

MAGAZINE OF THE CENTRE FOR CROP CIRCLE STUDIES (Sussex Branch)

S U S S E X
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C I R C U L A R

33



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"I do not claim or pretend to understand the world.
The sun comes up. The sun goes down. That is all
that appears certain"

SCOTT FROST

It's kind of an unwritten rule that SC doesn't give coverage to hoaxing unless absolutely necessary. So this month we've chosen to make an exception with Marcus Allen's excellent investigation into the possible minds and motivations behind the apparently co-ordinated debunking campaign that has thrown hoaxing into the limelight as the most likely explanation for the phenomenon in the public's mind. The inclusion of this article is not intended to re-inforce any idea that hoaxing is widespread but rather to demonstrate how a small but select group promotes the concept of hoaxing and why. Whatever your views, this is essential reading, which I suspect will get a wide airing in the near future - but remember, you read it here first. Another SC scoop!

Talking of hoaxing, which of course we never do, a huge petalled flower formation appeared at Froxfield this year, bearing a resemblance to... yes! - the Bythorn Mandala. And of course, one Julian Richardson (who claims Bythorn) has now laid claim to this... The proof? A rough pencil sketch of it on a piece of paper. Obviously a hoax then. Incidentally, Adrian Dexter says it was Julian who made the naff flower for Arthur C Clarke's Mysterious World, not him (as we rumoured last issue) - another formation Adrian hasn't made!

Viewers of the maligned-by-biased-Trekkies-but-quiete-good-actually science fiction series 'Babylon 5' currently showing on Channel 4 will have been amused by the recent episode 'Grail' in which a brief scene at the beginning saw a 'Grey' alien on trial for the abduction of someone's great, great, great, great grandfather 200 years before. When asked if it had anything to say, the Grey held up a picture of the 1990 Longwood Gallops 'Gaia' pictogram! Square-eyed readers by the way, should not miss the new series 'The X Files' now running on Monday nights on BBC 2 (although some will have already caught it on satellite TV) which concerns two FBI agents investigating paranormal mysteries and uncovering government conspiracies attempting to hide the existence of UFOs, abductions, ghosts and all the rest of it. Unusually, it steers away from a debunking tone and clearly the writers would have us believe they are trying to portray more than just fiction... The first episodes have been excellent and I recommend it. Meanwhile, in the world of films, the much talked about movie 'Roswell' (NOT directed by Spielberg as everyone seems to think) based on the alleged UFO crash in 1947 has now been released in the US to a fairly good reception. The Barge pub at Alton Barnes even got hold of a copy, set up a video and showed it a few weeks ago to a packed bar. Reviews of Roswell and The X Files in future issues. However, instead of the effect some hoped the film would have on the US releasing the truth about the Roswell crash, the authorities have recently put out a press release stating that yes, there was indeed a cover-up, and yes, it's time to come clean and that what was really found was not a weather balloon (as claimed for years) but a... US spying device. Ah, not quite what people were hoping to hear... even if it really is the truth! Put back the date of that party to celebrate the 'big announcement' that's been rumoured for at least 3000 years...

All being well, next month's SC will be the last before its new look inner pages, and the November issue we hope will be almost entirely devoted to finally fanfaring the results of our 1994 crop circle survey...

ANDY THOMAS

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REF: SUSSEX 1994/05

Location: Sampting, West Sussex

Crop: Wheat

Formed: 14/7/94?

Spotted by Andy Thomas, 16/7/94

Description: Kebab II

Crop laid anticlockwise, paths south to north, lower arc west to east.

Diameters: North satellite 17.1ft - 24.10, top circle 13.8ft - 15.5, path 2.1ft x 13.0, second circle 13.10ft - 16.4, path 2.2ft x 9.5, third circle 20.5ft - 14.5, curved path 3.10ft x 7.10, straight path 3.10ft x 3.7, path inside ring 3.10ft x 6.2, straight path 3.9ft x 4.5, bottom circle 30.8ft - 31.7, standing crop 3.0ft, arc 30.8ft x 1.0. Later additions unknown.

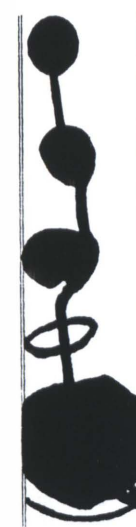


Fig.1

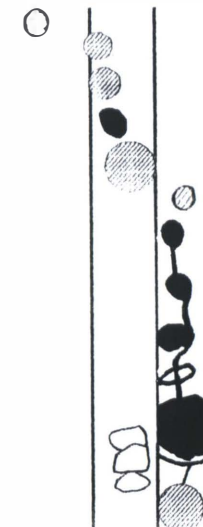
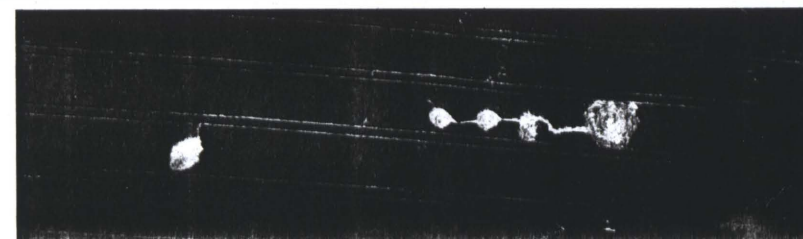


Fig.2

Surveyed by: Barry Reynolds, Andy Thomas & Martin Noakes

(North satellite not shown in fig.1. Light areas show later additions.)

DETAILS: The total length of this pictogram was 130.2ft, laid approximately east/west. Dubbed 'Kebab II' because of its resemblance to last year's Kebab/Mexican Cyclist formation, this was in the field above its predecessor, the same field as Sussex 94/02 which was a few hundred yards away. Although aerial photographs reveal this formation to be a rather messy shape, some of the centre swirls and crop lay, particularly in the upper egg-shaped circles, were excellent and there were numerous horizontal bent nodes in evidence, some stalks bending on more than node as they swept around corners. In the north satellite a small area of crop was found where the wheat was covered in a type of grey 'dust' rather like silver aerosol spray paint and red dots similar to nail varnish. Both the grey and red markings were only visible on top of the crop, not underneath. Some of the droplets of grey were very small indeed and no conclusion has been reached as to what this was. While surveying the formation, we were confronted by a gentleman purporting to be an unofficial 'bailiff' of the field, which his house backs onto close to the formation. It turns out this was the same mysterious 'farmer' who threw Lucy Pringle out of last year's Kebab, not realising they had permission to be there! (Thus clearing up an unsolved enigma as to who this strange person could have been, as recounted in SC 21, although the mystery 'soldier' remains unexplained - the probability is he was nothing more than a poacher.) At an unspecified date towards the end of July, the formation mutated, again echoing its ancestor, into the configuration shown in fig.2. A large circle appeared at the bottom of the main formation and another four circles appeared around the north satellite. A strange 'grid' also arrived alongside. Unfortunately, the field was harvested before the additions could be surveyed. Some have speculated that this formation might represent part of the string of comet fragments crashing into Jupiter (this has also been suggested of the 'scorpion' designs this year). The formation dowsed well. Photo by MICHAEL HUBBARD.



Location: Sompting, West Sussex

Crop: Wheat

Formed: Around 29/7/94

Spotted by: Jason Porthouse & Andy Thomas, 31/7/94

Description: Three circles

Crop laid anticlockwise.

Diameters: Large circle 90.4ft - 90.3, middle 28.10ft - 27.1, small 14.1ft - 14.7, distance from large to middle circle 10.1ft, distance from middle to small 9.0ft.

Surveyed by: Barry & Linda Reynolds, Martin & Sloane Noakes and Andy Thomas.

DETAILS: The centre of all three circles lined up exactly magnetic north/south. The formation was placed at virtually the very same spot as the Sompting 1992 Captain Scarlet formation, in the field close to St Mary's, the old Knights Templar church which dates back to medieval times. The crop itself was very scrappy across the whole field, with a high proportion of weeds present, giving the formation an untidy look although the actual shape and size of the circles were worked out very accurately as an article in the next issue will show - several exciting mathematical qualities are present in the design. The formation was visible from the A27 with a bit of neck-craning. The configuration of the three circles appears to be a small instalment in this year's fashion of large circles with tails of increasingly smaller ones trailing below them, used most notably in the 'scorpion' formations earlier in the year. It's interesting that the amount of circles used as tails seem to diminish as the formations move out from Wiltshire - compare the Bishops Cannings scorpion (photo last issue) with the East Dean half moon Sussex formation and this one and you'll see what we mean!

* Surveys of Sussex 1994 formations 6 - 9 appear in the previous issue of SC.

REF: SUSSEX 1994/11

Location: Camp Hill, Amberley, West Sussex

Crop: Unknown

Formed: ?

Spotted by: A friend of Terry Harrison

Description: Two circles

Diameters: Unknown

Not surveyed

DETAILS: Virtually nothing is known of this formation beyond the fact it was there at some point in the summer. The report came to us long after harvest and the field had been ploughed. Like the other three formations in this area (the East Dean and South Harting formations) this was very close to the South Downs Way footpath.

By MARCUS ALLEN

An international organisation exists which appears to be solely concerned with debunking and ridiculing the work of others. This organisation is CSICOP - the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal. It was formed in 1976 by Professor Paul Kurtz as a breakaway group from the American Humanist Association. Paul Kurtz, born in 1925, is now retired as a philosophy lecturer at New York University. Politically, he is a Social Democrat, part of the American Non-Communist Left through which the CIA channelled funding from large American foundations such as Ford and Rockefeller, to promote liberalism in Europe during the Cold War.

Kurtz was concerned about the revival of Astrology in the US, and circulated a letter to leading scientists and academics collecting 186 signatures, including those of 18 Nobel Prize winners, to a manifesto called 'Objections to Astrology', the publication of which brought about the formation of CSICOP. Soon afterwards, Kurtz held a press conference in New York to announce "a campaign to purge the media of occultist leanings" and to ensure "no TV programme dealing with parasceience would go out unvetted by the appropriate authorities", ie. CSICOP. Among its first members were science fiction writer Isaac Asimov, magician and showman James Randi, and astronomer and writer Professor Carl Sagan.

CSICOP began a journal called 'The Zetetic' which was replaced in 1978 by 'The Skeptical Inquirer'. It is illuminating to note from the definitions of Zetetic and Skeptic how CSICOP was also changing: Zetetic; adj - having to do with enquiry or investigation. Skeptic; n - a member or adherent of an ancient Greek school of philosophy that maintained that real knowledge of things is impossible. Quite what prominent scientists were doing lending their names to an organisation whose journal denied the results to which their lives had been dedicated is a matter for them and their reputations. Perhaps other pressures were being applied beyond their control or understanding.

From the start, the Skeptical Inquirer's style was jokey and cynical, and was the hallmark of many articles which it published. CSICOP's own studies did not follow accepted scientific procedure and results not matching their preconceived views were simply changed, causing extreme damage to serious scientists, spiritualists and healers, both professionally and personally. Most notable of these were the astrological links to the 'Mars Effect' on athletes (where their performance appeared to be affected by the position of the planet Mars). When CSICOP carried out their own studies which confirmed Gauquelin's results that there was a real effect, the information was suppressed. Also, the hounding of Professor Jacques Benveniste, following his research into the 'memory of water' and its apparent validation of homeopathic practice, was directly linked to CSICOP. Since October 1981, CSICOP have had an official policy of not conducting any scientific experiments. This appears to be diametrically opposed to their stated objectives and organisation title.

The structure of CSICOP came to resemble organisations set up during the Cold War by the US foundations and the CIA to mask their activities: just a few people to handle admin, while the use of PR gave the appearance of something much larger, including the ability to place articles in media all over the world. An extensive list of advisers and associates such as philosophers, scientists, writers and magicians numbering well over 100 as committed participants of CSICOP, raised the public profile and plausibility of the organisation. The activities of CSICOP were promoted by scientists close to the US government, who pushed it as a scientific policing organisation. Magazines such as 'Science' and 'Scientific American' published articles on its behalf. However, other scientists observed CSICOP was acquiring an inordinate influence and appeared to be directed by hidden forces. Writing in the 'Times Higher Education Supplement', Harry Collins said science did not need "a scientific vigilante organisation" apparently unaccountable to anyone.

In 1986, James Randi, one of the most prominent members of CSICOP, received a five year grant of \$272,000 from the MacArthur Foundation to assist with his hoaxes and attacks on all matters spiritual, psychic and holistically medical. Uri Geller has recently won a long and costly court case against Randi, who had accused Geller of fraud. Randi then had to resign from CSICOP in order that Geller would not sue it also. As early as 1978, the New Age was being attacked and ridiculed, "especially those attracted to cults and others who grouped around Glastonbury and other supposedly sacred sites". Alternative lifestyles would >>

increasingly attract vitriolic levels of attack as their influence was perceived to grow. A British branch of CSICOP was launched in 1987 and is represented by the small circulation magazine 'The Skeptic'.

On both sides of the Atlantic, CSICOP carried out a sustained campaign against alternative medicine. There are close ties with the National Council Against Health Fraud with continual debunking and ridiculing of any therapies which do not meet its approval, specifically to do with cancer and AIDS. It is notable that approval is inevitably given to treatments deriving from the products of multinational drug companies: Wellcome, Hoffman LaRoche, Eli Lilly etc, all of whom are not only linked to the US foundations through hospitals and research institutes, but also to the government in the guise of the FDA (Federal Drug Administration), who approve the use of new drugs for sale, so implying their safety. It is also legitimate to question why senior members of the US government, politicians, the military, industry, bankers, the foundations, religion, universities and the media meet clandestinely in the USA under the auspices of an organisation founded in 1973 by David Rockefeller, the Trilateral Commission, and how their decisions are then implemented - if not through their own organisations, then their offshoots and associated companies.

Despite there being no mention of crop circles as a subject worthy of inclusion in the pantheon of the paranormal, which by now covered UFOs, abductions, ghosts, faith healing, moving statues, weeping statues, metal bending and mediums, the UK Skeptics corrected this oversight with an article by Dr David Fisher in the British and Irish Skeptic (March/April 1990), reviewing the available crop circle literature to date. His conclusion was that "there was no reason why every one of the hundreds of recorded crop circles could not have been made by tricksters" using a "giant comb-like farm implement". Dr Fisher had not found that his researches required him to visit any crop circle prior to his article appearing. This was published four months before the first issue of either The Cerealogist or The Circular. The same Dr Fisher also had a letter printed in The Guardian (11 July 1990) challenging cerealogists to distinguish between a 'genuine' crop circle and a hoax.

This overly dramatic gauntlet throwing act was in response to both the recently published 'plasma vortex' theories of Dr Terence Meaden and the unexpected success of Circular Evidence by Colin Andrews and Pat Delgado. No-one had denied that some circles were being 'hoaxed', or created deliberately to be passed off as unexplained. However, as nobody then had any idea what might constitute a 'scientific' method of investigation, this just had to be developed as investigators went along and the work being undertaken by Professor W C Levensgood and Michael Chorost of Project Argus was a sincere attempt to apply the scientific method as far as possible. The UK Skeptics and their parent organisation CSICOP had cleverly killed two birds with one swipe - the onus was passed to inexperienced but enthusiastic investigators to prove their case, and the 'hoax' explanation was promoted whenever possible. That a so-called science-based group of academics and researchers should immediately dismiss the crop circle phenomenon with contempt and ridicule is not just hypocritical, it also exposed some of the hidden agenda underlying their activities:

- 1) Demand scientific methodology is used and then ridicule any results presented as 'biased' or 'pseudoscientific'.
- 2) Belittle any scientist or academic appearing to move away from orthodoxy.
- 3) Demand peer review of any paper presented for publication (by definition, this is very hard to achieve in totally new areas of research).
- 4) Do not offer assistance of any kind.
- 5) Heavily and widely publicise that 'hoaxing' and 'fraud' are the only explanations for what is reported.
- 6) Do not engage in discussion. The organisation's associates should be called upon to provide the 'expert' viewpoint. The use of academic titles such as Doctor, Professor and Nobel Prize Winner adds 'credibility'.
- 7) Adopt a caring and protective attitude as the guardians of 'ordinary' people who could be 'duped' by unscrupulous 'tricksters' trying to make money out of them.
- 8) Encourage individuals who are seen to be sowing seeds of mistrust and confusion in target groups.
- 9) Counter any attacks against the organisation as soon as practicable.

The British government, by 1990, was aware of the mounting public interest in crop circles. There were even reports that members of the Royal Family were taking an active interest in the phenomenon. High level meetings between the Ministries of Defence, Environment and Agriculture, Fisheries and Food took place and having agreed that the cause was as yet unknown, ordered the fields of Wiltshire to be closely monitored by the army, who were already present in large numbers at their bases around the county. Since then, they have appeared to follow these instructions assiduously, given the number of sightings of military helicopters flying low over crop circles. >>

By early 1991, a long article by a Peter Williams in The Cerealogist No.3 discussed hoaxing in detail. Prominently promoted was "Dr David Fisher's excellent article in The Skeptic" - and this from someone who also admitted he had never set foot in a crop circle. While declaring his open mind, he called for "proper testing of hoaxing methods" so it could "be seen as the most credible solution". The words colour, nailed and mast seem appropriate here. By the summer of 1991, a TV programme, 'The Strange Case of the Crop Circles' transmitted under the Channel 4 'Equinox' banner had been made by Juniper Productions. This contained a long sequence involving the Wessex Skeptics, Dr Robin Allen and Dr Martin Hempstead, physicists from the University of Southampton, who were depicted in Fortean Times No.63 as "an anti-paranormal group", deliberately hoaxing to catch out serious circle researchers. They had paid Wiltshire farmer Martin Pitt £100 to allow part of his field to be flattened. A garden roller and some planks sufficed to crush the crop into a small circle which was then used to lure Dr Meaden and Busty Taylor into inadvisable pronouncements of authenticity. These were then relentlessly exploited by the programme makers to give the impression that solutions had been found for all crop circles.

Doug and Dave were also on the bandwagon with their "capers in the corn". Another mystery had been solved by the fearless investigators of 'MBF Services', who in truth had cynically set up Pat Delgado with a deliberately planned deception. (Interesting to note that D & D were also based in Southampton - Ed.)

The Wessex Skeptics, without the protection of a TV crew, found circle faking rather more difficult on their own. They were caught red-handed at Cheesefoot Head by crop watchers in 1991. Not having previously obtained the farmer's permission and having been caught, they subsequently decided to send an anonymous donation to the farmer. The Wessex Skeptics were desperate to show all circles to be the products of humans alone, and so to protect their established scientific view that everything can be explained in terms of orthodoxy. By the end of 1991, the Wessex Skeptics needed support. It arrived in the form of a double whammy. First, the hoax promoter and Skeptic publicist Peter Williams, claiming that "there is no feature of any known circle that cannot be produced by hoaxing" - and this after the appearance of the Barbury Castle triangle and the Mandelbrot formation! Secondly, the arrival from the US of Jim Schnabel with bigger plans than the occasional article, and with money to match his full-time commitment to debunking the circles.

The incident of the Schnabel tapes was the giveaway. (A taped conversation between Armen Victorian and Schnabel appeared to reveal Schnabel as a member of a secret organisation which had links with the CIA and the Vatican - Schnabel later claimed he was winding Victorian up as a joke - Ed.) At the Quest Conference at Leeds in 1992, when the tapes were played, Schnabel reportedly appeared shocked to hear his involvement made public. Adopting the time-honoured principle of the best line of defence being attack, he proceeded to do just that. Aiming for George Wingfield in particular, and anyone else who believed what they heard on the tapes, such as "a number of agencies have pooled their resources" and "we believe there is something very sinister about what is going on", Schnabel promptly dismissed everything as a hoax, which only served to confirm his own involvement.

It is a regrettable fact that some intelligent and literate people, amongst whom Schnabel can be numbered, must continually leave hints as to how clever they are. Hints which can usually only be picked up by those 'in the know'. So, for his article in 'Fortean Times' No.69 (June/July 93) as part of their 'Hoax!' series, he names all the main supposed crop circle hoaxing groups with, amongst other details, their "alleged conspiratorial affiliations". Seven groups are listed and four of them have "affiliations" to be expected from the snide style of Schnabel's presentation: 1) Doug and Dave - Today newspaper, MBF Services (MI5) 2) Bill Bailey - none 3) Merlin and Co - Sunday Sport newspaper 4) UBI (United Bureau of Investigation) - CCCS, CPR, CSETI. The other three were altogether different: 5) Spiderman and Catwoman - MI6, CIA, The Vatican, Beckhampton Group 6) Wessex Skeptics - Channel 4 TV, CSICOP 7) The Snake (Jim Schnabel) - MI6, CIA, The Vatican, The Trilateral Commission.

Just how many people have ever heard of CSICOP and the Trilateral Commission, let alone know what they are and what they do? Of course, if you not only know but are actively involved as a field (!) operator, then you might just want to say to the folks back home "Hi! Look what I've done so far!" It could be argued that the inclusion of such an unlikely collection of organisations was only intended as a 'wind-up' and not to be taken literally. However, enough evidence has recently been found to show that links appear to exist between Schnabel and certain religious and intelligence groups. >>

Schnabel completed his two-year assignment amongst the cropfields of England with his book 'Round In Circles - Physicists, Poltergeists, Pranksters and the Secret History of the Cropwatchers'. A tome more noted for its fictitious comments by circle researchers than any insights into the true nature of the phenomenon. He departed these shores to author a book on alien abductions. Before leaving, Schnabel's swan song was to be his public attempt to replicate the 1992 Charm Bracelet/Dharmic Wheel formation, one year on. What he so graphically illustrated was his failure to realise that although anyone can, using simple equipment, flatten crops into any shape or design they wish, the genuine Circlemakers, whoever they are, always add an extra dimension to their creations - one of aesthetics. Something you know when you see it, but cannot easily explain because it touches everyone differently. It has to do with proportion and balance, clarity and accuracy, and the ability to communicate at a level which transcends wonder.

Just how do you convey the grandeur of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, the enigma of the Mona Lisa, the majesty of the Taj Mahal and the colour yellow to a blind man? You cannot do so. Any more than Schnabel and his fellow skeptics can persuade people of vision that a few crop crushers created such formations as the Barbury Castle tetrahedron, the Mandelbrot Set and the Charm Bracelet at Silbury Hill.

As these links between Schnabel and religious and intelligence groups do appear to exist, that links also exist between the Vatican, The Trilateral Commission, CSICOP, CIA, MI5 and MI6 is well known. The Pope receives an official CIA briefing every Friday afternoon. Members of those organisations also belong to the Sovereign and Military Order of Malta, which originated from the time of the Crusades. Now based in Rome, it is the world's smallest nation state. Its senior members are appointed by the Vatican. Opus Dei, a radical lay Catholic organisation and a personal favourite of Pope John Paul II, also has adherents around the world.

It would be reasonable to assume the existence of crop circles is known to members of all these groups. Should a consensus be that crop circles represented some form of adverse influence, then it would be simple to arrange for a few people to be despatched to the fields of Wiltshire to sow seeds of doubt amongst enthusiasts. With the co-operation of the media, the 'hoax' explanation would be offered as the only solution and any adverse influence seen to be negated. That could have been the plan, but from the evidence of 1994, the circles have not co-operated!

MARCUS ALLEN



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It is, as they say, like punk never happened. When flower power finally bit the dust, Glastonbury became caught in a time warp and shunned the march of cultural progress, becoming a mecca for the remaining survivors. But with the sudden re-emergence of peace, love and mysticism in the form of flower power's heir apparent, the New Age, it has again become an important centre for those daring to look beyond materialism, although the plethora of 'spiritual' bookshops and trinket merchants gathered in the High Street seem hell-bent on creating their own form of commercialism. Glastonbury then, seems an appropriate host town for what is rapidly becoming the most important event in the circle enthusiast calendar, the Glastonbury Symposium, created and organised as ever by Roland Parfetter, whose heart and sincerity for the event somehow spills over, imbuing the entire weekend with, dare I say it, good vibes. In the absence of a full-scale CCCS conference and no Cornference for 1994, the Symposium became this year's central focus for the crop circle community - a "tribal" event, as Michael Glickman describes it.

I only made it down for the Saturday, but I'm informed this was a good indication of the other two days. Held in the darkened and stiflingly hot environment of the Assembly Rooms, overlooked by a huge mural of the Bythorn Mandala, a good couple of hundred or so crammed in to listen to the good, the bad and the ugly (but mainly good) of cerealogy and beyond, sharing their research and viewpoints. The Friday sessions, after a talk by Dr Chet Snow, were kicked off in earnest with Professor John Searle, who invented and constructed 'anti-gravity' discs which picked up some attention in the 70's. Although little has been heard since, his work continues and Professor Searle reportedly outlined the developments to a curious but somewhat bemused crowd, some of whom found it hard to get to grips with his concepts without something handy like a degree in astrophysics. No slides or visual aids accompanied the talk, which some found difficult, but such was the Prof's enthusiasm, he spoke for over three hours and practically had to be hooked off, still speaking, in the time-honoured tradition. For those who missed out, the good Prof appeared to be continuing his presentation the next day in the coffee room to any who would listen...

When I arrived, I was amused to see the words 'CCCS Council' stuck directly below the sign to the toilets, with an arrow apparently pointing in the same direction... what can it mean? Interestingly, in the toilets themselves, instead of the usual lurid fantasies scribbled on the walls, I was astonished to see the first existentialist graffiti I've yet encountered, with various musings about the meaning of life daubed on the walls with marker pen... clearly Glastonbury attracts a higher class of lavatory artist. Still, perhaps toilets have more to do with life, the universe and everything than I thought, as my father telephoned me recently to ask a) if we wanted a good-as-new lavatory for our bathroom and b) to say that he'd come up with a new theory for gravity.

Michael Glickman opened the Saturday proceedings to the strains of 'When You Wish Upon a Star' as the Bythorn mural was illuminated. I was rather hoping he was going to make his entrance being lowered from the ceiling on a wire but perhaps this was expecting too much. An entertaining and heartfelt address followed, setting out the Glickman creed on the crop circle phenomenon for those left in any doubt, dismissing the so-called hoaxers and setting up a positive agenda for the day. Michael has had several inventions inspired by the geometry of the crop formations as we were shown. "Wacko" and proud of it, his talk ended with the first ever live demonstration of a captured 'luminosity' in a box (looking suspiciously like a lightbulb)... One member of the audience even brought out his sunglasses for the occasion.

Next, John Sayer explained how the number 23 had recurring significance in his life. The point he was trying to make rather escaped me I'm afraid (though I also spotted the number 23 scrawled in the loos by some wag) but his tale of the (apparently genuine) carpet circles that appeared in his bedroom and of how Pat Delgado once healed him over the telephone (!) were fun. Jim Lyons then did his bit about 'subtle energies' in his usual entertaining fashion, followed by Michael Hesemann, showing a selection of stunning photographs in the best English accent he could muster, but losing marks for keeping my slot waiting 45 minutes as he got carried away showing just about every UFO video in existence. I then babbled about the Birling Gap formations before everyone rushed off for lunch, and had the dubious honour of being the only speaker that day not to overrun the timeslot! >>

Barbara Dee, Firewalk With Me!

Now look, don't get me wrong, I have nothing personal against George Wingfield, really I don't. But when someone gets up, as George did on the Saturday afternoon, and debunks every major crop formation of this year with completely unsubstantiated claims about hoaxing, I think they have come to the wrong place. I couldn't bring myself to make it to the end of this complete tosh and made for the coffee room where I had a much more constructive time. Never have you seen so many people flood into a canteen while a major speaker was on, suffering from a severe overdose of hokum and finding the idea of a cup of tea and a cake far more palatable than what they'd paid to come and hear. The room was heaving. And who can blame them? With no disrespect to Roland, George was the wrong man for this event. His views (which I accept he has a right to) might be fine for a Sceptics' convention but not for what was otherwise a fine celebration of the crop circle phenomenon, which clearly a vast majority of the speakers and the audience believed to be beyond the work of human hands. At the CCCS mini-conference a few weeks later (report next issue), even Rob Irving (supposed hoaxer) disowned the many claims of George as his own fantasies. George is the victim of his own paranoia and a major member of the increasingly tiresome "I know why this is a hoax but I can't share that information with you at the moment" brigade. If information can't be shared with anyone, it's as good as useless. Somewhere down the road, George, along with a few others, took a different turning from the rest of us and became a debunker. Let's start giving space to those with something fresh to contribute for what we, if the Glastonbury crowd are a yardstick, believe to be a genuine phenomenon.

Palden Jenkins, previously of 'Only Planet of Choice' fame, bearing an alarming resemblance to one of the 'Modern Parents' characters in 'Viz', helped redress the balance with a discourse on the deeper significance of the circles, followed by Jon Erik Beckjord with what can only be described as photographs of aliens and strange creatures or leaf patterns forming faces and men in rubber suits depending on how you look at them. Don't ask me to decide. Lucy Pringle then described the various and interesting reports of healing effects from crop circles and her own experiences of the 1994 formations. As the day was running rather late, a proposed open debate was sensibly scrubbed in favour of dinner, as we all streamed out to the various pubs and restaurants which now mark Arthur's final resting place.

The 'Avalonian Free State Choir' (who look like they've been dragged in at random from the streets of Glastonbury and probably have been - but they sound wonderful) kicked off the evening's shenanigans with an exhilarating mixture of classical, modern and ethnic choral pieces, sung entirely without accompaniment, leading into the main speaker of the day, Colin Andrews. With his knack for the dramatic, Colin is a charismatic and compelling speaker and knows the value of letting emotion show its face for effect - and it works; a hushed audience hung on every word. Clearly upset by the negativity shown him by some on his return to England, Colin was critical of the approach to circle research taken by persons who remained unidentified. This lack of identification perhaps tarred many unfairly with the same brush; specifics would have been helpful. Too many researchers "sit behind desks" and he felt "physically sick" at the said negativity, which had already caused Pat Delgado to have "his heart ripped out".

Things brightened as Colin showed a selection of excellent slides showing the events of the summer and praised some for good work, including his friend and colleague Reg Presley (I learned later that this upset some, feeling that this "lout of a rock star" as one put it, didn't deserve praise above others of equal worth). One thing's for sure, Reg has certainly raised the profile of the circles in the public eye. Colin spoke of certain hoax information that had come to light, but was challenged to produce evidence for this by Michael Glickman. Colin said this would be shared "at the appropriate time". (Something else which has been promised at a later date, is information revealing that Operation Blackbird at Bratton Castle did indeed get film of a genuine formation going down in full view, after all... this was revealed to some of us a few weeks earlier by Colin at The Barge, after we subjected him to severe interrogation! Remember, you heard it here first. Perhaps more on this another time.) He also claimed to have information that showed that the 'galaxy' formation at Avebury had its middle cut out by the farmer on the orders of a shadowy intelligence group, but no details were forthcoming. More worryingly, a crop circle sample testing lab in America had recently been broken into - several important samples were taken and arson was attempted in an effort, Colin believes, to undermine the producing of scientific proof for the phenomenon's validity. He is also in possession of a video showing unidentified helicopters harrassing Colin's team in East Field, Alton Barnes. One of the helicopters then tails off to pursue a ball of light which suddenly >>

appears... This video was shown the following day and was apparently impressive, although the light itself was not visible on the video projector used in the hall. Some have since speculated that the light was nothing more than plastic bird-scarer bottles catching the light and that the movement of the helicopter was a coincidence - however, Colin is adamant there was a light.

Talking of birds, Colin then, prematurely in my view, informed the hall that the very strange Birling Gap formations in Sussex (see SC 31 & 32) were nothing more than rook damage. This has been well covered in other issues, suffice to say that I openly took issue with Colin's explanation at question time. Many pertinent details remain unresolved by this theory, as many other members of the audience openly agreed, applauding some of my comments. A reported sighting of balls of light seen at Cheesefoot Head were also gently (but perhaps fairly in this case) debunked as the tail-lights of cars in the far distance! The talk concluded with a recounting of an apparent alien abduction case which occurred in connection with the Vale of Pewsey scorpion formations. Three youths were also allegedly witness to a landing of a spacecraft and actual sightings of ETs at Silbury Hill. A video was then shown, as at the recent Andover lecture, of Gerald Hawkins talking about diatonic ratios and the circle connection. Although interesting, this might have been better shown nearer the beginning; after a whole day's sitting, it produced a severe outbreak of bottom-shuffling in amongst the masses.

I'm reliably informed that the Sunday of the Symposium was a continued success, kicking off with Andy Collins' report on the Orgone 94 project, followed by Paul Vigay, Stanley Messenger, John Martineau debuting some of his important geometrical findings in relation to the solar system and stone circles, Colin Bloy and Isabelle Kingston. The entire event closed, very appropriately for Glastonbury, with a meditation. The Glastonbury Symposium appears to operate on a deeper level than other circle conferences (although this isn't to demean other events) and perhaps because of this, seems to be leading the way. It's not that the speakers are radically different, but rather that the whole atmosphere pervades a sense of going beyond the mere recitation of data, and the lecturers adjust accordingly. The dark, hot world of the Assembly Rooms at the heart of such a significant place to so many pilgrims also adds to the mystique. If other organisers aren't careful, they are going to find that the Glastonbury gig is considered THE circle event of the year from now on, as it was by default in 94, whatever other contenders may reappear...

ANDY THOMAS



REVIEWS

SHELDRAKE THE HERETIC... ANDY THOMAS ASSESSES BBC 2'S 'HERETIC' SERIES

The recent series shown on BBC 2 entitled 'Heretic' was one of those rare things; a programme that managed to give airtime to rarely-exposed subjects and challenged accepted views without a patronizing smirk on its face. Each week, a 'heretic' who had upset the status quo of science was profiled, usually a figure previously of the establishment who had broken away to undermine it with unusual or radical theories. For instance, one man believed cancer could be prevented with large intakes of vitamin C, another had discovered that water has a 'memory' when used in homeopathic remedies, that sort of thing. Each programme followed a fairly predictable but inevitable pattern; the heretic and his/her theories were explained, hardened scientists wheeled out to rubbish them appeared, our hero's persecutions were documented and then we would learn that last-minute discoveries made by orthodox science seemed to support the offending heresy after all. One of the subjects was the biologist and 'New Age' scientist Rupert Sheldrake, who in the past has been vocal with his interest in the crop circle phenomenon (he helped set up the 1992 hoaxing competition) although there has been a bit of back-tracking of late.

The programme concentrated on Sheldrake's most well-known and controversial concept, Morphic Resonance, which proposes that all organic life is surrounded by nebulous energy fields which retain and promote race-memory in species, stimulating development and evolution in a manner which appears to transcend time and space. For example, if one species of animal in one part of the world begins to develop a certain attribute, another entirely independent group of the same species elsewhere often takes on the same qualities at exactly the same time despite there being no apparent contact between the two groups. This, Sheldrake believes, is but one example of Morphic Resonance at work, information >>

somehow being transmitted beyond physical means.

Naturally, most scientists believe this is utter bunk, preferring to trust in the theory that DNA carries the answers to all conundrums of species development, even though this long-held idea raises many unanswered problems itself. Dr John Maddox, the editor of 'Nature' magazine even went so far as to suggest that Sheldrake's first book was a prime candidate for burning! A well-known Sceptic with a capital S, Maddox had already cropped up earlier in the series, attacking Jacques Benveniste for his water-memory findings. What is not generally known about Maddox is that he lost his unborn second child after his wife was administered a homeopathic remedy, and has waged a ceaseless war against all 'alternative' practices and ideas ever since. (He recounted this himself at the 5th European Sceptics Conference in August 1993.) This perhaps explains his cynicism, but recommending book-burning is surely taking things too far.

Not that Sheldrake's theories are entirely watertight however. Problematically, there was not enough time to explain Morphic Resonance in enough detail to make its case satisfactorily. One flaw noted before in Sheldrake's concept is that although the basic idea is often demonstrated, few actually seem quite sure how it works exactly - no 'mechanism' if you like is ever detailed. 'Heretic' didn't make it any clearer and perhaps as a result Sheldrake's detractors in the transmitted half-hour appeared to have the upper hand. The term 'Morphic Resonance' is often bandied about as the explanation for all sorts of things by people who don't really understand it, fuelling the sceptics, because of this lack of clarification. Sheldrake must really be the one to give it, but it was not to be on this occasion either.

A friend of Sheldrake described him as a philosopher rather than a true scientist and I would go along with that on the strength of this airing. His theories may yet be a little too loose to convince entirely but at least he is asking the right questions, challenging the blinkered world view that has been set up around us. Some of the questions he asks are more than pertinent - how can simply DNA information account for the way flocks of birds and shoals of fish move as one? Why do we accept that birds build nests by 'instinct' without really knowing what that means? Where does this instinct come from? These and other hugely incredible things we take for granted are the thoughts that have led Sheldrake to his conclusions. His belief in the interconnectedness of all things has drawn many of the New Age persuasion to be close supporters of him, a support which he doesn't appear to shun although he himself, perhaps surprisingly in this light, is a committed Christian.

In fact some have used his Christianity to allege bias with his own version of the Darwinian evolution theory, tied in with Morphic Resonance, which says that there is some kind of planned design involved with the development of species and that evolution is not just some kind of accident brought about by the 'survival of the fittest'. Sheldrake accuses historians of having perverted the original works of Darwin to fit into a mechanist-reductionist world view and that Darwin's beliefs have been misrepresented by selective quotation.

Sheldrake, who looked a little nervous with cameras around, seems determined to wear his 'heretic' label loudly and proudly, perhaps to become even, as the narrator suggested, a full-blown "subversive" in time. Fair enough, but let's hope he retains enough sense of the need for some credibility to explain himself and his theories properly. To achieve that, a more accessible and precise definition of Morphic Resonance needs to be put out to the world at large who may never get to sit down with one of his books. As a mere heretic he may be able to do that but as subversives tend to get little sensible media coverage, I'd advise him to stay this side of the fence as his basic ideas I believe are of value and deserve to be heard. The media has been more friendly to Sheldrake and his theories than the scientific establishment and it wouldn't do to lose the few friends he has there.

Still, maybe that's why he's stopped talking about crop circles.

ANDY THOMAS



COUNTDOWN TO... THE SUSSEX CEREOLOGICAL BONANZA 1995!!!

The date: April 29th 1995. The event: SCB 95 - the Sussex Cereological Bonanza 1995; a crop circle conference with a difference... You won't want to miss it. Watch this space...