

GIGANTIC UFO OVER REFINERY

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A report for UFOIN and *Flying Saucer Review*

MOST readers will have seen the feature film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* by the time they read this article. No doubt, like us, they thrilled to the spectacle of the gigantic "mothership" gliding silently over the mountains while the awestruck witnesses looked on. Whilst Stephen Spielberg's epic film was true to life in many of its insights into the UFO phenomenon, this seemed to be one where it had missed out. Who has ever reported an object that size before?

The UFO phenomenon seems to have several basic ground rules. Whatever it is, and whoever is controlling it (and that could include us) it seems to play a game of cat and mouse with us. You chase the answer, think you have found it, and then realise that it has run away from you again. In a similar vein the phenomenon seems to tantalise us. It appears to play little jokes, or provide infuriating and ridiculous little asides, maybe to distract us from reaching the truth. Whatever that truth, it is quite in keeping with the phenomenon, as we know it, to present us with a sighting such as the one described below, seemingly comprehending the reaction it would provoke.

Partington is a Manchester overspill area, about ten miles from the city itself. It is in the district of Trafford and is most famed for the nearby Carrington Oil Refinery, which is operated by the Shell Company, and which is the biggest of its kind in the country. This vast complex dominates the mostly flat landscape on one bank of the Manchester Ship Canal, opposite to Irlam (the scene of the solid light encounter from July 1977 described by Ron Sargeant in *FSR* Vol 23, No. 5). The immediate area also contains a power station and a large number of electricity grid supply lines.

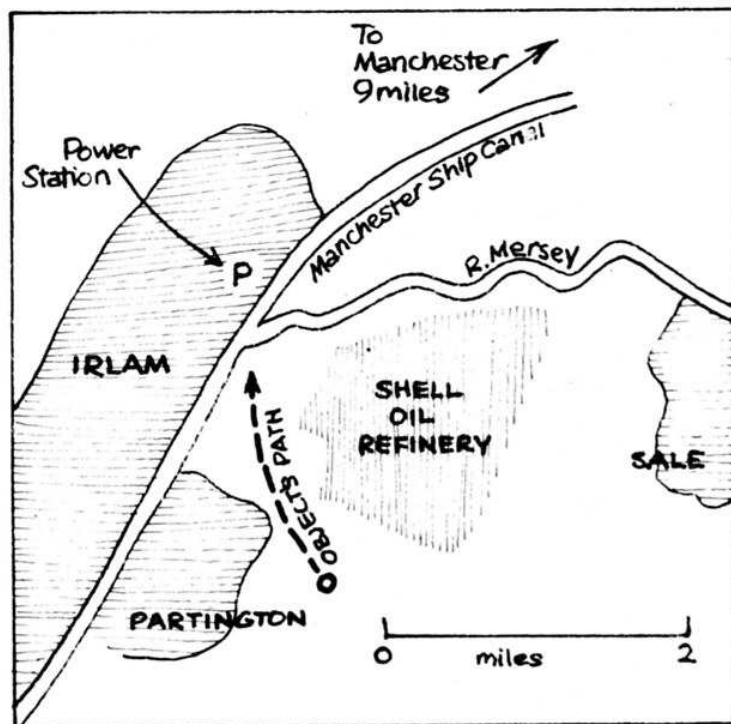
Being on the fringes of rural Cheshire, the area is not highly urbanised and is regarded as a not unpleasant residential spot.

This was the scene on the evening of Monday, November 14, 1977, which was cool with just a slight breeze and a clear sky. At about 5.45 p.m. four people got off a bus bringing them home from work nearer the city. These were June, a 32-year-old office worker, a female neighbour aged in her forties, and two male acquaintances whom she knows because they travel regularly by the same bus.

Darkness had fallen as they began their walk home from the bus stop. When reaching the end of Conifer Walk they all noticed some strange lights in the sky, and automatically assumed that they were connected with the Shell plant. Talk centred on these for a moment, as they realised that the light must have been put up very recently, until one of the men pointed out that these lights were in the SSE, whereas the Shell plant was further north. It was then, as

they began to walk towards them, and as they came visibly closer, that the four people realised they were witnessing something very near, very low and very peculiar.

The lights had been in view for up to two minutes at this point and are described in detail by the witnesses: "Like floodlights at a sports game... sort of panelled in appearance like two TV screens with a slight gap between them... there was no glare or dazzle and no beam coming from them... although they were very bright."



The two lights remained in one position and were very large indeed. The witnesses, although using different methods of gauging the size, all say that a half page of a tabloid newspaper at arms length would have been necessary to cover them. They estimated them to be no more than 100 ft. in the air (another reason they had connected them with Shell) and within half a mile across open fields.

It was at this point that they realised that they began to think about UFOs, and they began to speculate excitedly about what this object was doing in the area. There was little fear at this point. However, when the lights suddenly went out the tension increased a little. Most of them feel that this was caused by the object bearing the lights turning sideways on, thus hiding the beams which were on the adjacent side. One of the men, however, is sure that the lights were in fact turned off. Whatever the cause,

at the position where the lights had been a strange dark shape appeared, and this shape began to move in their direction.

Understandably their fear was intense at this, but they were rooted to the spot – whether due to “paralysis,” or simply to fascination, they do not know. In addition the area suddenly became very quiet. Although there had been little noise around them this utter silence was noticeable and added to the tension of the situation.

The huge object continued to glide silently towards them. It moved so slowly that they were able to obtain an excellent view. Their descriptions of it can, therefore, be regarded as quite precise:-

“It was like a huge dark oblong... It was dark grey, a kind of blackish metal covering... I cannot be sure of what the front end was like but I think it was a cone and on this was a huge pulsating red light. The light itself was the apparent size of the full moon. This pulsed at a slow rate – about once every three seconds... most of the time the light was off. It came on suddenly, grew bright, quickly faded and then came on about three seconds later... The size of the thing was amazing... it seemed to take so long to pass over... it seemed ages before we saw the back of it...”

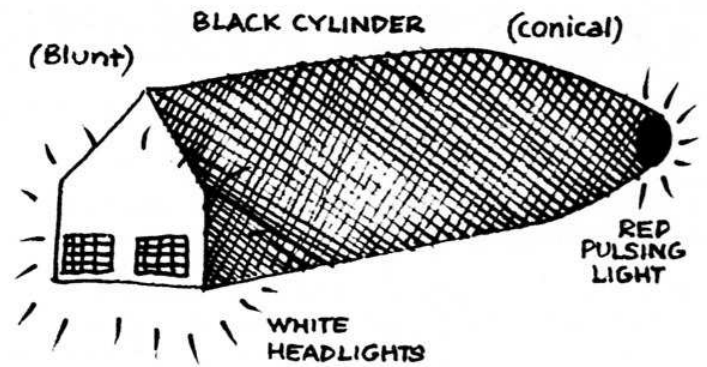
As for a realistic estimate of the size, this has proven very difficult because of the total impossibility that the object presented to the witnesses. They talk consistently in terms of a size at arms length of approximately four feet, that is two opened tabloid newspapers at arms length! Since they feel that the object passed by within a hundred feet or so, and at a similar height, we are talking about something in the region of half a mile in length!

One can imagine the feelings of the observers as this monstrous thing passed by. One of the men said “It was like a huge floating restaurant.” Yet the biggest surprise of all was the total lack of sound. Had it been an aircraft, one witness commented, the noise would have been deafening.

In addition to all this was the strange and alarming way the background noises had subsided into nothingness, and the “paralysis” was locking them to the spot.

After what seemed an eternity, but was estimated afterwards as being perhaps another two minutes, the object had passed over on its course heading northwards towards the canal (and Irlam) maintaining its speed and height. At this point the tension broke, and although the object was still in view, for one of the women enough was enough, and she hurried home in a state of fear. She says that while the object had been overhead she had acute sense of being watched by something very strange.

June, the lady who fled the scene, arrived home and blurted out the story to her mother and a friend who were in the house. She was obviously highly distressed so when she had calmed down somewhat, they decided to call the police. A Sergeant Butts and another officer arrived about 7.0 p.m. and at first seemed sceptical, but after they had checked out the story their attitude altered somewhat.



Sergeant Butts was in fact very helpful, despite the fact that our inquiries with him took place more than six months after the incident. He told us he remembered the case. In fact it had interested him considerably because he was unable to explain it. “The lady who reported it to us,” he said, “seemed genuine. Her fear was quite apparent that night. I have no reason at all to disbelieve her, and she was very certain that she wanted no publicity. What made me even more certain of what she told us was when, next day at the office, I heard a story circulating that two officers on duty in Sale (just two or three miles from Partington – JR) had seen the same thing. They had drawn it and it looked just like the sketches the others had drawn. The police officers apparently said it looked as if it was landing on Washway Road but when they got to the spot there was no sign of it, and no marks on the road surface, although from the size of it, they expected great imprints...”

This story had come second hand to Sergeant Butts, although he tried to verify it, this proved impossible. He was not surprised at this as reports of any seriousness are passed on to the Ministry of Defence – via his superiors – who conduct a full investigation after the reports are out of his hands. Asked if reports “of any seriousness” are received frequently he said, “oh, yes, quite often.”

In an attempt to discover more about the object he had contacted Manchester Airport within two hours of the sighting. They were adamant that no aircraft of any kind were in the vicinity at the time, and that nothing was on their radar screens (although the oil refinery is reflected clearly. They could offer no explanation for what had been reported.

With total enquiries at a dead end the report was “passed upwards,” and Sergeant Butts heard no more. Indeed, at one time he wondered if we might have been involved in an official inquiry into the incident.

Since the time of the first report a number of others were received by the police. These were invariably of white and red lights, but with no specific shape, and all of them were in the vicinity of the plant. Sergeant Butts told us that the thing was regarded as a “phantom helicopter” because it seemed to hover, brightly lit and low down, near the plant. Police had suspected at one time that the plant operated a helicopter illegally but no justification for such suspicions had been found. He admitted this was an attempt rationally to explain the thing away.

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