

*THE MONTHLY
JOURNAL OF
CROP CIRCLES
AND BEYOND*

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**Olivers
Castle
Revisited**

**Special
Investigative
Issue**

**THAT Video:
Sorting Myth
From Fact**

"Our sense of security, in this culture, comes from our relative certainty of being able to predict what's going to happen. But given the infinite nature of reality and our finite grasp of events, the best we can do with causality is predict what's likely to happen" TOM GRAVES

Apologies that this issue reaches you late. This is because I have been moving house! Thus SC has a new editorial address, which is as follows:

13 DOWNSVIEW COTTAGES, COOKSBRIDGE, LEWES, EAST SUSSEX, BN8 4TA.

The telephone number REMAINS THE SAME. If everyone in regular contact with me could also note this, it'll save some 'new address' cards! Any letters, articles, or enquiries that relate to the content of SC should now be sent to this address. Enquiries about mailing or subscriptions should continue to be sent to Di and Jason at the Portslade address.

This month, we have a first - an entire issue devoted to one subject, namely the video allegedly taken of the Olivers Castle formation appearing. If this seems like overkill, forgive us, but the palaver surrounding this warrants a lengthy piece to examine properly the pros and cons of its authenticity. This is the fullest attempt to nail down the circumstances surrounding this controversial event to have appeared in print anywhere yet and we've tried to give what we believe to be the most comprehensive guide available to what is either an astonishing step forward for circle research or an elaborate deception. Next month, normal service will be resumed and we won't cover the video again until substantial new evidence comes forward.

Meanwhile, another controversy is cranking up. An old-time hoax-claimant, Rod Dickinson, has stated on the Internet that he knows who made the huge 'Julia Set' formation at Stonehenge and, by implication, the other two 'fractals' of this summer. Such verbal claims are nothing new, but this time none other than Colin Andrews has publicly accepted them as true on his own web site, and apparently believes Rob Irving to be responsible... Yet these claims are *provably* false, as we shall discuss next issue. Given that these three formations were the only ones Colin had appeared to consider genuine in 1996, we presume this is his resignation statement as a crop circle researcher!

On another note, conspiracy theorists will of course have seen that yet another Mars probe went kaput last month. But here's another oddity - whatever happened to all the incredible photos of Jupiter we were promised from *Galileo*, which has now been in Jovian orbit for a year? So far only a dozen shots at most have been seen, with barely a fanfare!

Lastly, an apology to Steve Alexander. The caption to last month's front cover photo should, of course, have read 'Streatley, Nr Barton Le Clay, Bedfordshire', and not 'Olivers Castle'. Grovels all round.

ANDY THOMAS



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Front Cover: Oliver's Castle, Wiltshire, August 1996. Photograph by Lucy Pringle.

There are some sagas in the history of crop circles that you just know are going to fall into croppie legend and folklore even as they are happening. The Doug and Dave shenanigans, the Jim Schnabel 'CIA' taped telephone conversations, the arguments over the origins of the 1993 Bythorn mandala formation... Like all legends, the passage of time and the human inability to report a simple fact correctly begins to blur the reality of what actually happened and the mythical versions of events take precedence as the accepted story.

The alleged video of the Olivers Castle 1996 'snowflake' formation appearing in seconds under a series of floating white lights is just such an event. As with the aforementioned legends it won't be until a year or so from now that, with the gift of hindsight,

we'll be able to get a perspective on what this whole thing was actually about and some kind of consensus opinion one way or the other will have been reached by some unspoken agreement amongst the circular community. By then, however, the *actual* truth may well have become a hazy mix of myth and anecdote.

The fact is that *right now* we find ourselves bang in the middle of the furore surrounding this simple but potentially shattering piece of video. Already mythology, received wisdom and incorrect third-hand information is beginning to be stirred into the broth, so NOW is the time to try and pin down the exact sequence of events and examine possible implications of the video, whether authentic or not, while we've still got a grip on all the reliable sources available to us. This is the purpose of the lengthy investigation which follows. Discussion of the for and against arguments which have been put forward for the authenticity of the footage are looked at in detail and some new aspects, not revealed before, are uncovered.

So far, most of the coverage published on the Internet and elsewhere has been generally against the video being genuine, when there are actually unaired arguments to suggest otherwise, so Accusations, in which the sceptic view is put by the prosecution are countered with Possible Explanations from the defence. Neither mean that SC is endorsing the video as genuine or false. Readers must make their own minds up within the whole of this article.

In SC 57, Michael Glickman gave us his perspective on the video. Since then, more information has come to light and this article is to be seen as a wider and more

detailed look at the events from all sides. Colin Andrews, in particular, has sent us an alternative report to Michael's version, and his comments and corrections are incorporated. To have read Michael's article is not necessary to understand this but if you have it to hand it will be referred back to and stands as a good companion piece, containing a more detailed description of the

actual video sequence than outlined here. The events below have been constructed from the reports available, and from contacting many of the people involved. Throughout, to avoid ambiguity, names of all involved are included. Where accounts conflict, this is noted. We have tried to be as accurate and fair as possible - even so, some errors may have unknowingly crept in. If so, inform us and we'll be glad to correct any inaccuracies in a

future issue, and indeed would welcome anything that brings this whole thing closer to the truth than to the myth.

The Beginning

On Saturday night August 10th 1996, John Wheyleigh (his real name we assume - see below) told friends at The Barge pub at Honeystreet, Alton Barnes, that he was going up onto Olivers Castle with a video to look out for UFOs or crop circles. At about 5.00am on the rainy Sunday morning, John claims that his attention was attracted by a sound like "crickets". Directing his gaze to the apparent source of the sound, he witnessed lights moving about in the fields below him. He quickly reached for his camcorder. It would not work. Some video cameras have an automatic protection facility to stop the recording heads being used when damp is in the air. John claims that after a couple of attempts, the camcorder started to work and the lights reappeared in the field almost as soon as he began to film, leading to the sequence described below.

Accusation: *Dew-protection facilities are very difficult to override and it is unlikely that it could have been overcome so quickly.* **Possible Explanation:** Dew-protection is erratic and will sometimes come off with persuasion. And if the story is a fabrication, why mention such a potentially damaging detail unnecessarily?

The Video Sequence Itself

The bootleg version of the video doing the rounds of cropies now (it is apparently edited from the original), is all that is currently available to us and shows the fol-

- FEATURES -

FLAKY: THE FULL STORY OF THE OLIVERS CASTLE VIDEO

ANDY THOMAS delves deep to discover the truth behind what *may* be the first ever video of a formation appearing... Or then again, may not...

lowing: First we see a paused long-shot of fields as seen looking south from the embankment of Olivers Castle, the ancient hillfort at Devizes in Wiltshire. The pause is then taken off (again, one assumes this is editing) and the camera zooms out slightly. Then the sequence cuts to an extreme zoom-in onto one particular field. Almost as soon as this part starts, two glowing white balls of light cross rapidly from right to left and back again, turning a semi-circle as they go. Some have estimated the lights must be travelling at about 80mph and about 20' above the crop. As the lights cross the centre of the field, the snowflake pattern begins to appear, central circle first, then some of the outer ones. The pathways and extreme outer circles then arrive as the first two lights exit. They appear to wink out briefly as they pass under power cables or go through a hedge - this is uncertain, although some claim you can see the hedge being illuminated by the lights as they pass through it. However, power cables run across the field directly in front of the hedge in the video's field of vision and it's hard to be sure. Another light then enters from left to right. As this light crosses the centre of the field, it either splits into two or another light fades into view beneath it (this is also unclear). These lights then arc back into the frame from right to left, turn a semi-circle and exit right, one of the lights suddenly speeding away ahead of the other. The image then pauses and the sequence ends. With pauses, the entire sequence is about 40 seconds. Without, the actual sequence of the balls of light and the formation appearing is 18 seconds. The snowflake itself arrives fully in about 7 seconds.

Technical Pros And Cons

Before moving on to see how the video came to public attention, let's look at a number of accusations that have been made against the footage being genuine, on grounds which relate to the way in which it appears to have been taken. This leads some to say that the sequence is fabricated with special effects.

Accusation: *The camera doesn't follow the movement of the lights but stays central, allowing the formation to appear suspiciously centre frame.* **Possible Explanation:** John trained his camera on the field where he first saw lights. The camera appears to be on full zoom. Given how quickly the lights appeared he might well have not had time to actively think about what he was doing and simply kept the camcorder trained where the general action was taking place - to have moved the camera to follow the lights would have risked missing something. Training a video on full zoom to track a moving object is not easy. It could simply be fortuitous that the formation appeared in full view. It does not, in any case appear exactly centre-frame as some claim.

Accusation: *The image doesn't wobble as one would expect with a hand-held camera.* **Possible explanation:** It most certainly does! Why some have said there is no

camera shake is a mystery. The image shakes substantially at times and the camera is most certainly not on a tripod as others have suggested. If it doesn't shake quite as much as some might expect, they should remember this: a) Many cameras have a digital anti-shake facility these days which is very effective at eliminating image wobble. That's not to say though that John Wheyleigh used such a device (it is not openly known what kind of camera was used). This leads to: b) Maybe those who expect more wobble aren't as good at using video cameras as Wheyleigh might be. In fact the amount of shake on the image is one of the reasons some have suggested such a sequence would take a long time to fake - every shake of the picture (the theory running that raw footage of the field would have to be taken at some point if the sequence was to be faked) would have to be digitally accounted for when super-imposing special effects of the lights and the pattern.

Accusation: *Wheyleigh doesn't sound as suitably excited on the soundtrack of the video, as one might expect.* **Possible Explanation:** The words "as one might expect" are the key here. How do any of us know how we would react in such a situation and who are we to judge the emotions of others? The bootleg copies of the video generally available don't have a soundtrack attached, but the original video does, in which John is heard breathing and simply muttering something about wondering where the lights have gone at one point. If holding a recording video camera with a microphone, how many would start to whoop and yell if by themselves? Well, perhaps some, but just as many would simply get on with the job in hand of recording what was going on and then collapse into vocal exhilaration afterwards. For all we know, Wheyleigh's heart may have been pumping vigorously and his legs turning to jelly. Everyone expresses things in different ways. It's also worth remembering that Wheyleigh may not have known he had captured a formation appearing - there is reason to suspect that, if the footage is genuine, he was at this time only aware of the moving lights, as we shall see.

Accusation: *The shadows and light on the field and formation are wrong for the alleged time of the day.* **Possible Explanation:** One researcher has claimed the way light and shadows falling on the edges of the circles which appear are in the incorrect places, which is more indicative of film of the already existing pattern having been taken through dark filters in mid-afternoon (to be taken away for the reverse-engineering of its 'appearance'). But we know that the formation was there by lunchtime on Sunday 11th August at least because a number of people (see below) visited the formation at around midday. Wheyleigh was already telephoning The Barge at around the same time to say he had taken his video by then (admittedly the video had not actually been seen at this point). The snowflake was certainly not there the previous day to be filmed as Michael

Glickman and others had stood at the top of Olivers Castle the evening before.

Accusation: *There is no shadow marking the boundary of the central circle as it appears to form, appearing only at the last second.* **Possible explanation:** In fact, some have pointed out, thought about carefully, there *wouldn't* be a shadow as the crops were laying down if the crop was slowly spiralling outward, because what you would be looking at would be a continuous rolling 'wave' of seed heads falling against one another, with no boundary defined until the circle reached its final chosen perimeter and the crop settled down finally, only then leaving a clear edge.

A Military Presence?

Despite scaremongering, there seems little strangeness to the fact that while leaving Olivers Castle Wheyleigh claims he saw a group of soldiers coming toward him. One of them (an "officer" according to Colin Andrews, not a sergeant as Glickman reported) allegedly said "Did you get what you came for?", leading some to think there was some kind of military conspiracy surrounding the appearance of the formation that night. As the Territorial Army have barracks at nearby Roundway and often train using the local landmarks, there is nothing to suggest any truth in this idea and their presence and the remark passed was probably coincidental.

The Video Arrives

At lunchtime on Sunday 11th August, the public telephone rang at The Barge. It was raining heavily outside and not many people were present. Video-maker Lee Winterston, playing on a fruit machine near the telephone, took the call. According to Winterston and most accounts, John Wheyleigh asked to speak to American croppie Peter Sorenson or Colin Andrews. However, Colin Andrews and American cohort Freddie Silva claim Wheyleigh asked to speak directly to Silva. Whatever the case, Wheyleigh was on the telephone for only about a minute and said he had videoed some strange balls of lights that morning. Note that neither here nor in the evening did he state he had filmed a formation appearing.

Wheyleigh finally turned up with the video at The Barge about 22.50 that night, when only a few people were left in the bar. In an Internet posting by Freddie Silva, responding to Michael Glickman's article in SC 57, he claims that the only people present that night were himself, Lee Winterston, John Huckvale, Nick Nicholson and Jane Ross. In fact one other person was present - aerial photographer Michael Hubbard - who Silva doesn't mention.

Nicholson remembers that Wheyleigh, a youngish man with shoulder-length hair and a small beard, was

nervous and shy, but seemingly genuine.

Two Videos?

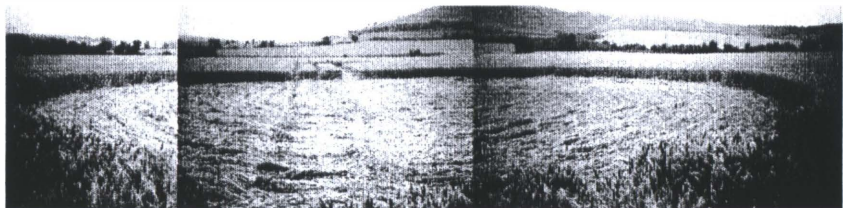
This is where things begin to get complicated. Wheyleigh ran his master video several times through the camera's tiny viewfinder to those present, despite telling them that this was a borrowed camera which had a habit of chewing up tapes. Winterston and Silva appear to hold that the video shown that night was the same one receiving exposure now, with the formation appearing under the lights. However, Nicholson claims that the video they saw that night did NOT show the pattern appearing, and that it was already visible before the lights began. He believes more than one version of the video exists. Hubbard remembers lights being visible, but like Nicholson states that they seemed closer up and taken from a different angle from that of the 'standard' video. Yet he doesn't remember any formation being visible at all!

How can these discrepancies be explained? It has been suggested that given the dawn light of the sequence the snowflake might not have showed up over the small viewfinder, and that the contrast of the lights might have burned out its image under those conditions. However, when Barry Reynolds experimented with playing the video back through a camera viewfinder, the formation's appearance was quite obvious. Could it be that Hubbard and Nicholson simply weren't concentrating or are there in fact *two* separate videos of the same event, one showing the formation appearing, another showing the lights from an angle where the snowflake can't be seen? US researcher Erik Beckjord has even claimed a second cameraman is visible in the standard Wheyleigh footage, further down the hill! (No-one else has yet managed to spot this.) If there are two separate videos, how is it that Winterston and Silva seem to think the video shown that night is the same one we've all heard about? And why hasn't the second cameraman, unless he's in some peculiar conspiracy with Wheyleigh to *hold back* evidence that the snowflake really did appear in front of cameras, come forward, unless Wheyleigh himself had set up two cameras at different levels that night? This mystery has yet to be resolved satisfactorily.

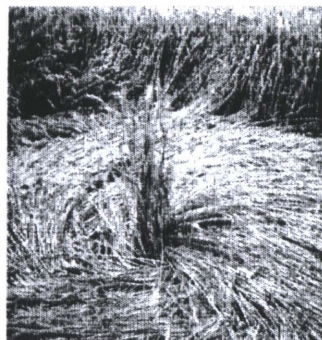
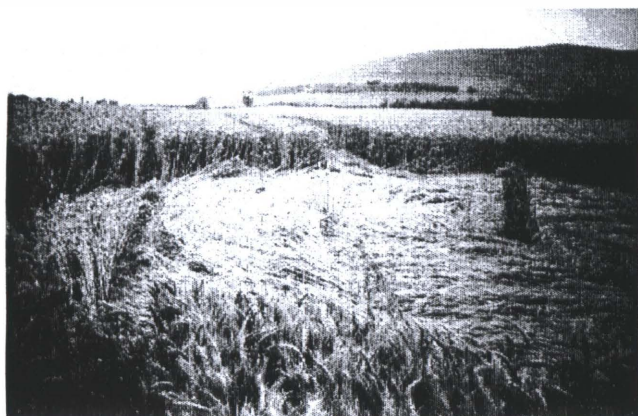
What Did Wheyleigh See?

Aside from the possibilities of there being two videos, a crucial point is that Wheyleigh never claimed he had filmed a formation appearing. But if we assume there is only one video, showing the pattern appearing, this leads to the following:

Accusation: *If the footage originally showed it, why didn't Wheyleigh notice that a formation appeared under the lights at the time?* **Possible Explanation:** The light would have been far less in reality than shown in the video sequence (video cameras are very good at



(Montage)



compensating for low light conditions). Wheyleigh's eyes were drawn to the field by the initial lights; he put his eye to the viewfinder and started videoing. It's possible that in the low light of dawn and squinting through a hand-held camcorder, he may well not have noticed what was going on underneath the lights. When the activity was over and he put down the camera, presumably he must have been aware then that a formation was present, but until his eyes had been drawn there by the lights perhaps he couldn't be sure that it hadn't already been there in the gloom before. Presumably he eventually realised what he had actually filmed when he viewed it himself over a full monitor or it was pointed out to him by others.

The Video Reaches Colin Andrews

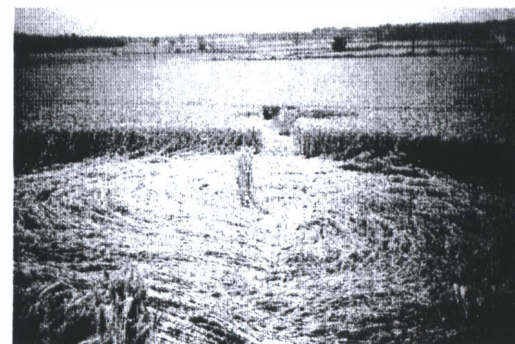
At this point, Colin Andrews, who has been instrumental in publicising the video, and latterly chastising Wheyleigh, became aware of the video. Contrary to some reports, outlined in Michael Glickman's article, Colin Andrews, in a personal communication to SC, explains how a copy of the video fell into his hands:

"The picture Glickman paints is that Freddie Silva had ties with me, was used by me to slip in under everybody's noses to get my hands on the film and then run back to the USA."

"When Freddie Silva met John that first evening in The Barge, it was Freddie who suggested he should have me look at it and have it analysed. John was very keen to do this and Freddie telephoned me immediately from The Barge with John still in attendance. I was not able to travel from Andover. Freddie and CPR United States co-ordinator Jane Ross took his telephone number and gave him mine."

"Lee Winterston also made contact with me the following day, to tell me about the footage, saying he was going to meet John again and would inform me of the arrangements, thus allowing me to see the film. Lee had difficulty reaching him. Several days passed while I was travelling in Wales during which time I received several telephone messages from John asking me to meet with him. He suggested the Waggon & Horses (pub at Beckhampton) on Saturday 17th August at 2.00pm. My aircraft departure time for the USA was the following day at 10.00am."

Colin, with his wife Synthia, met Wheyleigh as agreed. According to Colin, when Wheyleigh turned up, he had a number of other people with him, as if there to protect him. He seemed nervous and eager to get the meeting over as soon as possible but did hand over a copy of the videotape. He suggested that Colin could have 10% of any money produced by the showing of the footage. Colin believes the rendezvous was observed by a



number of suspicious characters hanging around the pub, although he admits there is no proof this was the case.

"When Michael Glickman says I said I had to subject the film to analysis, that is blatantly untrue. John pulled out of his pocket a hand-written contract which he had already prepared, giving me his authority to use the film in any way I wanted. He asked me to have it analysed, although this would have been my intention anyway. I did not imply it was fake and was in no position at that time to have a view one way or the other."

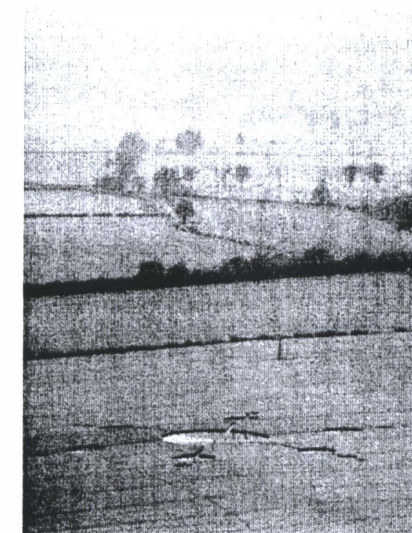
The next day, Colin left England for his home in the US as planned, although he is insistent there was nothing untoward in this seemingly abrupt departure.

"The aircraft arrangements were made five months before. I was not to know that this whole thing would appear on my doorstep at the eleventh hour."

Enter Sorenson

About this time, John Wheyleigh made contact with Peter Sorenson, who borrowed the master tape. He took it to Lee Winterston's video studio in Swindon where the image was examined. Winterston wanted to obtain the rights to use the video sequence in his forthcoming crop circle documentary which he had been filming throughout 1996, but was unable to obtain Wheyleigh's blessing. Sorenson, however, was given a copy and was

CENTRE PAGES: Photographs taken by **TERRY WHITNALL** and **JOHN WILLIAMS** inside the Olivers Castle Snowflake formation on the day of its appearance. **BELOW:** View of the formation as seen similarly in the video footage, taken by **ANDY THOMAS**.



granted permission to use the sequence in his own annual video round up of the summer's crop formations.

The video, by popular demand, and in the custody of Sorenson, was subsequently shown first at Francine Blake's house at Etchilhampton, Wiltshire, and again at The Barge, in front of many who travelled there especially to see it. The general reaction was one of astonishment, although some were sceptical.

Disappearing Act

From the time that Colin Andrews met with him to be given the tape, Wheyleigh became *incommunicado*, his whereabouts unknown. The only contact number available for him was for a mobile telephone, which was allegedly never answered. However, no other researchers (including SC) were given the chance to try to contact Wheyleigh as those with his number would not pass it on. Contrary to Glickman, Andrews claims he *did* try to contact Wheyleigh on his arrival back in the States: *"I did leave many messages on John's telephone answering service and am still doing so - none have been returned. I am not alone, others are also trying and without any luck. He made NO calls at all to my office. If John has come to 'question my intentions', it is hard for me to know his reasoning. If he also has said I have not kept him informed, etc, then clearly this must ques-*

tion HIS intentions."

The fact that Wheyleigh has seemingly gone to ground, communicating with no-one, has provided the spark for the attacks on his character, leading to claims led by Andrews and Sorenson that he is simply part of a much wider attempt to fool crop circle researchers and damage the credibility of those looking into the phenomenon.

Accusation: *Wheyleigh's unreliability and unwillingness to come forward and speak openly on what he witnessed must mean he and his video are fraudulent.*
Possible Explanation: Those who met Wheyleigh appear to have been struck by how shaken he appeared to be at what he had filmed and by the very strong reaction shown towards his video. When he realised how important his video footage might be, perhaps he decided he wanted no more part in the process of disseminating it, scared of all the attention and wishing to keep a low profile, passing the task on to Andrews and Sorenson instead.

Private Investigations

Wheyleigh's reluctance to be contacted led Colin Andrews to make some enquiries about his background and character. The elusive video-taker claimed to be attending, or to have once attended, Nottingham Trent University. Nick Nicholson contacted the University to try and reach Wheyleigh. He was told that no-one of that name was known of there.

Hiring a private detective agency (rather unwisely announced on the Internet), Andrews did manage to track down a person called John Wabe, who *had* attended the University. According to Andrews' Internet reports, this person lived at Maple Grove, Bath, Avon, and had worked there on 'American Studies'. He now worked for a Bristol video-editing company. Calls made to the alleged home of Wabe produced only a man of "around 40 years" claiming never to have heard of either Wabe or Wheyleigh. Because he denies knowledge of either, some are convinced this man is clearly part of some huge conspiracy! It is possible he is telling the truth and that the existence of a John Wabe at the same University is simply a red herring of coincidence. However, Andrews is convinced he is on to something here. Until the results from his investigations are released fully, judgement must be reserved.

Accusation: *Because Wheyleigh hasn't come forward to clear his name in all this, he must be guilty as charged.*
Possible Explanation: Given that it has been globally announced that private detectives are on his tail, Wheyleigh may now be running scared even more, increasingly reluctant to be subjected to that sort of scrutiny. Whilst odd, it is not necessarily indicative that he and others faked the video.

Distancing and Denial

After initial press releases and Internet statements sounding excited about the footage, the grey areas over Wheyleigh's identity have convinced Andrews to exercise "caution" and publicly state that the video is almost certainly fake - although there is no technical evidence against the video itself to show this (see below) as he himself admits.

Andrews denies allegations that he has been promoting the video as his own in the US, and has actually gone out of his way to distance himself from it:

"I made no telephone calls to radio or television stations about this video. And for the record, I have not accepted any money for the video, although I have had offers from the media and researchers alike. The one radio interview I took part in and to which Michael Glickman must refer, was the Art Bell show. I received a telephone call from Linda Moulton Howe asking me if I would be interviewed by her on the programme. I agreed to do so and at NO time promoted "my video". I hope Linda would agree I answered only the questions she posed and was very open and honest with my answers."

Meanwhile, Peter Sorenson, despite also believing the video a hoax, is still intending to include it on his next video, although he was given a hard time about this on a recent US radio show. His argument is that it should be shared so that others can see it for themselves... Sorenson has also reportedly taken part in the US show *Sightings* (shown on the Discovery satellite channel over here), decrying the footage as fake, but Andrews declined to take part. Andrews has since agreed to appear on another US television programme, presumably to proclaim the video a hoax.

Video Analysis

Aside from all the espionage surrounding Wheyleigh, what of the video itself and the circumstances in which it was produced?

Copies of the video have now been looked at by several prominent people qualified in video-making, and, to date, all but one group have been highly impressed by the video's apparently realistic qualities. Most notably, Michael Glickman gave a copy to John Stevenson of the Jim Henson workshops, who have produced special effects for many Hollywood movies. After their team looked at the video, they stated that if it is fake, it must have taken a lot of sophisticated equipment, money and a lot of time to achieve and they were amazed by the sequence's authentic feel.

Pete Glastonbury and Steve Page of the Devon crop circle group gave a copy of the tape to Professor of Electronics Philip Gurr and Philip Head of Exeter University's video and television department. They were happy to go on the record to state that they would be

unable to fake such a sequence even with their advanced equipment. In their opinion, only the most sophisticated and very expensive 'Avid' digital editing suites, available to very few, would be capable. Their detailed analysis could show no signs that the video had been tampered with. Others, including Colin Andrews' own 'experts' have echoed these remarks. Others still, amongst them Bruce Maccabees in the US, who has examined many UFO films in the past, are looking at the video at the time of writing.

Only Lee Winterston and John Huckvale have voiced disquiet over the footage and they link this with a quality known as *double field intensity* and *single field intensity*. Video images are made up of two separate 'fields' and when tinkered with digitally, one will apparently give way to the other, and they believe this is the case when the lights start to appear in the snowflake footage, giving them cause to suspect special effects have been applied. However, what the telltale signs for this are, and how they discovered them, have not been released. Until this information is made available, this remains uncertain. Winterston, while enthusiastic, believes generally that most crop formations are man-made. No others who have studied the footage from a technical point of view have yet produced the same results. A Brighton video editing company, Victoria Real, who have examined the video and are impressed with it, have cautioned that if the video was examined on an Avid editing suite, going through the sequence frame by frame will only reveal the first field *anyway* and that it is not possible to see the second field for comparison unless the original camera master is available. This method of observation, in their opinion, is not entirely reliable.

Nancy Talbott of the BLT laboratories in the US has echoed this, pointing out that the only truly accurate *scientific* analysis that can be made on a piece of video is that drawn from looking at *the original master tape from the camcorder* - NOT a copy, which degrades the image substantially from an analysis aspect.

Two Scenarios

If the video sequence is a fake, the following points have yet to be satisfactorily explained. In time perhaps they will be, but at the time of writing, they remain undressed:

i) Wheyleigh claims he took his video at about 5.00am. The formation was certainly not there the evening before. In one scenario, he would still have needed to have filmed the pattern first if he was intending to take the video back to a studio to 'reverse-engineer' the formations 'appearance' and add the balls of light. First of all he would have had to have been very, very lucky to have found the first new crop circle of the day so early to film it by chance unless he had access to satellite photograph technology to know where to look (some have actually suggested this!). If we assume that he

already had a video ready to show at 12.00 lunchtime when he telephoned The Barge to see if anyone was there to see it, this would give a maximum of 7 hours in which to fake the very elaborate sequence. Part of this time must be written off as travelling time. It takes 15 minutes to get off Olivers Castle itself and there are no known video studios nearer than Swindon, so lop off another 45 minutes and that leaves 6 hours in which to create from scratch such a feat of image processing. Expert opinion so far has suggested that this is an impossible time in which to do this. Even if we assume that the phone call to The Barge might have been a ruse and that the video wasn't ready to be shown until the evening when he finally turned up, that still only gives a day. According to the Jim Hensons workshops a Hollywood special effects company wouldn't dream of knocking up such a sequence in that time. All this suggests that the time factor alone makes fabrication unlikely.

This hasn't, however, stopped Paul Vigay trying to emulate the sequence using his home computer setup. He claims to have produced his own version of the film on his gear in 3 hours. The results are apparently convincing to some. But Paul had a template to work from and wasn't trying to create something from the beginning - which is far harder.

ii) Another scenario to be considered is that the video sequence was fabricated *first*, by filming the empty field a few days previously, taking the raw footage back and adding on an imaginary formation and balls of light. This however means that the pattern would then have to be created *in reality* on the night it appeared by crack hoaxers. To create this *at exactly the right angle to the topography of the land and towards the camera* to the one fabricated in the video (they match perfectly) would be excessively difficult. As for allegations of hoaxing - see below.

One other possibility could be considered: that balls of light really were filmed over the formation but that Wheyleigh decided to go one better and doctor the sequence to show the pattern actually appearing.

The Formation Itself

The snowflake is very similar to a formation that appeared at nearby Etchilhampton in 1993. Thus it seems to follow symbolism seen before. This aspect has been overlooked so far. A quote from Kenneth Meadows' *Shamanic Experience* (Element books) describes snowflake symbolism as "...A symbol of multi-dimensional reality... a two-dimensional image to indicate that there is a central shaft or spindle and an 'above' and 'below' as well as four directions of left, right, forward and behind. So it could be regarded as sky above, earth beneath, west, east, north and south". The pattern at Olivers Castle was approximately 390' across and appeared in wheat.

"Bristling with equipment!"

Accusation: *The formation at Olivers Castle was clearly a fake perpetrated by Wheyleigh or a team connected with him as the lay inside was a complete mess and there were many broken stalks.* **Rebuttal:** Simply untrue. Many who are claiming the video is fake also make the assumption that the formation is fake, without any grounds whatsoever. Most hoax claims remain forever unsubstantiated, so this is not unusual. However, the grounds for believing this pattern was man-made can be traced back to remarks which first appeared in one of Colin Andrew's Internet statements and have since been repeated elsewhere that the floor-lay of the snowflake was messy and that the stalks were substantially smashed. These remarks are attributed to a "CPR team" (Circles Phenomena Research). This team appears to have consisted of Freddie Silva and one unnamed individual, who entered the formation the day after its arrival. Silva, in his own later Internet letter, states:

"...The paths were cockeyed, the floor lay was a complete disaster, the walls of the circles were messy and fanned-out... This was already a mess the day after its appearance"

Freddie Silva is fully entitled to his opinion. However, one can only assume that his criterion for judging the quality of formations is quite different from that of many as his view flies in the face of the views from others who entered the snowflake. (Silva also claims to have invented a litmus test for genuine circles which involves infra-red photography and this also apparently proves the formation a dud. But in the absence of any data on this technique, this remains a personal litmus test for him alone.) Those who saw the snowflake on the day of its appearance, and in the days after, considered the quality to be as good as many of the other designs of 1996. I entered the formation with Michael Glickman and Patricia Murray on the following Wednesday and the condition of the lay was still impressive then. The standing centres and pronounced swirls were quite exquisite, very reminiscent of the centres of the 'DNA' formation at Alton Barnes from June and the triple Julia Set at Windmill Hill in July. I have a set of slides taken inside showing this.

At lunchtime on the Sunday, only six hours or so after it arrived, a group comprising Terry Whitnall, John Williams, Michael Hubbard and Lee Winterston (presumably after taking the call at The Barge) went to see the snowflake. The weather was drizzling, with low cloud. Ironically, Terry Whitnall had also spent the previous night up on Olivers Castle, but had the ill-fortune to be sitting on the other side of the hill to John Wheyleigh, and could neither confirm nor deny his alleged sighting. However, he knew that it had been begun raining at about 4.00am, and the rain had become heavy and continued throughout the morning. As the group walked through the wet formation, they left very visible muddy footprints as they went. Michael

Hubbard confirms that there were NO such footprints inside when they arrived. With the exception of Winterston, who is generally sceptical about pictograms and felt negative toward the snowflake once there, the rest of the group, according to Hubbard, who have visited many circles between them, were happy with the look of it. Whitnall and Williams took photographs inside.

When I went to visit the formation two days after, we met Peter Sorenson and two others leaving the site. I asked Peter what he thought and he replied along the lines of "Yep, it's a good one". A few weeks later, Peter had changed his mind.

The floor lay was not, then, a "complete disaster". Far from it.

Silva is correct in as much as the very *outer* circles of the pattern were "messy and fanned out". These seemed to have been laid as little more than light brush-strokes, but were actually quite attractive. But this seems less indicative of hoaxing than if they were perfect grapeshot circles, which hoax-claimants continually brag are easy to produce. The other circles of the formation were clear-cut and neat - so why suddenly give up at the edges?

Seen from the air, it is clear that one of the paths of the design is slightly "cockeyed". But not all of them as Silva implies. But then one of the paths of the tetrahedron from the famous 1991 Barbury Castle formation is famously cockeyed, so is that therefore an obvious hoax? By studying photos of many formations from the past, we can see that the crop formations are rarely perfect and pathways are often kinked or bent, but whoever said we were dealing with perfection here? (Interestingly, *geometrically* they are often perfect, but *visually* they are not, for example as evidenced by Professor Gerald Hawkins' findings on the Sussex Sompting 1992 pictogram, as outlined in the book *Fields of Mystery*.)

Silva's views, to which he is perfectly entitled, have been quoted third and fourth hand by people who did not see the formation for themselves, as evidence against the snowflake being 'genuine'. But this is the opinion of one, and people who rely on the information of others to shape their own opinions should be aware that in this case there is another view to be considered. If the pattern was man-made, its quality, in this case, is not the issue on which to judge it. In any case, some believe even the universally-acknowledged very best of crop circles are hoaxes.

George Wingfield, one who holds to this, has stated that the snowflake was almost certainly created by alleged-onetime-hoaxer Rob Irving on the rather inconclusive evidence that Irving had been seen at The Barge the previous day. He believes that Irving is also involved in the supposed faking of the video, together with other alleged hoaxers Rod Dickinson and John Lundberg who George believes had a hand in the

creation of the famous 'alien autopsy' video...

The real truth is that there is, as yet, no conclusive evidence to show that the snowflake was the work of human hoaxers. In any case, the assumption is being made here by the hoax theorists that the formation and the video are the work of the same conspiratorial team. No one seems to have considered that Tom Bloggs may have made the pattern and gone home, and then Joe Bloke came along by chance, filmed it and then rushed back to his elaborate studio and reverse-engineered its 'celestial' appearance.

A puzzle still being debated is that within the floor lay of the snowflake were very visible but thin 6" wide underlay paths which had clearly been put down first, as is consistent with many formations. The video shows the main pathways being created *after* the circles. However, the clarity of the video is not sharp enough to really see whether or not the underlay paths are laid first. They would be so thin that even if they did go down in front of the cameras, it's possible they simply wouldn't be visible in the footage at that distance.

A few crop samples from the snowflake were taken by persons unknown and sent for testing by Dr Levengood of BLT in the States, but there were too few samples and too little was known of how and exactly where they were taken for any conclusive results to be reached. It's ironic that, due to the hostility of the farmer (those who got in either trespassed or paid Mr Butler a hefty bribe), the snowflake was one of the least-visited Wiltshire formations of the year.

General Conclusions

A lot of paranoia is coming to the surface here. The crop circle community is presented with the video it's waited a long time to see and instead of greeting it with open arms, many have assumed it's all a big con trick to catch them out and discredit researchers. Whether the film is genuine or not, that the first conclusion jumped to is that it *must* be a fake, instead of saying it *might* be real, let's sit on the fence and see, says much about the state of crop circle research these days. The Doug and Daves and Jim Schnabels of this world, who have been very few and far between looked at in the big picture, have become a disproportionately huge threat to some people's pride and fragile belief-systems to the point where frightened researchers can't even be seen to take middle ground for fear of being caught out by those 'out to get us'. To be cautious is sensible, but the reaction to the Olivers Castle sequence has bordered on the self-destructive from some quarters.

Part of the problem here is the murkiness surrounding the identity and whereabouts of the elusive John Wheyleigh, and this is admittedly cause for concern. But maybe he will yet come forward when he realises what people are saying about him and that his video is

being shown around the world without his consent or financial gain. As well as at the US *Sightings* show, the video has recently been shown - without Wheyleigh's permission - on a West Country regional BBC programme, and other TV companies are sure to follow suit. Sooner or later, one assumes he will surface. Until he does, and becomes available for questioning about his video and alleged sighting, he will remain a figure of suspicion.

But this elusiveness does not prove the video a fake. Remember the testimony of the 'experts'. No-one has yet come up with any convincing evidence to condemn it as fake. It is possible that Wheyleigh, perhaps being of a perverse nature, really did film such an event but decided, perhaps in collusion with others, to use the opportunity to stir up people by refusing to co-operate in the way one would expect from someone who had taken such an important video. Certainly, one would have expected such a cameraman to have capitalised on such an event and by now be appearing on all the chat shows with a historic piece of footage. But who knows how individuals react when placed into such a position as Wheyleigh? Maybe he really is just running scared, shaken by what he saw and the zealous fervour he has seen in others' eyes when confronted with his footage.

Or... it could all be a huge, hideous fraud, perpetrated with cunning, detailed planning, circle-hoaxing expertise and access to sophisticated video technology and the know-how to use it. If so, who would want to do this? Who would want to spend the time and money to bring it about? Could it just be a bunch of cheeky pranksters or something more sinister, be it the CIA, MI5, the illuminati or whatever?

The same questions have all been asked of the aforementioned 'alien autopsy' film, which bears some strong parallels with this situation. It was suggested that was released into the public domain to 'test the waters' of public reaction to such an event. Could this be something similar? Interestingly, *that* video was generally written off as a fraud, but two years down the line, evidence to finally condemn it has not been forthcoming and new information is turning opinion back to the idea that maybe there was something to it all in the first place, as published recently in *Nexus* and *UFO Magazine*.

Colin Andrews is convinced the whole Olivers Castle thing is a set-up targeted at him specifically but this assumption may be, with the greatest of respect, misplaced. That because Colin said the word "snowflake" in an interview from 1990 is unlikely proof that this is all aimed at him. If it is a set-up, one can assume its sweep is intended to be rather wider than simply reaching one man. Sorenson and Andrews may simply have been used as good starting points to get the word going round, which is exactly what has happened.

At the end of the day, whatever the truth, reasons for why the video must be fake haven't yet convinced.

Even if the video is proved next week to be a fake, the reality is that here and now, we don't have that evidence. One argument, seriously put forward, that the footage shows too much of exactly what researchers would expect is a strange one because it implies that when something comes along which supports the research of a decade and a half, it must be fake. Where's the logic in that? It's a good example of the negative thinking which has infected too many in the crop circle community in recent years. In any case, the video does bring surprises - many had assumed that balls of light seen during the creation of a crop pattern would be seen to move in ways which suggested the shape of the formation. That in the Wheyleigh footage they don't was a revelation to some.

But maybe, after all, it's just a little prank which got out of hand. We shall see.

What If...?

Through all the scandal and intrigue, one thing has been rather overlooked: the implications of the video if it should turn out to be real.

If genuine, what does it tell us about the nature of the balls of light and their behaviour? What does it reveal about the construction of the patterns themselves? Does the footage reveal anything that might give us a clue to the origin of the circles phenomenon?

If this footage is what it appears to be, crop circle research has indeed taken a giant leap. More than this, it is a major step forward from a phenomenon which has seemingly taken every measure to prevent itself being caught in the act by cameras before.

There have been a number of reliable eye-witness accounts of circles forming in seconds, there have been videos of balls of lights floating around already existing formations, but never before have the circle-making forces allowed the ultimate holy grail to be achieved, perhaps until now.

There have been many attempts of course, and it always seemed to end in frustration. Operation Blackbird at Bratton Castle in 1990 wound up getting fooled by hoaxers and the unfortunate arrival of a hot air balloon mistaken for strange lights (although rumours persist to this day that real footage of a circle forming was captured - but where's the film?). Terence Meaden's surveillance experiment in 1991 had the ultimate insult of having two formations appear right next to the equipment caravans without anything being detected. The very presence of cameras seems to chase the circle-making forces off.

So if the Olivers Castle video is genuine, this is a gift indeed from whatever is doodling in our crop fields, and a sign of things moving up a level, a hint that maybe we've learnt enough to be ready for this experience, this evidence, almost a sign of trust. In which case the

generally negative reaction to the event may be a betrayal of that trust. Assuming though that they're not put off, this could herald further peace offerings.

Consider - here we have a video, but only one witness. Next year, bear in mind, there will almost certainly be some definitely hoaxed videos going around, now that the idea has been put into people's heads and even as we speak, home video enthusiasts are probably spending their winter trying to make the ultimate fake circle appearance. It'll be tough to tell the wood from the trees in a year's time. So the next step forward for the circle-making forces, to avoid the arguing we've seen over the Wheyleigh video, could be to grant *more than one witness* the privilege of seeing and perhaps again videoing a pictogram being created. The trouble with the eye witnesses to these events up to now is that they always seem to be lonely voices, with no way of corroborating their stories. Perhaps this will change, and two, three or more videos of the same event, through some extraordinary circumstances will be produced. Eventually a mass-witnessing of a formation appearing, maybe in front of a crowd, will be the ultimate gift. Still sceptics will deny, but it would become progressively difficult for them to sustain their position in the face of such adversity.

Dreams? Perhaps. But the crop circles seem to be about broadening horizons, making people ask questions, so such speculation isn't really out of place. Maybe these things will happen quickly, or maybe it'll be another few years before the curve started with the events at Olivers Castle is picked up again. Maybe we have to show that we are ready for such enlightenments. It's uncertain how we're doing right now. The reflex negative reaction to even the possibility of the Wheyleigh video being genuine has shown cracks in what may need to be a united front before we're ready for more. We may have a way to go.

Or... the general reaction has been quite correct, Wheyleigh will be exposed as a fraud, the formation will have been proved to have been made by Rob Irving, the video shown to have been knocked up on an Amstrad home computer and all the rest of it. This article, despite its questioning, does not deny this possibility.

At the very least, the video is a fair articulation of what it *might* look like to watch a crop formation being created by non-human forces. And the thought that it might be real, to those who could bring themselves to consider it, was at least exciting while it lasted.

All of which begs the question: if this isn't the genuine article, how are we then going to react when the real thing does come along, and how are we going to recognise it? **AT**

Thanks to everyone who helped in the compiling of information for this article (directly or indirectly): Colin Andrews, Nick Nicholson, Michael Hubbard, Karen Douglas, Michael Glickman, Nigel Tomsett, Barry Reynolds, John Huckvale, John Williams and Terry Whitnall. We tried but Lee Winterston couldn't be tracked down! Thanks also to Chris Garner for writing in.