

Carl Grove

The Airship Wave of 1909

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THE AIRSHIP WAVE OF 1909

A Preliminary Survey

Carl Grove

DURING March, April, and May of 1909, a "mysterious airship", somewhat similar to the 1896-7 "airship", was seen by at least one hundred witnesses in Great Britain, and gave rise to considerable concern. Preliminary investigations suggest that a minimum of 50 separate sightings were made, and there is no doubt that further research would bring many more to light. The aim of this article is to place on record summaries of the 43 cases so far extracted from the files, thereby stimulating interest in this phase of UFO activity.

The 1909 airship was a dark, cigar-shaped object carrying a rather bright "searchlight" about 100ft. in length, which manoeuvred with ease. Like its 1897 predecessor, it is the behaviour and not the appearance of the airship that connects it with the modern UFO phenomenon. However, the 1909 airship differed from that seen in 1897 in two important respects; first, as is the case today, the British data lack many reports of Type I events. There was only one "touchdown", that on Caerphilly Mountain (Case 30). Secondly, the reports do not possess the dramatic impact and wealth of detail that characterised the American observations; this is at least partly due to the fact that most sightings took place at night. Despite this, some of the events described below could, by implication, be just as important—if not more so—as those documented for 1897.

It is necessary to point out that the socio-psychological background for the 1909 reports was very different from that in rural America in 1897. Aerial navigation was a fact, and anything connected with flight made the headlines. At the start of May, the Wright brothers were visiting the War Office, London; H. G. Wells' new book, *The War in the Air*, was about to be published; newspapers were asking whether the days of the Navy were numbered. There was, therefore, a very real possibility that a foreign power—Germany—was engaged in an aerial survey of the country in preparation for The Invasion. It is not surprising that the airship legend took its place beside stories of German spies, and of German armouries hidden in central London.

The airship scare* contributed nothing to Anglo-German relations; the Germans, Lord Northcliffe said, were starting to believe that England was "the home of mere nervous degenerates" (*Daily Mail*, May 21). There were thus social pressures against seeing airships, and towards the end of the wave reports were being "explained" in ways familiar to the ufologist.

The wave began in East Anglia, and extended to South Wales and Ireland, but it is useful to begin the summary

by reviewing a case that took place in the North Sea. On a clear night in October, 1908, the skipper of the smack *Superb*, 35 miles off Lowestoft, saw what appeared to be a "large star" approaching the ship. Calling a crewman, he decided to light a flare in an attempt to discover what the thing might be. He showed a red flare, and, to his surprise, was answered with a red flare which threw into relief a "sausage-shaped" airship. When the skipper showed a white flare, the airship responded with a blue one. After 20 to 30 minutes, the airship flew away seawards; the case was not reported until May (*East Anglian Daily Times*, May 20).

The cases

1. March 4. **Lambourne, Berkshire.** Charles Maberly, an organist at St. Michael's Church, was returning home from choir practice at Woodlands St. Mary. At about 8.25 p.m. his attention was attracted by a bright searchlight, and he looked up to see a large torpedo-shaped dirigible heading west at about 200ft. He estimated that it travelled three-quarters of a mile as he walked 50 yards. As it passed out of sight he heard three explosions, sounding at regular intervals, reminding him of the noise of "shell mortars at firework displays". (*Evening News*, London, May 18.)

2. March 23. **Peterborough, Northants.** Police-constable Kettle reported that: "I was on duty in Cromwell Road, and was coming out of Cobden Street into that thoroughfare when I heard what I took to be a motor-car, which I judged was some 400 yards distant. It was 5.15 (a.m.), and still quite dark. I walked along Cromwell Road, expecting to see the lights of an approaching car, but none appeared. Still I could hear the steady buzz of a high-power engine, and suddenly it struck me that the sound was coming, not along the surface of the road, but from above! I looked up, and my eye was at once attracted by a powerful light, which I should judge to be some twelve hundred feet above the earth. Outlined against the stars was a dark body."

The object was "somewhat oblong and narrow in shape, and looked about a couple of yards long", and Kettle could see no gas-bag attached. "When I first sighted the machine it was not straight overhead, but appeared to be over the railway . . . It was going a tremendous pace, and as I watched, the rattle of the engines grew gradually fainter and fainter, and it disappeared into the northwest. Altogether I should say I saw it for about three minutes." (*Peterborough Advertiser*, March 27.)

3. March 23. **Peterborough.** That night, Miss Gill, the daughter of the city electrical engineer, was returning from the theatre with two friends. They saw a bright flashing light, apparently attached to some dark object,

* Some newspapers began to make use of the term "scareship".

moving slowly in the direction of Cromwell Road. "The whole thing happened very quickly, and I lost sight of it almost at once." (*Evening News*, May 19.)

4. March 25. **March, Cambridge.** A. J. Banyard, a railway engine driver: "On going into my yard shortly after 11 o'clock . . . I saw a light in the sky in the direction of Peterborough. My curiosity was aroused, and a few minutes' careful watching revealed, beyond all doubt, that it was an airship I was looking (ergo sic)." (*Weekly Dispatch*, London, May 16.)

5. Mid-April. **New England, Peterborough.** F. Baxter reported: "I was returning from the theatre, where I play in the orchestra, about 10.50 . . . when I saw a bright light in the sky. I said to my mate, 'What's that up there?' and he replied 'It's the moon.' No further notice was taken until we had gone about half a mile further, when we saw the light travelling very rapidly in a north-westerly direction.

"Several other people also noticed it. We ran to a large field, where we got a good view. We could make out a long black body, in the front of which was a very bright light, the shape of a fantail pigeon. I could not say at what speed it was going, but it was not many minutes before it passed out of sight." (*Evening News*, May 17.)

6. April 24. **Ipswich, Suffolk.** About 8 p.m., P-c Hudson stated, he was on duty in the vicinity of Gippeswyk Park when his attention was drawn to a light in the sky. "It appeared to be at a great height, and I lost sight of it at intervals. Whilst I was watching the light I suddenly observed a dark object which appeared to be about a hundred yards from the lighted one. I examined it through a pair of opera glasses, and the dark object appeared to be like an ordinary balloon. After hovering about for a time it passed out of sight in a south-westerly direction."

Quite a crowd gathered to watch the object; another witness, J. A. Smith, said: "It did not appear to be an aeroplane, but rather a large elongated gas-bag, with a car carrying lights at a considerable distance below . . . Powerful lights were used at times, but I heard no sound." The object moved off against the wind. (*East Anglian Daily Times*, Ipswich, May 7; *Evening News*, May 13; *Weekly Dispatch*, May 16.)

7. May 2. **Lowestoft, Suffolk.** At 7.30 p.m., a "well-known builder" and his family saw an egg-shaped object, the larger end pointing skywards, passing between two banks of clouds in a westerly direction. "It was going at a rapid rate, and passed quickly out of sight." (*East Anglian Daily Times*, May 18.)

8. May 3. **Woolpit, Suffolk.** Mrs. Amy Rush and her son, driving from Woolpit, saw an "aeroplane" heading south. (*East Anglian Daily Times*, May 10.)

9. May 7. **Clacton-on-Sea, Essex.** About 10.30 p.m., Egerton S. Free, out locking up his house, sighted a long, sausage-shaped dirigible, hovering 200 yards inland above the cliffs and quite near by. It seemed to be 60 to 80ft. above the ground, carried no lights, and after a few minutes flew off to the northeast. The next day Free's wife found in the area where the airship had hovered a mysterious steel and indiarubber bag, 5ft. long, weighing 35 lb. Stamped on the side were the words—"Muller Fabrik Bremen"—and Free considered that it had fallen from the (German) airship.

Several weeks later, it was identified as part of a target used by the Navy for gunnery practice, but, by then, a more curious incident had taken place. The day after Free's sighting first received national publicity, May 16, two strangers appeared near his home. They examined his private stairs leading to the beach and the area where the airship had hovered, then walked round the back of his house to the stables, where he had for a time kept the peculiar object: "The men hovered about my house persistently for five hours, that is until 7 o'clock in the evening. When the servant girl set out to church she heard them conversing in a foreign tongue. Finally they came up to her, one on each side, and one of the men spoke to her in a strange language. The girl . . . was so frightened that she ran back to my house, and would not again leave for church." (*Evening News*, May 15; *East Anglian Daily Times*, May 18.)

10. May 9. **Wisbech, Cambridge.** "While cycling near Wisbech, Mr. Deacon, of Market Harborough, saw a dark shape drive by overhead." (*Weekly Dispatch*, May 23.)

11. May 9. **Northampton, Northants.** At 9 p.m., Mr. Kelf and his wife saw a torpedo-shaped airship with lights passing over the town. (*Weekly Dispatch*, May 23.)

12. May 9. **Stamford, Lincoln.** W. Cole: "I was taking a walk . . . about 11 o'clock when my attention was drawn by a searchlight over Burleigh Park. It flashed eight or nine times in different directions. The object which the searchlight came from was large and of oval shape. I watched it for about ten minutes, and then it disappeared towards Peterborough." (*Evening News*, May 15.)

13. May 9. **Southend-on-Sea, Essex.** Miss H. M. Boville: "I was closing the window of my bedroom, which faces N.E., about 11.20, when I noticed a very large dark object looming out of the sky, and travelling slowly from the direction of Shoeburyness. At first I thought it was the gunpowder cloud that one sees after an explosion, it was so opaque and black, and the night was too dark to enable me to see it clearly. After a few seconds, however, it crossed the sky and remained nearly stationary in front of my window. I could see the outline of a torpedo-shaped airship, very long and large. It was not more than about a quarter of a mile above the houses and trees, and remained immovable for a few minutes, then rose higher, and travelled very swiftly in a westerly direction towards the coast and London, showing, as it did so, two very powerful searchlights at either end for a second or two. I did not hear any sound from the engines, as it was too far off, nor could I discern the aeronauts; but the vessel seemed to travel very steadily and smoothly." (*Evening News*, May 15.)

14. May 11. **Ipswich, Suffolk.** One of the witnesses to the April 24 sighting, a postman named Jackaman, saw an object rising from the west at 8.40 p.m. He thought it may have been a kite or balloon. (*Evening News*, May 13.)

15. May 12. **Terrington March, Norfolk.** Fred Harrison, a farm worker, was walking home at about 9.45, "and was about a hundred yards from my house when I saw a bright light showing up all the road about two hundred yards from me. It was a very bright light—like a searchlight. The light was fastened in front of

what I thought must be an airship, because it was the shape of a cigar—oval shape. The thing passed over me, and I heard a rattling noise in the air—like a motor. It was 'siding' the wind, and that was how I knew it could not be a balloon."

The object was heading north, and he saw it only two or three minutes. At 10.30, a Mrs. Warnes heard a whizzing noise, like a motor. She looked out, but did not see anything. (*Evening News*, May 17.)

16. May 13. **Sandringham, Norfolk.** According to several press reports, servants on the royal estate claimed to have seen an airship.

17. May 13. **Peakirk, Northants.** Mr. Strange, a solicitor, saw a black shape, heard a whirring of machinery, and saw searchlights. (*Weekly Dispatch*, May 23.)

18. May 13. **Kelmarsh, Northants.** C. W. Allen, "the pedestrian holder of the 2,000 mile record," was motoring with two friends. "When passing through the village of Kelmarsh . . . we heard a loud report in the air, like the backfire of a motorcar. Then we heard

distinctly from above our heads the 'tock-tock-tock' of a swiftly-running motor engine, and we looked up. I was sitting on the front seat, next to the driver, and had a clear view of a dark shape looming up out of the night. It was an oblong airship, with lights in front and behind, flying swiftly through the air. It seemed some five or six hundred feet up, and must have been at least 100ft. long. The lights were not very bright, but we could distinctly see the torpedo shape and what appeared to be men on the platform below.

"The steady buzz of the engines could be heard through the still air, and we watched it until it passed out of sight in a north-easterly direction towards Peterborough. It was travelling at least twenty miles an hour, easily and steadily, and appeared to be answering the helm like a ship. I cannot doubt the evidence of my senses, and my two companions, both practical men, are convinced that the Peterborough district contains the home of the airship." (*East Anglian Daily Times*, May 13.)

(To be continued)

MORE ABOUT UNIPEDS

Gordon Creighton

IN my article *On Unipeds and Asparagus* in FSR for May/June 1970 I included a summary of the account of the alleged 1949 Lomo de Ballena incident, which Coral and Jim Lorenzen told in their book *UFOs over the Americas*. The witness, or percipient, a Señor C.A.V., claimed that he saw a near-landed disc, from which emerged three extraordinary mummy-like creatures with human type profiles, arms and torsoes, but with legs joined together as one and with one large foot. Basing my account on the report given by the Lorenzens, I wrote that Mr. Richard Greenwell, formerly APRO representative in Peru, and now Assistant Director of that Organisation, had interviewed Sr. C.A.V., and was quite unable to believe that the man had invented the story.

A letter, dated June 30, 1970, with a further report enclosed, has been received from Mr. Greenwell, and *Flying Saucer Review* is happy to publish both documents, and to express our thanks to the writer.

As in all other cases, every reader must decide for himself whether he thinks that the story told by Sr. C.A.V. has or has not the ring of truth, *Flying Saucer Review's* function being simply to "keep the record" and serve, to the best of our ability, as a forum for discussion.

It should be borne in mind that, in his approach to UFO reports, Mr. Greenwell, in common with most folk, is probably inclined to seek either a straight "extra-terrestrial explanation", a mental aberration in the percipient, or a hoax. For us at *Flying Saucer Review* it must be emphasised that such is not necessarily the case, and here, as in so many other occurrences which we have published, we desire to remind readers that

there may be yet another explanation. Indeed, more than one.

For example, it is possible that one of these explanations could be that Señor V's experience, while an "hallucination" (as Mr. Greenwell would no doubt prefer it to be) was nevertheless no subjective hallucination, that is to say, not self-induced, but was a *projection*, i.e. an hallucination induced within his mind and within his field of vision by some kind of alien intelligence—an intelligence regarding which the majority of mankind possesses at present no information, and which mankind as a whole has never seen or met. If such a form of intelligence be found to exist, it would at the present stage be merely a waste of time to debate the question of whether or not it is "extraterrestrial".

Another possibility, to which I referred in my previous article, is that Señor V's experience was real and that the creatures he met could belong to the teeming kingdoms of the so-called Elementals of this planet.

Here, now, is Mr. Greenwell's letter:

APRO,
3910 E. Kleindale Rd.,
Tucson,
Arizona 85716.

Dear Mr. Creighton, June 30, 1970.

This refers to your article *On Unipeds and Asparagus, and not to mention Penguins*, in the May/June issue of *Flying Saucer Review*.

On the first and second pages of your article you discuss the case of "C.A.V." in Lima, Peru, which is a case I investigated for APRO. Unfortunately, my

Mr. E. Johansson said the light went out. Did it do that, or did it only go down below the treetops? If it went out, does that prove it was a hoax?

We do not think this is the end of this story, but we have decided to publish the results so far and we hope that some new facts will come to light in consequence.

This case-report has been prepared by GICOFF. All information presented is based on GICOFF's

investigation. We have not used any second-hand material. I have shortened the report a little and translated it into English.

* * *

Comment by R. H. B. Winder:

With great respect to the investigators, who seem for the most part to have done a very good job, the scientific examination, although it sounds impressive, is actually a

little weak. They ought, for example, to have considered chemical tests to confirm the presence of Cerium—my professional chemist friend tells me this—and they ought to have been more specific about the sample. If it consisted of the ashes from the mark the burning might well have concentrated material deposited from the atmosphere. The suggestion that it came from a nuclear propulsion system, or the like, is *not* supported by the evidence.

THE AIRSHIP WAVE OF 1909—Pt. 2

Carl Grove

THE opening part of this survey listed 18 reports of unconventional aerial phenomena rather similar to the 1896-7 U.S. "airship." Most of the reports originated in East Anglia during March to mid-May, 1909.

The following 25 reports conclude this preliminary listing, and cover the second part of May. During this period the geographical focus of the phenomenon shifted to South Wales and extended into Ireland.

19. May 14. **North Sea.** The steamer *St. Olaf*, a Norwegian trading vessel, was a short way out from Blyth, Northumberland, when a large airship carrying five searchlights suddenly appeared. Hovering above the *St. Olaf*, it directed all its lights on to the steamer's bridge. It was within hail, Captain Egenes reported, but gave no answer to the challenge, and in the glare of the searchlights no detail could be seen.

Suddenly the airship swung off after another steamer a mile or so away, and directed the searchlights upon that. It afterwards made off at a sharp rate towards the south. (*East Anglian Daily Times*, May 19.)

20. May 14. **West Green, East London.** At 3.30 a.m., several railwaymen at West Green station saw a long black object, without lights, travelling northeast at a fast pace. No sound was heard, as an engine was letting off steam. (*East Anglian Daily Times*, May 21.)

21. May 15. **Yarmouth, Norfolk.** Mrs. Fricks, a nurse, saw a balloon-like object hovering over the northern outskirts of the town in the morning. It showed a white light, then a green, then a red. (*East Anglian Daily Times*, May 19.)

22. May 15. **Newport, Monmouth.** G. Beanland and A. V. Day, at the local flour mill, sighted a cigar-shaped dark object stationary over Newport Bridge, shortly after 1.00 a.m. Searchlights flashed from each end on to the bridge. After 10 minutes one of the lights went out, and the object flew off towards Stow Hill. (*South Wales Daily News*, Cardiff, May 17.)

23. May 15. **Northampton.** A policeman and others sighted an airship, carrying lights, crossing the town at 9.15 p.m. Chief Const. Mardlin reported that this was a

fire-balloon, carrying lanterns, sent up as a hoax by some young men. (*Daily Mail*, London; *Daily Mirror*, London, May 17.)

24. May 16. **Lowestoft, Suffolk.** At 1.30 a.m., Mrs. Wigg was awakened by a noise similar to that of a motor-car. Looking through the window directly opposite her bed, she saw a dark object pass fairly quickly, heading southwest. It was not very high, and was bottle-shaped, in a horizontal position, and of considerable length; she saw what appeared to be a man steering at the front of the machine. Several other people saw vivid flashes of light or heard engine sounds at that time. (*East Anglian Daily Times*, May 18-19.)

25. May 16. **Broome, Suffolk.** Capt. Hervey, Local Government Board Inspector for the Eastern District, saw a cigar-shaped balloon sailing towards Lowestoft at about 7.45 p.m. It was 3-4 miles distant, and a quarter of a mile high, and moving against a strong northeasterly wind. (*East Anglian Daily Times*, May 18.)

26. May 16. **Monmouth.** A well-known auctioneer, Oliver Jones, was driving from Treginach to Monmouth. "It was about eight miles from Monmouth when I first saw it. It came from the direction of Usk and Raglan, and seemed to go towards Chepstow. It then turned right round and came back towards Raglan and over the mountain.

"I continued to drive slowly on, and watched it for about half an hour. I was driving eight or ten miles an hour, but the airship seemed to go faster than that. It went up and down and around in a remarkable manner. There were lights in front and behind, and they seemed to be about 15 yards apart. I could see the cigar-shape quite distinctly, and noticed the perfect control the occupants had over the airship." There were four lights in front and one behind, and four others saw the object. (*South Wales Daily News*; *Evening News*, May 20.)

27. May 17. **Belfast, Ireland.** About 10 p.m., a bright light was seen in the direction of Colin Mountain. It was moving, and many people in the southern part of

Belfast began to watch. It was very high, and steadily approached, at times dipping towards the ground. The night was fairly dark, and it was not until the light came over the Lisburn Road area that "it was just possible to distinguish in the gloom a long-shaped object."

Some of the witnesses saw a red light flash from it several times, and when it had got a mile past the mountain it slackened speed somewhat. Finally it rose to a very great height and disappeared rapidly in an easterly direction. No sound was heard. (*Belfast Evening Telegraph*, May 18.)

28. May 17. **Brecon, Wales.** Lichfield, the chauffeur to Archdeacon Bevan, distinctly saw an object carrying lights about midnight. (*Evening News*, May 20.)

29. May 18. **North Sea.** Ostend fishermen saw a dirigible manoeuvring ten miles off Hull. (*East Anglian Daily Times*, May 21.)

30. May 18. **Caerphilly Mountain.** C. Lethbridge, "an elderly man, of quiet demeanour, (who) did not strike one as given to romancing," worked in the winter at Cardiff Docks, but in the summer travelled the area giving Punch-and-Judy shows at the local schools. At about 11.00 p.m., he was returning home from Senghenydd across Caerphilly Mountain, a desolate and lonely area with few houses.

Turning the bend at the summit, he was shocked to see, lying to the right of the road, a large tube-shaped object which he first took to be "some big bird." Nearby were two tall, smart-looking young men, with a military bearing—in fact, Lethbridge found himself referring to them as "two officers." They were wearing big, heavy fur coats, and tight-fitting fur caps. Scared, Lethbridge continued towards them.

The men were busily engaged with some work at the roadside, and did not notice Lethbridge until he had come within 20 to 30 yards of them. The rattle of his spring-cart attracted them, and they jumped up "and jabbered furiously to each other in a strange lingo—Welsh or something else; it was certainly not English." They appeared to pick something from the ground, and jumped into a little carriage suspended under the cigar. The object "switchbacked" into the air in a zig-zag fashion, and when it had cleared the telegraph pole and wires two lights like electric lamps shone out. Making "an awful noise" like an engine working, the object rose higher and flew away towards Cardiff.

After Lethbridge had told his story in Cardiff, a party of investigators returned to the site. There were signs of trampling in the grass, and a small collection of curious objects was discovered. The first was a red label, attached to a chain and metal pin, with some instructions printed in French. This was later found to be a spare part for a tyre valve, distributed by the French branches of the Michelin Tyre Company. English pins of the same sort sold at 1d., but pins carrying the French labels were not obtainable in Britain at that time.

The second of the finds was a piece of notepaper, cut in half, bearing the letterhead of a firm of stockbrokers in London. Faint outlines of a typewritten message were just visible on the lower half: "provincial centres . . . rest assured that we shall not . . . the fullest confidence . . . this letter is amply justified . . ." The head of the firm disclaimed all knowledge of airships, and knew nothing about the letter.

There were many scraps of paper lying about. These included newspaper cuttings about airships; a quantity of pulpy, papier-mache-type wads, thought to have been used in packaging; and a couple of dozen small bits of well-made blue paper bearing a mass of figures and letters. The lid of a tin of metal polish was also found.

After Lethbridge's account was first published, a Cardiff stockbroker's clerk came forward with an odd story. On the morning of Sunday, May 16, he had seen five "foreigners" surveying and photographing the Caerphilly district. They were driven from spot to spot in a couple of traps, and took photos with cameras fixed above the seats of the traps. They were also seen at a spot a mile and a half away, where three of the five were said to be carrying cameras. About noon they drove away, and separated at Beulah, one party taking the road to Llanishen, the other driving to Cardiff. (*South Wales Daily News*, May 20-21; *Weekly Dispatch*, May 23; *Daily Mail*, May 20; *Daily Mirror*, May 21.)

31. May 19. **Cardiff.** Two hours after Lethbridge's meeting with the "officers", an airship was seen by several workers on the Cardiff Docks, and by the third mate of the steamer *Arndale*, which was being loaded at the time.

Robert Westlake stated: "At 1.15 this morning . . . while attending to my duty, signalling trains at the King's Junction, Queen Alexandra Dock, I was startled by a weird object flying in the air. In appearance it resembled a boat of cigar shape. A whirring noise came from it. It was lit up by two lights, which could be plainly seen. It was travelling at a great rate, and was elevated at a distance of half-a-mile, making from the eastward."

C. Harwood, the traffic foreman, commented: "The airship took a wide curve from the direction of Newport, and, though high up, could be plainly seen against the clear sky, even had it not been lit up by the two lights . . . And we all heard distinctly the whirr of its driving gear. It seemed to hover over the docks for a few seconds, and then swept away across the channel, and the lights were extinguished as it passed away to the eastward."

The object was red in colour, and a coaltrimmer on the *Arndale*, W. John, reported seeing "trellis work" on it. Another witness claimed that "Had the Dowlais Works blast been on, we should have had the airship clearly discovered, but we saw enough to put at rest all doubts about it." Estimates of duration varied between one and four minutes; it would have been visible longer but for the sudden extinguishing of the lights. (*South Wales Daily News*, May 20; *Weekly Dispatch*, May 23.)

32. May 19. **Maindee, Newport.** About 8.00 a.m., W. Beighton's little girl pointed out a "big fowl" which would "flap" at times. It came from the Bristol Channel, standing still on occasion, and moving away about 8.30 a.m. Two others saw the object; one, using a telescope, said that the craft was 12 to 15 yards long and was carrying three men. (*South Wales Daily News*, May 21.)

33. May 19. **Shoeburyness, Essex.** At dusk, a Royal Artillery sergeant saw something manoeuvring at a considerable height. It was lost to view in the darkness. (*East Anglian Daily Times*, May 21.)

34. May 19. **Pontypool, Monmouth.** About 9.30 p.m., night duty workers at the town forge sighted a cigar-

shaped object with a powerful light at the tail. It travelled "speedily and gracefully" to a point over the forge, "and then darted off in another direction, practically at right angles to that from which it arrived." Two post office officials said that the light "quivered considerably."

Architect Garth Fisher and his wife, at Penygarn, a village overlooking Pontypool, described a cigar-shaped object which flew directly overhead. In the glare of its light they saw something "like striped canvas," and it was last seen heading north. Three 6-foot fire balloons were known to be in the area. (*Evening News*, May 20; *East Anglian Daily Times*; *South Wales Daily News*, May 21.)

35. May 19. **Norwich, Norfolk.** Mrs. Turner, returning home at 11.30 p.m.: "As I came into my street, a flash of light came on me all of a sudden, and made the street look like day . . . I could hear a noise like the whizzing of wheels. I looked up, and there I saw a big star of light in front and a big searchlight behind. I saw no body of an airship; I only saw the light and heard the noises. It was coming from the N.N.E., from the direction of the Angel Road School, and flying very low, so low that it would have touched the pinnacle of the school had it passed directly over it."

36. May 19. **Wroxham, Norfolk.** "A well-known gentleman who resides at Wroxham . . . was motor-cycling home on Wednesday night, and had just reached the bridge over the river, when the light of his lamp went out. This was at about 11.30, or probably just before. While he was examining his lamp, what he describes as a flashlight was directed upon him from above, and kept upon him for half a minute. He was dazzled by the light, and could not see any airship, nor did he detect any sound . . . on reaching home, his brother told him that while at Sprowston (a village some few miles distant) that same night, he saw a strange light in the sky, and could not see from whence it came."

37. May 19. **Thurston, Norfolk.** Mr. Chatten, a grocer's assistant, was cycling home to Thurston about midnight. "I was dazzled by a bright light shining from right above me. The trees and hedges were lit up brilliantly. I have seen a naval searchlight at Harwich, and I should suppose that what I saw was something of that sort, but there was a bluish tinge, and it did not appear to me so strong as the naval lights. It seemed to be switched off again after only a few seconds."

"Getting off my bicycle and looking upwards, I saw a long, cigar-shaped object, some three or four hundred feet above me. It was soaring upwards, the tapering end going foremost, and was moving rapidly in the direction of Norwich. On the under side was what I should call a bar, supporting a sort of framework, a yellow light shining at each end. I could not see any men upon the framework, nor could I hear any buzzing sound, such as a motor would cause, but that is not to be wondered at, because, although the night was still, the thing was travelling at a great height." (Cases 35-37: *East Anglian Daily Times*, May 21.)

38. May 19. **Framlingham, Suffolk.** At midnight, an ostler named Hadley, and two others, saw a lighted airship. (*Evening News*, May 20.)

39. May 20. **Dublin, Ireland.** Just after midnight a cyclist saw a cigar-shaped body, two clear lights in front, travelling at a considerable pace. (*East Anglian Daily Times*, May 22.)

40. May 20. **Dennybrook, Dublin.** Just before 8.00 p.m. many people saw a football-shaped object moving rapidly to the southwest. (*East Anglian Daily Times*, May 22.)

41. May 22. **Maesteg, Glamorgan.** At 10.30 p.m., a rumour spread through Commercial Street that the airship was overhead. Many saw lights only. One, using a telescope, claimed to see people on board. (*South Wales Daily News*, May 24.)

42. May 22. **Aberystwyth, Cardigan.** 14 witnesses saw bright lights burst into view like an electric lamp. "The lights were travelling in from the sea heading south-east. At one point . . . the lower light was flashed on to the sea and it looked very much like a searchlight." The lights hovered two miles offshore, then moved towards the pierhead and disappeared. The lights were so bright that at first the witnesses thought it was moonlight. The object appeared to be searching the bay. (*South Wales Daily News*, May 24.)

43. May 24. **Swansea.** P-c Williams and a man named Bell saw an airship with a bright light under it heading northwest. P-c Johnston saw a "bright moving light," but would not swear to its being an airship. (*South Wales Daily News*, May 26.)

Discussion

The 1909 airship may constitute a significant link between the earlier American sightings and the 20th Century development of the UFO phenomenon. While fantastic landing and contact reports are largely absent from the cases reviewed above, this should not lessen their impact. Witnesses seem to have been of high reliability and described their experiences without embellishment, coming forward to face hostile and often vicious criticism in the press.

The published accounts contain many elements of interest. Note the airship's bright searchlights and remarkable performance; the right-angle turn in case 34 (which, however, may have a conventional explanation); the cluster around Norwich (cases 35-37); the motorcyclist's lamp in case 36; and the five reports of occupants. Incidental to cases 9 and 30 are the stories of mysterious "foreigners" who engaged in some odd behaviour on the same day in places 200 miles apart. Clearly these events may be interpreted only within the context of a general discussion of the interaction between the phenomenon itself and the situation in which it appears.

It is to be hoped that British researchers soon begin a thorough study of these early events. The newspaper files for 1909 and 1913 contain a mass of data which has not seen the light of day for 60 years: retrieving these data is a remarkably easy process. It is difficult to make predictions about the total number of reports such a study might uncover, but preliminary investigation suggests that there were perhaps as many as 150 sightings made during this period.