

ESSEX REVISITED

by Alan Watts, B.Sc., F.R.Met.S.

ONE of the significant features of UFO phenomena is the fact that they never seem to repeat.

A sighting occurs over a certain locality and there is no prospect of predicting that another will appear over the same locality. Even if there is another it is usually so different from the previous one that there seems to be no correlation between them. This unrepeatability is one of the most potent weapons of destruction for those who wish to damn the whole subject. On the other hand it is excellent evidence for those who by logical deduction are certain that the genuine UFO is an extra-terrestrial space-craft of some kind. Given the whole of Earth to approach in three dimensions, day and night, clouded and part-clouded with the urbanisation of life making more and more people look down rather than up, the UFO is bound to appear as a random phenomenon.

Occasionally a ufocus such as that near Warminster does provide at least a greater chance of seeing a UFO, but when an isolated but very well documented incident occurs in one spot and then almost exactly five years later to the day another well observed and reported incident occurs over the very same spot, then this is something almost unique.

So first let me describe the second of these events, that of the morning of Friday, July 1, 1966. The first I knew of anything odd was when I was rung up at about 08.20 (all times B.S.T.) by the College keeper of the Technical College at Colchester where I lecture in physics. "Had I seen the shining object over the Hilly Fields?" The Hilly Fields are an open space to the west of the College building and given over to cattle, broom and birds. The object had been there for fully an hour, he said, and had not moved as far as they could tell. They were all watching it down there.

It did not take long to locate the object high in the

western sky. It was bright and silver and shone. There seemed to be at one time an orange glow on the top part. It looked as if it were slowly revolving. By naked eye it looked at times like two objects one above the other but closely coupled. The upper one gave the impression of roundness while the lower part seemed fuzzy. My thoughts turned to one of the cosmic-ray research balloons that are sometimes flown from Cardington (Beds) by Bristol University and Imperial College. It had that sort of look and the fact that I thought so and then changed my mind is significant.

Anyway, having been caught before, I got a parallel rule and began to make chinagraph marks on my west-facing upper window pane and to write times under them. From these I was able to confirm a very slow drift of the object to the right, i.e. with north-going components. At about 08.45 it disappeared—the College observers lost it at the same time or nearly so.

With my own line of sight carefully measured and by independent measurement from witnesses at the College we were able to get two lines of sight and their elevations. The line joining my own home in Elmstead Market to the object passed almost exactly through the College. Hence we had a baseline of 4.7 miles between home and College and two elevations. It was simple to calculate that the object was most probably 15-17 miles away on a bearing of 280 degrees True, and 8-9 miles aloft, i.e. at about 40,000-45,000ft. up. (Fig. 1).

When I plotted these observations on the map I was astonished. The object had stood so high in the sky that I hadn't thought of it being in the same area as the one we had seen at 21.30 on the evening of June 30, 1961—but it was.* The sketch map shows the most probable positions on the two occasions which were separated by five years and just 11 hours.

Could it have been a balloon, however? There was

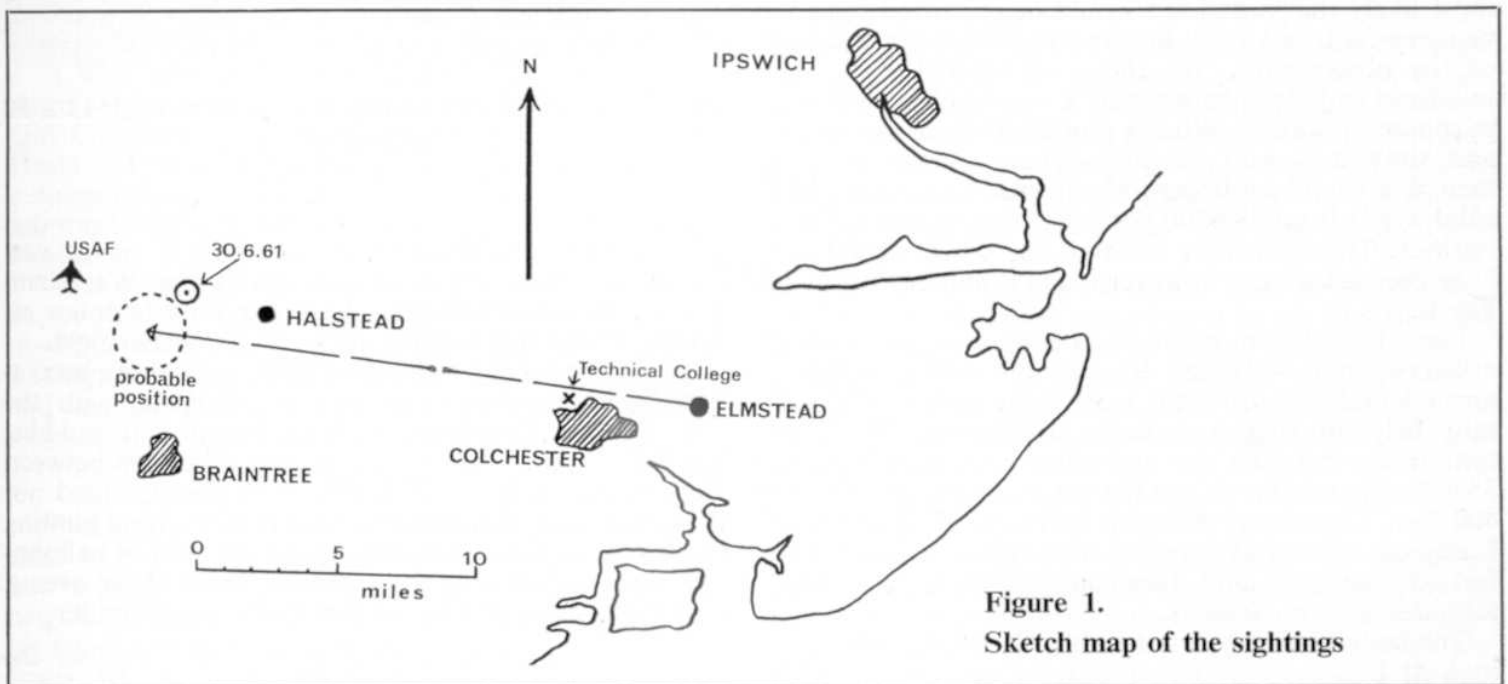


Figure 1.
Sketch map of the sightings

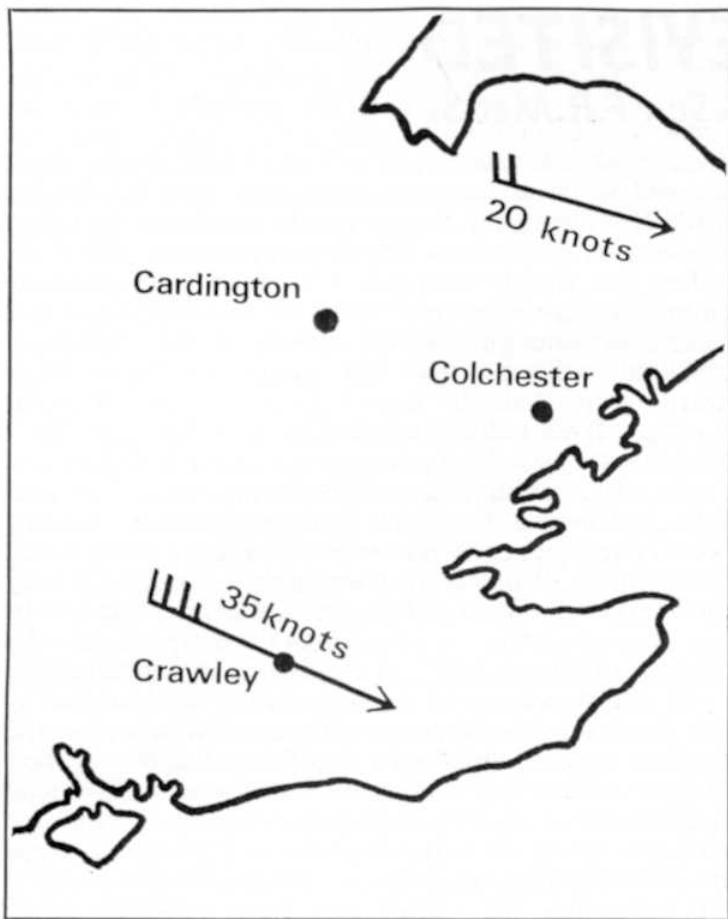


Fig. 2. Guide to area and wind directions

an easy way to check. The upper winds at the most probable altitude at Hemsby and Crawley (Fig. 2) both gave between 20 and 35 knots from 280-300 degrees and made it pretty certain that the wind at the object was from around 290 degrees 25 knots. Should the object have been 10,000 feet higher then the winds would have been lighter by some 10 knots. So it was most likely that a balloon would have drifted towards us some 30 to 40 miles during the total hour and half of the observation. Yet those who watched it with buildings to judge against said it was to all intents and purposes stationary. When I plotted its later movement and showed it had northward components of drift then this would be impossible against observations of solid winds from 280-300 degrees made by two reliable stations. This convinces me that the object could not have been a balloon, however much it may have looked like it.

Next I made an estimate of size. I independently asked several witnesses to estimate on a ruler at arm's length the apparent size of the object. They all said between two and three millimetres. With 60 centimetres between eye and ruler and scaling up to 15 miles distant this gives a diameter of between 250 and 400 feet. Cosmic-ray research balloons of upwards of 1 million cubic feet capacity will inflate to 100 or so feet in diameter, and then only when at operating altitudes above 50,000ft.

The balloon theory is untenable, therefore, so we can look at Fig. 3 which is a sketch by an observer with

12 x 50 binoculars. It looks like a balloon but it couldn't be. In any case when I phoned to check I found that Cardington had not flown a balloon at that time.

Then there was the certain observation of two of the night staff of the Technical College who said that while they watched, a star-like object, much smaller than the stationary one, left the latter and shot off at high speed in a south-easterly direction. They were quite certain of this.

So what was this thing? Whatever it was it maintained its position in space for a long time except for a certain drifting about against winds which would certainly have swept a balloon much nearer the observers if not actually past them.

My own hunch is that this was another of the vast carrier craft which drop into our atmosphere from time to time to despatch scout saucers on unknown missions, one of which *was* observed. The fact that it so resembled a sky-hook balloon may be chance or design and makes the re-assessment of other presumed balloon observa-

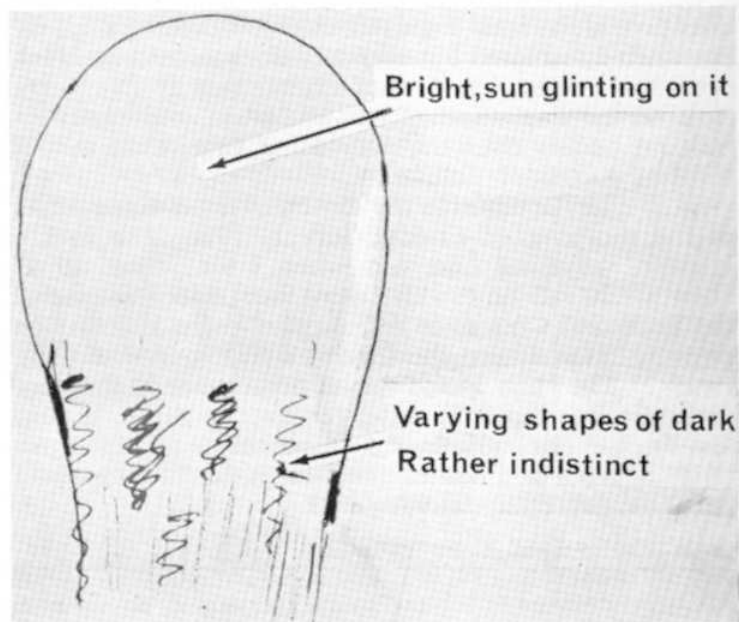


Fig. 3. Rough sketch of object as seen through 12 x 50 binoculars

tions worth consideration. In any case it was a vast object and was observed also from the Wattisham R.A.F. Base. Knowing the U.S. Air Force's policy on UFOs, I did not trouble to contact Wethersfield.

To me the most significant feature of this observation is its position and timing compared with the 1961 sighting. Coincidence? Well, I suppose it could be, but if I'm still in this locality at that time then between June 30 and July 2, 1971, I shall be disappointed not to see another unidentified flying object sitting glinting in the mid-summer sun, defying all the laws of ballooning, and maintaining its position once again over a seemingly favourite bit of the Essex countryside.

* FLYING SAUCER REVIEW, September/October 1961, p.28. See also LUFORO BULLETIN, January/February 1962, p.13.