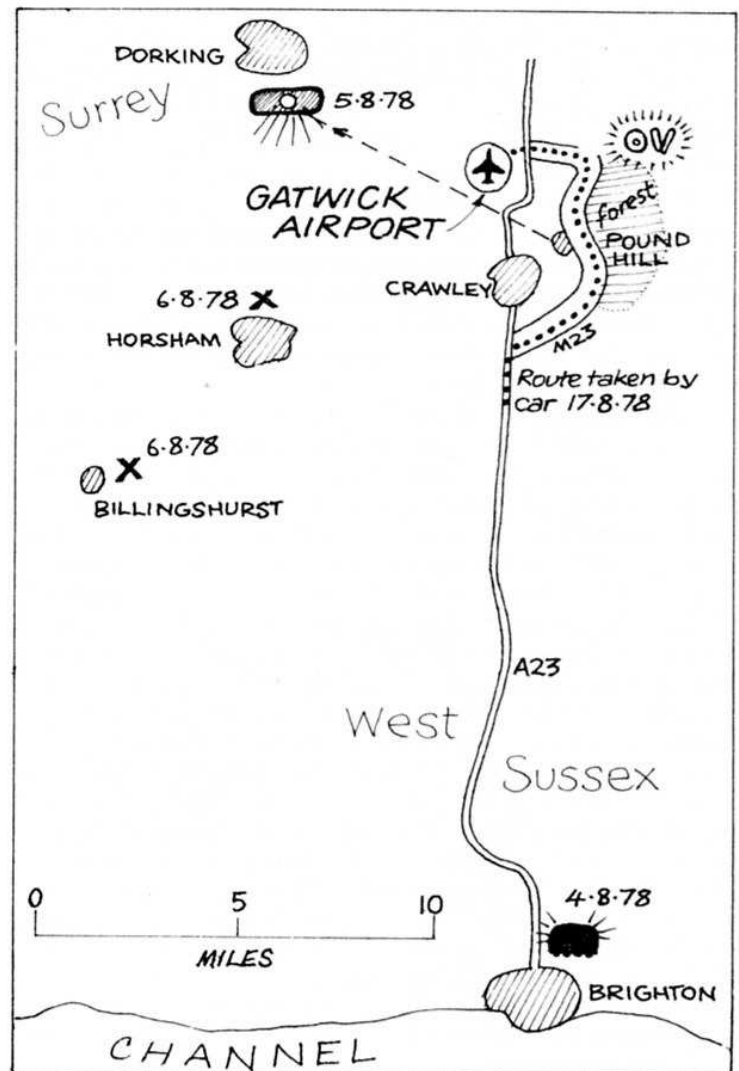
It seems that the main event occurred on Saturday, August 5, 1978, at 12.57 p.m. Mr. G. Potter was the Air Traffic Supervisor at the airport that afternoon, having come on duty shortly before that time. The A23 road runs north from the town of Crawley, a mile or so from the airport. To the right (i.e. south east of the airport) is an elevated area known as Pound Hill. The occupants of several cars, some with caravans heading to or from holidays on the south coast, saw a strange object appear over the hill and travel quite slowly on a north westerly course, virtually right over the airfield, and heading towards Dorking, Surrey (8 miles west north west). It was described as a black cigar with an intensely brilliant white light in the centre. The object was descending slowly and was finally lost to sight behind trees. There was no sound.

Unfortunately, nobody at the airport seems to have taken details from any of the witnesses, although it is known that one man was named Mead. He estimated that the object at its closest was little more than a quarter of a mile away. Although

Jenny Randles, in her capacity as Secretary of UFOIN, writes:-

"On Tuesday, August 8, 1978, the national news was filled with stories of some amazing happenings in the vicinity of Gatwick Airport. A government enquiry was promised — then, as so often happens, all went quiet. Squadron Leader Alastair Prevost was on to the affair immediately for UFOIN, and did a good deal of the necessarily speedy follow-up. Sadly it was his last case, as he was already seriously affected by his terminal illness. John Judge picked up the pieces and completed the investigation but we owe a great debt to Alastair Prevost, who knew how important it was to act right away. Despite an often painful situation, he was willing to work on to the end."

Alastair could obtain no details, he was told that Air Traffic Control staff at the airport did see the object.



He was not informed if it was detected on radar.

ATC Gatwick sent an immediate signal to the chief UK control at West Drayton. A Flt. Lt. Lockwood received this (it was coded Sic Echo Uniform Kilo... D 51 545 ZA) The MOD in London were also informed, although interestingly, Alastair was told by ATC Gatwick "they only act as a post office."

I contacted Mr. Watson, the area co-ordinator for CONTACT UK. He had a good personal contact at Gatwick Airport who had often been very responsive in the past. He had written immediately to this man, but when a reply was received (dated September 13, 1978) it was from the Ministry of Defence (MOD) in London, signed by Miss G.J Jamieson. She simply stated: "I regret I cannot help you over the incident you mention. We are grateful for the reports sent to us..." She then went on to repeat the by now monotonous refrain on the score of investigating for defence implications and that no evidence of a defence threat had been discovered.

It was possible to obtain the weather details for the time in question. There was a light wind at 7 knots from bearing 240° - which strongly indicates that the object was not windborne. Since ATC at Gatwick had no knowledge of the traffic passing under a mile from their runway we can safely assume it was not a conventional aircraft.

In the circumstances only one conclusion is possible. The sudden change in public relations by the Civil Aviation Authorities at Gatwick implies that they may have received instructions from the MOD to stop being as helpful as they had been to both John Ellis and Alastair initially. Similarly the failure to come up with any explanation, and the apparent "government investigation" during which they took no details from the civilian witnesses who telephoned, indicates that an unknown phenomenon was observed, possibly even on radar, and that trained airport staff witnessed it.

While I ran up against a brick wall with this sighting, Alastair had picked up many other leads that indicated that the area around Gatwick had been subjected to quite a flap during the first half of

August. I was much more successful in chasing these up, being able to obtain full reports from most of the witnesses. Here is a brief review.

### Devil's Dyke Sighting

On the evening before the airport sighting, namely Friday, August 4, 1978, Mr. and Mrs. Freer-Ash were out walking on the South Downs, near Brighton, at the well-known Devils Dyke. The time was 9.20 p.m. and it was twilight, but still quite light. Mr. Freer-Ash is a Chartered Estate surveyor and is well used to observation. The object seen was to the South West at about 20° elevation, seemingly very low. It was the apparent size of a golf ball at arm's length, and yellow in colour. Bright light poured out from each top edge, and the underside appeared jagged and seemed to flicker.

The witnesses lined this object up with a bush and noted that it was hovering. After thirty seconds it rose and moved away slightly. It climbed to elevation 75° where it disappeared into cloud. This motion was extremely fast and apparently soundless, although Mr. Freer-Ash said the wind was blowing into his face, possibly distracting him from any sound.

The wind was from bearing of 220° at 10 knots, and there was one eighth cloud at 2200 feet, and five eights at 4500 feet.

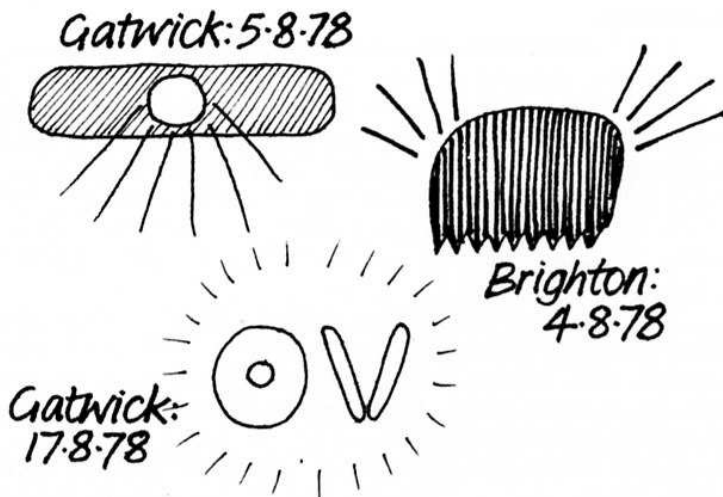
### Billingshurst Sighting

On Sunday, August 6, 1978, there was yet another sighting. This time two 14 year-olds, Raymond Edmunds and his girl friend, Miss K. Botting, were walking their dog in the village of Billingshurst, 12 miles South West of Gatwick. It was about 9.15 p.m. and the sun was just setting. There was full cloud at 4500 feet, and lower cloud at 800 feet. The wind was from bearing 220° at 7 knots.

They spotted an object in the South West, looking at first like a bright star. But it came closer, moving too slowly to be an aircraft, and they realised it was triangular in shape. It then moved alongside low cloud and finally disappeared into it. After about four minutes the cloud moved away and the object was still there, hovering. It then accelerated very fast and moved away westwards, before slowing down again.

Raymond called Gatwick, who put him on to Horsham police station. While he was making his report, Miss Botting saw the object move slowly out of sight to the West.

Horsham police have logged the call as being received at 9.35 p.m. Since the estimate of duration of the sighting by the witnesses was 15 minutes, this tallies well. Horsham police had also received a call from a Mrs. Quinton who reported what they took to be the same object. They dispatched PC Page to investigate, and he too saw the triangular light moving westwards. By the time he reached the spot where it first seemed to have been hovering, it had moved out of sight. Horsham is on a line between Billingshurst and Gatwick.



## More unusual "flying Objects" over Pound Hill

Perhaps the most interesting sighting occurred on the morning of Thursday, August 17, 1978. Miss M, a 29 year-old airport receptionist from Burgess Hill, was travelling, with a workmate who is similarly employed, towards Gatwick Airport to start their shift. It was 5.15 a.m. on a cool, dry morning with scattered cloud. It was still dark.

To the south of Crawley they joined the M23 motorway which links the 7 miles to the airport. Almost immediately on joining M-way they noticed to the North East, at an elevation of about 30°, two very clear letters in the sky. These were a clearly outlined 'O' and a 'V'. The 'O' had only a small centre hole. They were coloured white, and were the brightness of car headlights. Each object seemed to be about the size of a golf ball at arm's length. The objects appeared to be over the Pound Hill area, scene of the initial Gatwick encounter.

Partly because they were on a motorway, where

stopping is illegal, and partly because they were late for work, they drove on. They do not recall seeing any other traffic on the motorway. When they passed through Tilgate Forest the objects were temporarily obscured, but they were seen again, still in the same position, as the women turned off the motorway, westwards towards the airport.

There was a wind of 5 knots from bearing 260° and one-eighth cloud at 1000 feet. At no time did they see the objects pass in front of, or behind cloud. They were in view, off and on, for seven minutes.

While the two women do not realise it, and it may of course be pure coincidence, the letters O V make an intriguing and unusual formation. It is, of course, the first two letters of O V N I – the term used in many languages for U.F.O. The initials O V stand for "Objets Volantes" – or Flying Objects.

These were not the only sightings in the flap. Many odd lights were reported. Something quite unusual was going on in the vicinity of Gatwick Airport during those two weeks in August.

# TWO ENTITY REPORTS FROM ITALY

## *Verga Maurizio*

THE first encounter involved a farmer who wishes to remain anonymous. He resides in the country around Veghenza (Ferrara) in Northern Italy. The incident took place about 1.00 p.m. on the afternoon of August 14, 1951.

The farmer saw an object come down to the ground and land in some open ground adjacent to the town's cemetery. As it was coming down it looked rather like the planet Saturn, but tentatively he approached to within 150 feet of the object and obtained a clear view of it on the ground.

It was about 20 feet in diameter and it had the colour of a white, aluminium-like metal. It looked like a double saucer placed rim to rim, with a big dome on top. On this dome there were large "ailerons." The centre of these seemed to remain fixed while the outer surfaces rotated, but this was only noted when the object took off.

The farmer says the craft sat on telescopic supports, and had a set of stairs at each side that came down from the middle of the object to the ground. A row of portholes was visible on the side, seemingly set in a ring around the rim. These were dull blue.

While standing transfixed and staring stupefied at this sight the farmer was approached by six strange beings. They seemed to be looking around at the cemetery with great curiosity and, when they saw him, they came towards him laughing. Five were clean shaven but one had a short red beard. He made a gesture towards the farmer with his hand, which was interpreted as a greeting. They seemed to com-

About this report, Jenny Randles writes:

"I am indebted to Signor Maurizio for supplying us with details of these two fascinating cases – one recent, one from the distant past. Sig. Maurizio is an investigator for the Italian UFO Centre 'Centro Ufologico Nazionale' and was helped in the 1951 case by investigator, Sig. Z. Fabrizie. The investigation notes were kindly supplied in English and although there are a few phrases that are not quite clear I believe I have pieced them together in the manner in which they were intended."  
– EDITOR

municate with one another by a system of similar hand signs.

The beings were about four feet tall, or just under, and were dressed in one piece shiny overalls of a white colour. They wore white ankle boots which rose up to the knees. On the back they carried several cylinders or "oxygen bottles" that were strapped on, and attached by tubes under the chin. Around the hips were belts about 8 inches in diameter. These had various "lenses" of differing colours slipped into them.

The faces of the beings were a whitish colour and looked rather like those of monkeys. The eyes were round, and coloured azure blue. The arms appeared to be longer than those of a human, stretching down to below the knees.

Each being was carrying a "weapon" that looked something like a "tommy-gun." They had round magazines and, at one point, one was raised and pointed at the witness. There was a flash which was