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An Anecdotal History of BUFORA

A BRIEF HISTORY OF UFOLOGY AND THE EARLY YEARS OF BUFORA UP TO 1975

Until Kenneth Arnold's sighting of some nine objects reflecting the sunlight over the Cascade Mountains on 24 June 1947, relatively few people had taken a direct interest in unknown aerial phenomena. Soon after, the press came up with the collective name *flying saucers*, and people quickly seized on this new phenomenon, which seemed to coincide with the nuclear age. But researchers soon found ample historical similarities to suggest that this was an old phenomenon that had been overlooked or had been assumed to be divine portents. The United States Air Force (USAF) soon became enmeshed in the late forties, and carried out their own classified investigation under *PROJECT SAUCER*. The rumour of a saucer having crashed in the *boondocks* of New Mexico in July 1947 has been around for 36 years. Papers released through the Freedom of Information Act in the USA hint that this event received the highest military security classification; ranking with the atom bomb. The remains of the object were allegedly taken to the Roswell Army Air Base. Might saucer technology lead to an ideal missile launch vehicle? Other projects followed and Captain Edward Ruppelt, first head of *PROJECT BLUE BOOK*, coined the word UFO ("you-foh"), as it was less suggestive of an alien spacecraft. Probably the first full-length book was *FLYING SAUCERS ARE REAL* by Major Donald Keyhoe (USMC), much reprinted since 1950. This was closely followed by Frank Scully's dubious *BEHIND THE FLYING SAUCERS*. The first book in the UK was *RIDDLE OF THE FLYING SAUCERS* by Gerald Heard, serialised in the *SUNDAY EXPRESS* under the heading *IS ANOTHER WORLD WATCHING US?* Heard speculated about bug-eyed monsters from Mars! Captain Edward Ruppelt, head of *PROJECT BLUE BOOK* from 1951 to 1953, was convinced of the reality of UFOs judging from his 1956 book, *THE REPORT ON UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS*. Several thousand books and papers have been published since 1950 and Lynn Catoe's *UFOS AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY* published by the Library of Congress for the Air Force Office of Scientific Research (USAF) in 1969 is a useful source book. Amongst clubs springing up in the early fifties was the Aerial Phenomena Research Organisation (APRO) in the USA run by Coral and Jim Lorenzen, probably the world's oldest UFO group (now defunct). Albert K. Bender's shortlived International Flying Saucer Bureau (IFSB) was started in Bridgeport Connecticut, in 1952. A UK branch was formed in Bristol that year by Denis Plunkett. When the 600-member IFSB was disbanded (dramatically blamed on *Men-in-Black*), the 33-member UK Branch founded the British Flying Saucer Bureau in October 1953 (sub. was 5/-). Denis was called up to do his *National Service*, so his father, Captain E.L. Plunkett ran the club in his son's absence (see footnotes). Also founded in 1952 by Richard Hughes, was the Flying Saucer Club of Hove, Sussex. The Bristol and Hove Clubs amalgamated in 1954 and their magazine, *FLYING SAUCER NEWS* edited by Richard, was a great success. Denis claims they had up to 1500 subscribers at one time. Their magazine may have been overshadowed by *FLYING SAUCER REVIEW (FSR)* which was started in London in 1955. The first editor was Derek Dempster, who was followed by Brinsley Le Poer Trench (Lord Clancarty) about a year later in 1956 (see footnotes). While Dempster was still editor *F.S. News* was incorporated into *FSR* in 1956. The British Flying Saucer Bureau was an influential founding member-society of the British UFO Association in 1962. However BUFORA traces its origins directly back to the London UFO Research Organisation (LUFORO). This was founded by four young researchers at a meeting in London on 11 July 1959: Roy Stemman, Nigel Stephenson (see footnotes), Susanne Stebbing and Paul Teugels. Roy was the first editor of *LUFORO BULLETIN*, which was published monthly and the inclusive subscription was ten shillings. Roy dropped out of LUFORO in 1961 but edited an illustrated UFO book, *VISITORS FROM OUTER SPACE*, published by Aldus Books in 1976. Susanne Stebbing acted as both Secretary and Treasurer during part of LUFORO's first two years. She is well-known as a mail order bookseller. Nigel Stephenson was the main driving force in the early years and turned his hand to most things: Chairman, Bulletin Editor, Research Director and meetings' organiser as needed. LUFORO went through some difficult times and individual effort often under-wrote fiscal need. The LUFORO sighting report forms were based on the USAF UFO questionnaires.

Monthly meetings were generally held at Caxton Hall, near St. James's Park. Lawrence Moore (see footnotes) then an art student, took over the *LUFORO BULLETIN* editorship in January 1961. He improved its appearance although it remained duplicated. He is now a film director and his work has touched on strange phenomena, including a *two-parter*, *INTO THE UNKNOWN*, shown on ITV in December 1975.

Lionel Beer joined BUFORA in January 1961, having met Nigel and Susanne at *The First British Flying Saucer Convention* where the Aetherius Society had put on a motley programme at the Russell Hotel, Bloomsbury, the previous year. He was elected to the committee at the AGM in 1961 and took the post of *Publicity Officer*. In 1962 he was living in a luxury flat in Dorset Street off Baker Street. LUFORO's original aims included forming a national and international federation of UFO societies. When the committee met at Dorset Street, Nigel again advanced his proposals for a UK federation, and eventually he was given the go-ahead. Lionel suggested that if an inaugural meeting was to be arranged, it should be done with a little style. He said to Nigel, "You organise the platform (speakers) and I'll organise the floor." Two leaflets were produced announcing: *You are invited to attend the British UFO Association Convention at the Kensington Central Library, on Saturday 22 September 1962 at 2.30 pm*. Tickets were sold at four shillings, and buffet tea was three shillings. Compare that with the current price of a plastic cup of British Rail tea (in 1983)! The response was overwhelming and several dozen ticket applications had to be returned. More people were turned away at the door. Even so the aisles were packed with people, many standing against the walls - something that the *Fire Regulations* would not now permit! Following fraternal speeches, Leonard Cramp gave a lecture on his theories and Dr. Geoffrey Doel showed slides. Two colour films taken by the twins, Ray and Rex Stanford, were shown of a UFO in vertical flight in the USA. The *star-turn* was undoubtedly 12-year-old Alex Birch from Sheffield. Alex gave an account of how, while playing in his back garden with two friends, he took a photograph of a group of UFOs in February 1962. (In 1972 Alex was to claim it was a hoax, although he had succeeded in convincing his parents, his school-teacher, the *YORKSHIRE POST* - who paid his fare to London, and the Ministry of Defence officials. The latter dismissed the supposed UFOs as ice crystals, much to the annoyance of Alex's father).

Without question the British UFO Association was given a warm and successful launch. Eight societies came together as corporate founders of the BRITISH UFO ASSOCIATION:

- BRITISH FLYING SAUCER BUREAU (1953)
- ANGLO-POLISH UFO RESEARCH CLUB (1955)
- TYNESIDE UFO SOCIETY (1959)
- SCOTTISH UFO SOCIETY (1959)
- LONDON UFO RESEARCH ORGANISATION (1959)
- STRATFORD-ON-AVON UFO GROUP (1960) [(1960)]
- DIRECT INVESTIGATION GROUP ON AERIAL PHENOMENON/L
- CHELTENHAM FLYING SAUCER GROUP (1961)

The Anglo-Polish was a correspondence club run by Antoni Szachnowski. He originated a controversial UFO questionnaire and planned to send 20,000 completed forms to the United Nations to enlist their support. (The cause was eventually taken up at the U.N. by Premier 'Sir' Eric Gairy of Grenada in the late seventies.) The BFSB provided BUFOA's first president in Graham Knewstubb, an electrical engineer and research scientist in the aviation industry. He had been the President of LUFORO since 1960 and went on to be BUFORA president until 1965. DIGAP met in Manchester and Joan Nelstrop was their secretary for many years. The Scottish UFO Society was run by Sheila Walker in Edinburgh. The Tyneside UFO Society (TUFOS) had a long innings and Leslie Otley published *ORBIT* for many years. One of its memorable items was the *green men of Leam Lane*. TUFOS files and library now reside in Newcastle Central Library, which with recent additions, is probably the best public UFO archive in the country.

BUFOA was run by its secretary, Nigel Stephenson, in conjunction with a Council made up of representatives from the corporate member-societies. Geographical separation made it difficult to convene council meetings, so it fell to LUFORO, with Nigel as its Chairman, to act as the main co-ordinating body. *LUFORO BULLETIN* was still appearing under the editorship of Charles Stickland. The first *BUFOA JOURNAL* (now a rare document) did not appear until Summer 1963 and was edited anonymously. The centre pages carried an outline map of the UK showing the investigation area each of

the (by then) eleven member-societies or branches would cover. A key function of BUFOA was to provide a national network of UFO investigators linked by the regional societies. The *Journal* carried an article by Charles Stickland on the Charlton Crater in Wiltshire, which had appeared in July 1963. The editorial mentioned that LUFORO was developing a punched-card system for comparative analysis and concluded: "The breakthrough is at hand." The second and final BUFOA JOURNAL dated Autumn 1963 named Malcolm Bull as editor. Included were a piece on baffling bubbles, a Charlton Crater follow-up and an article by Malcolm on *orthoteny*. During the interim period, Lionel Beer had the ambiguous job of LUFORO Hon. Secretary and was glad to pass the post to Mrs 'Lee' Lloyd as the dual subscription was an administrative nightmare. It was a relief when LUFORO and BUFOA merged to form BUFORA at a meeting in Kensington Central Library on 25 January 1964, under a constitution drawn up by John Cleary-Baker.

The first BUFORA JOURNAL AND BULLETIN (BJ&B) dated Summer 1964 was edited by Charles Stickland and records that BUFORA had eleven member-societies and two branches. It reported a landing that left marks on the ground at Ivy Chimneys, Essex on 27 December 1963, and the Socorro, New Mexico case of 24 April 1964. BJ&B No.2, Autumn 1964 records a meeting in London to discuss investigation, attended by no less than nine member-societies. It was chaired by Nigel Stephenson, who stressed the need for BUFORA not to become over-centralised. BJ&B No.3, Winter 1964, noted the death of Waveney Girvan, a UFO book publisher and editor of FSR. Individual membership had grown to 300. In November 1964, Dr Geoffrey Doel took over as Chairman from Nigel Stephenson, who remained in charge of research and investigation. BUFORA's first booklet for investigators appeared: *UFO HANDBOOK No.1* edited by Malcolm Bull. The Spring 1965 BJ&B recorded the death of George Adamski. John Cleary-Baker took over as editor from Charles Stickland, who was ostensibly having trouble keeping up the schedule. On 8 May 1965, the Oxford University UFO Group hosted a conference in Oxford at which Antoni Szachnowski proposed the urgent need to form a global federation of UFO research societies. Strange sights and particularly sounds were reported from the environs of Warminster. Emly Rees, then Chairman of Warminster Urban District Council, called a meeting on 27 August 1965. Some 300 people packed into the Town Hall and many more were left outside. Dr Doel and 'Dr' John Cleary-Baker were on the platform as representatives of BUFORA. The meeting was hotly illuminated by an ITN camera crew and ended inconclusively after two and a half hours. Dr Doel and Lionel Beer investigated an alleged landing report at Scoriton, on the edge of Dartmoor, which later turned out to be a notorious contactee claim. In November 1965, Mike Holt took over from Mrs 'Lee' Lloyd as Hon. Secretary. At the same time Gordon Creighton (footnotes) became President (Gordon took over as editor of FSR in 1982) and Lionel Beer became Vice-Chairman. The Winter BJ&B had an article by Alan Sharp, which had been inspired by a rash of puzzling craters that year. Alan claimed natural causes.

On 10 September 1966 the Halifax Branch hosted a convention at the Textile Hall, Bradford, where Arthur Shuttlewood of Warminster was a speaker and insisted on meeting his own expenses. On 22 October the Cambridge University UFO Group hosted the Annual Congress in the Union Society Chamber in the University. The Summer BJ&B adopted a new cover and became simply *BUFORA JOURNAL* (BJ). It carried a letter from Dr Geoffrey Doel to Dr Edward Condon, Director of the University of Colorado UFO Investigation Panel, offering BUFORA's help. Dr Condon applied for BUFORA membership and was accepted with high expectations - subsequently disappointed. The national sky-watch day on 24 June 1967, organised by Edgar Hatvany was a major event and received good media coverage. Lawrence Moore was in charge of a BBC *Panorama* camera crew and filmed at Pewley Downs, Guildford. The BUFORA *Mobile Unit*, a Thames van refurbished by Arnold West, made its appearance on TV. It had been intended as a mobile investigation headquarters, but for logistical reasons it was under-used.

The Autumn BJ noted the death of American author and broadcaster, Frank Edwards and contact claimant, Ernest Bryant of Scoriton. Both died on 24 June 1967 - the 20th anniversary of Kenneth Arnold's sighting! In October, Captain Ivar Mackay took the Chair. There were now 18 member-societies and branches and membership had risen to 600. The Merseyside UFO Research Group hosted a conference in Central Hall, Liverpool, on 4 November 1967. Membership rose to 715 with three branches in addition to the 18 member-societies.

In June 1968 the *Mobile Unit* toured the northern counties and Scotland meeting investigators and local groups. At Loch Ness it contrasted with the six green Bedford vans sited around the Loch and manned by volunteers from the Loch Ness Phenomena Investigation Bureau (Ltd). 'Monster' sighting forms were found to be very similar to UFO report forms. The BFSB hosted an excellent convention at a hotel in Bristol on 20 July and DIGAP hosted a conference at the Friends Meeting House, Manchester on 12 October 1968. Due to irreconcilable differences, Nigel Stephenson was asked to resign from the Committee. Stephen Smith was appointed as Director of Research. An important article appeared in the Autumn 1968 BJ written by Dr Doel: *Did Pennington Build the 1897 Airship?* Charles Gibbs-Smith of the Victoria and Albert Museum "Britain's leading aviation historian" let it be known in *SPACELINK* magazine published by Lionel Beer, that he thought not.

A major venture co-ordinated by Lionel was BUFORA's participation in the *DAILY MAIL's* "New Year Show" at Olympia, 28.12.68. to 11.01.69. On the 1000 square foot stand special features included a diorama with a vanishing saucer, the renovated *Mobile Unit* used as a centre-piece and Peter Johnson's electronic UFO detector. Show attendance was put at 150,000 and BUFORA gained about 120 new members. In 1969 the *Contact Section* had had a chequered history and BUFORA was happy to let it pass to COS-MOS, a group run by Norman Oliver. On 22 February 1969 a research seminar was held at Cambridge University; on 6 May the BFSB held a small conference at Shirehampton Hall, Bristol, and on 6 September the Halifax Branch of BUFORA hosted a conference at Cezar's Hotel, Wakefield. By 1970 member-societies were down to twelve with branches in Halifax and Northern Ireland. At the AGM on 3.10.70. a motion was carried, *That the Association widen its scope to include FORTEAN and para-physical phenomena, in cases when such may be deemed to have a bearing on the solution to the UFO problem.* Mrs Aletheia Lloyd who had done much secretarial work and was well-liked, died of cancer on 21 January 1971. In mid-1971 Captain Ivar Mackay resigned from the chair for policy reasons and Lionel Beer's detailed Chairman's Report appeared in the Spring 1972 BJ. At the 1971 AGM, Roger Stanway took the chair and his friend Anthony Pace took over the work of Stephen Smith, who had edited some nine newsy *Research Bulletins*. Roger and Anthony came to the attention of ufologists through their publication of *UFOS UNIDENTIFIED UNDENIABLE*, a report of their investigations into a flap in the Potteries area of Staffordshire. Roger was a young solicitor who wanted to take BUFORA up-market and increase its standing with the *scientific community*. So he moved away from the original concept of member-societies who could follow-up local UFO reports. Considerable time and effort was devoted to the ATV film taken on a farm near Banbury on 26.10.71, which occurred at the peak of a flap in the South Midlands. It was eventually published by BUFORA as a booklet. Roger's initiatives also led to a booklet entitled: *A GUIDE TO THE UFO PHENOMENON*. *THE TIMES* mentioned it and its *fuzzy photos*. BUFORA duly received an order for the book with "fuzzy photos". Roger stimulated discussion amongst the membership on policy and long term aims, while noting that membership had fallen to 400 and funds were depleted. His solution was a 60% increase in the subscription to £2.40. He also advocated the establishment of a permanent research HQ at Newchapel Observatory, Staffordshire to support BUFORA's *scientific respectability*. The home-made stone-built structure was on a wind-swept hilltop. A telephone was installed but plans to man it during office hours fell through. *UFO INVESTIGATION*, BUFORA's comprehensive manual for investigators appeared. Roger Stanway's most noteworthy act was to establish BUFORA as a *Company Limited by Guarantee* in 1975, as a preliminary step to gaining charitable status. For technical reasons the application was unsuccessful, but BUFORA continues with its interlinked roles of research, investigation and education (eg. meetings and publications).

(c) BUFORA: by Lionel Beer - published September 1983
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NOTES: Denis Plunkett was erroneously reported as being killed while on RAF National Service. He still runs the BFSB in Bristol in 2003, the world's oldest UFO society. The Earl of Clancarty was a BUFORA Vice-President; he died in 1988. Nigel Stephenson died on 30 January 1996 in Scotland. Lawrence Moore helped run the 1962 inaugural convention; produced and directed a UFO documentary for Central TV and he lives in Fulham. Gordon Greighton died on 16 July 2003 aged 95; he was still editing FSR. Lionel Beer published *SPACELINK* between 1967-1971; he founded TEMS in 1992.