



*THE MONTHLY
JOURNAL OF
CROP CIRCLES
AND BEYOND*

65

JUNE 1997

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Dark
Skies

The Sussex
Cerealogical
Bonanza 1997

The
Qabalah
Arrives In
The Fields

"The consciousness of mankind is being prepared for great leaps and discoveries - in a gentle way wherever possible... God is giving Man a great chance... Now Man must choose"
MOTHER MEERA

Those on both sides of the divide still hungry for more on the (whisper it) *Olivers Castle* video may like to enflame/gratify themselves still further by tuning in to the television series *The Magic & Mystery Show* later this month, if they live in the Meridian or Anglia ITV regions of England. There, viewers will find my good self, Jason Porthouse and the editor of *The Skeptical Enquirer* discussing everybody's favourite eighteen-second piece of video. I'll be considering the possibilities of it being genuine (and before the old bores start up, I never say whether it is genuine or fake and still don't know), Jason will be looking at what is and isn't achievable with video technology (he's a professional video editor) and the resident Skeptic (yep, with a 'k'), who's hardly likely to be objective, will presumably be saying what a bunch of loonies croppies are. How this will all be edited and in whose favour is anyone's guess. I've so far been given three different transmission dates for the programme (fickle, these TV schedulers) but the current projected date is 25th June at 10.45pm on Meridian ITV and the 26th June in the Anglia area. Basically, consulting a TV guide for the week beginning Saturday 21st June might be a good idea. Croppies have done pretty well out of *The Magic & Mystery Show*. It's already featured Barry Reynolds, Pat Palgrave-Moore, Peter Sorenson, Busty Taylor and Andrew Collins on separate occasions. Actually, talking of Skeptic magazines, it was gratifying to see a few months ago that a cousin of *The Skeptical Enquirer*, namely, er, *The Skeptic*, listed cerealogy, the study of crop circles, as the worst "Novel British Pseudoscience most likely to endure". "Admissions by hoaxers have not deflected the ufologists, dowsers, healers and weather cranks from continuing to believe that the Universe is trying to tell us something" quotes the *Daily Telegraph* from the journal. Naturally, the givers of this 'award' see this as an admonishment of gullible idiots like us - but isn't it also an acknowledgement of just how resilient the circle phenomenon itself is to all the stupidity detractors have tried to surround it with? It says far more about the weakness of the "admissions from hoaxers" that interest in these extraordinary patterns persists than it does about anything else.

ANDY THOMAS



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Front Cover: *Burdrop Down, Wiltshire, May 1997.*
Photograph by *Steve Alexander.*

The circle season often goes in fits and starts; after a small rush of formations in April, things have slowed down again, but the one new English formation which has appeared since is pretty impressive, as you can see from our front cover...

WILTSHIRE

Burdrop Down, Nr. Burbury Castle: Many crop patterns over the years have suggested parts of the ancient 'Qabalah' or 'tree of life' in their design (the Burbury Castle triangle of 1991, for instance) but never had it appeared in its entirety until May 4th this year when a direct repre-

sensation arrived here, not far from the flower/wheel formation of the previous month. Once again in oilseed rape, this lacks the grace of its predecessor but makes up for it with the potential significance of its symbolism, which Debbie Pardoe describes in detail in the article on page 4. Not aesthetically beautiful to everyone and some have pointed out that two of the connecting pathways are kinked - however, there may be a purposeful meaning to this, as Debbie outlines. It's worth bearing in mind that the aforementioned 1991 triangle also had a kink in one of its paths. A formation guaranteed to get people talking!

CROATIA

The overseas magazine *UFO Roundup* records an event which took place on April 16th 1997 at Zagorje, northern Croatia. Firstly, the Croatian TV Show *The Living Truth* reported a large cigar-shaped object having been seen in the sky. Later that day, a local resident witnessed a black sphere about "15 metres diameter" surrounded by a "fiery red glow" hovering over a field just above the crop. The sphere apparently had three visible "holes like windows". Later, the same man found a 92' crop circle in the field, although strange footprints were also found at the sight. This could be the start of a Croatian 'flap' - three orange "fireballs" were witnessed over Lokrum Island in February...

AND THE STORY SO FAR...

In previous issues we have already covered these

1997 formations: Sennen, Cornwall / Barbury Castle, Wiltshire / Bradninch, Devon / Littlebury Green & Strethall, Essex and overseas formations in Holland, Brazil and Michigan, USA.

Littlebury Green update... In addition to her info on the Qabalah, Debbie Pardoe has also made an

interesting observation on the so-called 'Cosmic Bum'; not my nicknaming, by the way - I was just reporting it! Here goes: "Cosmic Bum!? Well, our dear 'Ed' really has got the wrong end of the stick this time because the Littlebury Green formation is, in fact, a precise representation of the astrological glyph for Aries which rules

the head! When the formation arrived on April 23rd the Sun had just left Aries and was two degrees within Taurus. If we consider the large ring to be the yearly path of the Sun through the twelve signs of the Zodiac with Aries at the top, then the small ring would seem to represent one of the planets in orbit. Aries is ruled by Mars and, as it happens, Mars was practically stationary at seventeen degrees Virgo for almost a month, a position which corresponds exactly with the small ring in relation to the placement of Aries at the top of the formation. Astronomically, the Skyglobe program (which records actual planetary positions at any given time and place) puts Mars beneath the constellation of Leo, corresponding to the position of the chamber recently detected beneath the Sphinx. Significant in itself, but even more so when the concept of the New Aeon is brought into the equation because Mars is Horus in Egyptian mythology, the Lord of the New Aeon. Looks like we're in for a Cosmic Season.

Strethall update... And this formation, reported last issue, looked like this:

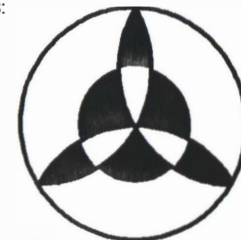


Diagram by **BARRY REYNOLDS**

Thanks to ilyes for the Croatian story.

"The Book of The Law presumes the existence of a body of Initiates pledged to watch over the welfare of mankind and to communicate its own wisdom, little by little, in the measure of man's capacity to receive it." ALEISTER CROWLEY

In 1904, when the huge paws of the Sphinx still lay submerged beneath the sands of Cairo, Aleister Crowley proclaimed the Advent of the New Aeon. In a magickal ceremony, he contacted a discarnate intelligence by the name of Aiwaz who dictated the code for the coming age by "direct voice transmission". The message for the New Aeon was "Do What Thou Wilt Shall Be The Whole Of The Law" and "Love is the Law, Love Under Will". "Follow your True Will" - a statement which was misinterpreted as something grossly evil by the Victorian society of the time. The world was just not ready for Aleister Crowley, a fact he was well aware of, stating this was only the beginning and that the time would come when man would understand the revelations in *The Book of The Law*. That time is now. The word for the New Aeon is Thelema, a Greek word meaning True Will, and by a numerology system known as Gematria which assigns numerical values to letters and words, both Thelema and Aiwaz generate the number 93, the number of the New Aeon, as does the Greek word for love, Agape, which indicates the nature of True Will. Aleister first received the message contained within *The Book of The Law* 93 years ago in April of 1904 and the arrival of the crop formation depicting the Tree of Life cannot be coincidence. (Incidentally, the number 93 frequently appears - 93 million miles being the mean distance between the Sun and the Earth; 93m is the average diameter of Stonehenge (the bank/ditch); and last year, the Alton Barnes DNA formation yielded 89 circles, four of which overlapped and so we must presume a total of 93 circles in the design). Aleister Crowley produced huge volumes of work and one of his greatest achievements was to assimilate the mystical teachings, symbolism and philosophy from various cultures down through the ages in a volume of tables entitled 777. The key to this ingenious system of interpretation was a Qabalistic diagram known as The Tree of Life, a blueprint of creation which is essential to an understanding of the complex occult correspondences given in 777. Qabalah (correctly spelt with a 'Q') is a Hebrew word meaning 'to receive' (ie. knowledge) and by Gematria the word generates the number 137 (spelt backwards - HLBQ - H=5, L=30, B=2, Q=100). The Hebrew word for 'wheel' also gives 137 and again

it is no coincidence that the two formations which arrived near Barbury Castle were a Wheel, at Grid Ref. SU 157 777, and a Tree of Life, at Grid Ref. SU 170 777! Clearly, numbers are providing both clues and answers to the ciphers that are appearing in our crop fields at the dawn of the New Age.

The Tree of Life is a map defining Creation and the origins of Spirituality. There are ten Sephiroth, or spheres of existence and twenty-two connecting pathways, just as there are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet and twenty-two Tarot cards that make up the Major Arcana, one of each being assigned to a path on the Tree. At the top

there are the three Supernals, the Holy Trinity, ruling the Great Unmanifest. The Crown, KETHER, the Cosmic Mind, knows only the potential for life and broods in darkness, dreaming. Within the dream are a million and one possibilities along with a million and one counter-possibilities all waiting to tumble down the Tree into the lower worlds at which point the Great Cosmic Mind will split into millions of sparks, each part unthinking itself, thus forgetting its origins. This then, becomes the nature of the game - each individual part must find the truth of its existence through countless lifetimes and a myriad of experiences, learning many lessons along the way as ascent of the Tree begins, for this is indeed Jacob's ladder.

At the top of the Tree Kether leans forward into the darkness and utters "Let there be Light" and all at once Time is born in Space. A perfect image is reflected on to the second sephira, CHOKMAH, Wisdom, but because it is so perfect the image in Chokmah believes Kether to be the image and the plan can go no further without BINAH, Understanding, which is needed in order to produce the triangle, adding a third dimension. Now the Light descends through the Abyss straight down like a flash of lightning to the physical plane at MALKUTH, The Kingdom. This is creation at its most dense, it is the world of form and it is the same Kingdom that Jesus spoke of in The Lord's Prayer, just as the Ten Sephiroth are a perfect rendition of the Ten Commandments when translated correctly. (Incidentally, there is a growing school of thought which believes that Jesus never intended to start a new religion in Christianity but instead he wanted to bring back Ancient Judaism (incorporating the teachings of the Qabalah) which had, by his time, grown corrupt.

Each Sephira contains its own mini Tree of Life and so the lessons of life are on multiple levels. Above earthly Malkuth there is the Sephiroth of the Moon, YESOD, which governs the subconscious mind and all subcon-

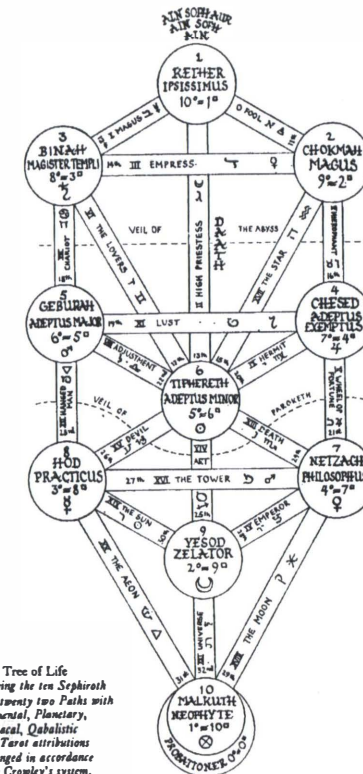
scious processes which link the astral to the physical. Then there are two Sephiroth called HOD and NETZACH, the spheres of Mercury and Venus respectively. These represent the Head and the Heart, or the Intellect and the Emotions, which must be in perfect balance before the neophyte can aspire to higher realms because the lateral path joining them is governed by the Tarot card known as The Tower, which depicts human beings falling from a tall tower struck by lightning. It is here that Aleister Crowley's 'True Will' has full impact on the psyche, since an individual is only following his True Will if something feels right, that is if the heart as well as the head both concur. There is no room for seeds of doubt and apprehension.

TIPHARETH is the very essence of Being, the Seat of Solomon, the Synthesis of the Tree of Life, and the Light of the Sun. Tiphareth leads towards Unity and it is here that man first makes contact with his Spirituality and now there is no excuse for not living his life according to spiritual principles. There is much scope for meditation and all the triangles formed by the Paths between Tiphareth and the other Sephiroth as the Sun's rays shine down directly along the central axis of the Tree into the subconscious realm of Yesod, the sphere of the Moon. Above Tiphareth are two more Sephiroth which form a perfect balance, GEBURAH and CHESED, the spheres of Mars and Jupiter, Severity and Mercy. Chesed is the sphere of adjustment and assessment and some liken it to a large room bathed in scarlet light, known as The Hall of Judgement, for it is here that the soul stands naked of all excuses with his whole life before him and in the utter silence of that scarlet hall, justice is revealed. Perhaps he can bear the burden of the truth, perhaps not, but Understanding emanates down from the sphere of Binah above and inevitably the Truth reigns supreme. Either the initiate will fall back down to relearn his lessons, or he will accept what is - it matters not to Cosmic Justice. Balancing the pitiless severity of this Martian force is the sphere of Jupiter, Mercy, where the Inner Plane Adepts, or Masters reside. Of course, form has no substance here and so the Masters are images in our imagination but that doesn't mean that they are the product of our imagination. They are human beings who have passed all the tests and earned great wisdom in becoming perfect men. They no longer have any need to reincarnate on earth, but many do, electing to help out mankind, their younger brethren, rather than passing on to higher evolution in other spheres. These are the Teaching Masters and communication with such entities through astral psychism often filters down through the Tree into our consciousness as intuition.

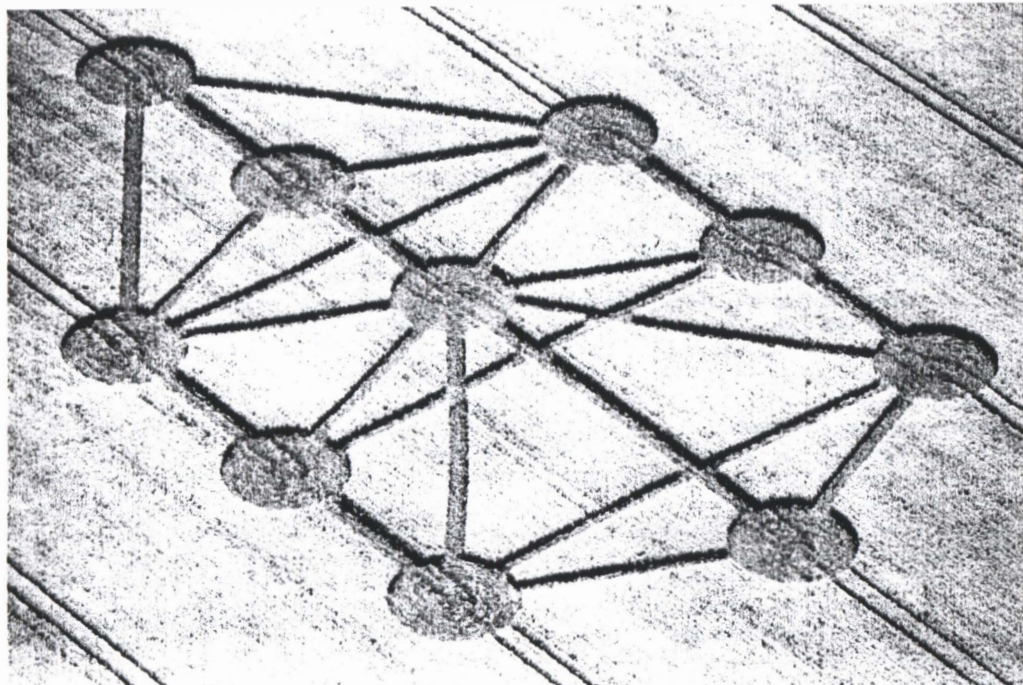
This then is a very general interpretation of the diagram of Tree of Life, a logical and precisely defined Qabalistic teaching which ultimately acts as a guide to the potential initiate of occult wisdom and it also influences an individual to become a better person by following his True

Will. As we stand at the threshold of the New Aeon of Aquarius, which symbolises a rebirth of the human spirit whereby water, or Divine Wisdom, is poured out freely for all mankind, these wonderful symbols appear in our fields. Perhaps, as Aleister Crowley prophesied, the time has come for the Masters to come forth from their higher realms as beings of light to "communicate their own wisdom, little by little, in the measure of man's capacity to receive it" and thereby imprint their messages in the corn for us all to see.

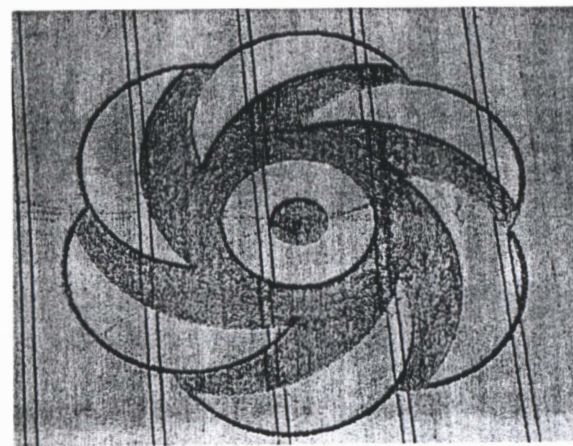
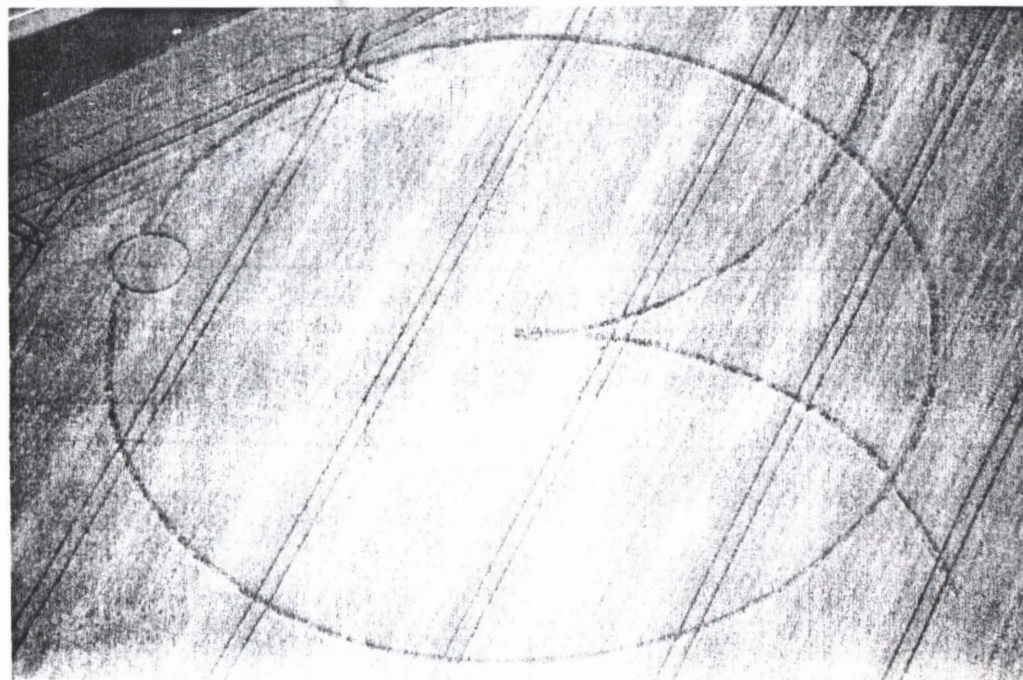
During the most recent meeting of Southern Circular Research/CCCS Sussex at Burgess Hill, Barry pointed out that two of the paths in the Tree of Life crop formation were 'kinked' in a similar fashion to the Barbury Castle beauty of 1991. These paths correspond to Paths 15 and 28 on the Tree of Life. The diagram shows Tarot card No. XVII, The Star on Path 15 and Tarot card IV, The Emperor on Path 28. It will be noticed that Tarot card 0 (The Fool) sits on Path 11, card I (The Magician) on Path 12, card II (The Priestess) on Path 13, and card III (The Empress) on Path 14. It should follow that card IV (The Emperor) should occupy Path 15 but Aleister Crowley chose to swap the correspondences of Paths 15 and 28 - the very two with a 'kink' in the formation. Coincidence? I think not. DP



The Tree of Life showing the ten Sephiroth and twenty-two Paths with Elemental, Planetary, Zodiacal, Qabalistic and Tarot attributions arranged in accordance with Crowley's system.



ABOVE: The 'Qabalah', Burdrop Down, near Barbury Castle, Wiltshire. **BELOW:** Littlebury Green, Essex. Not, after all, the 'Cosmic Bum' it seems but perhaps the astrological symbol for the constellation Aries, showing the position of the planet Mars in relation to it? The stripes going across the picture are power cables.



#1 '97 CIRCLES GALLERY

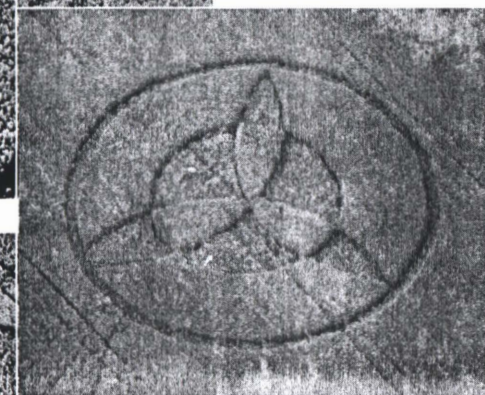
Views of the first major circle events from 1997, taken by STEVE ALEXANDER.

Full colour original copies can be obtained from Steve at: 27 St Francis Road, Gosport, Hants, PO12 2UG.

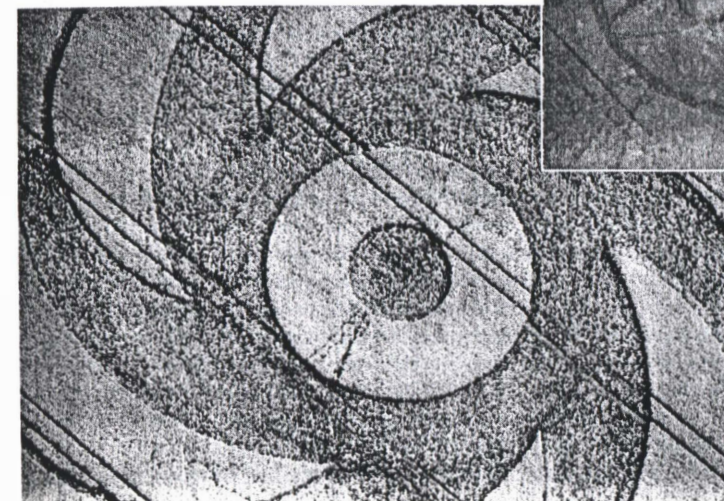


TOP: Barbury Castle - the first major formation of 1997.

MIDDLE LEFT: Pole shot of the Barbury Castle flower/wheel.



ABOVE: Flower/radiation symbol, Strethall, Essex. The two white blobs are plastic bags placed inside by the farmer for unknown reasons.



LEFT: Closer aerial view (or a damn good pole shot!) of the first Barbury Castle formation.

"Excuse me, but am I right in thinking there's going to be some music tonight?". Er... no, I don't think so. "Oh, it's just that the programme says there's going to be a jazz band later." Er, no... it's Jazz Rasool you're thinking of. That's his name... Such are the perils of holding an event with

speakers of unusual nomenclatures. Organising something like the *Sussex Cerealogical Bonanza*, at which the above conversation was held, is a blur of answering such questions and constantly checking to make sure everything is going to plan, as anyone who has helped run similar events will testify. The day before was a blind panic of hall setting up, food preparation and

last minute hitches (our hired 'large' projection screen turned out to be the size of a postage stamp and a rather larger - massive, in fact - replacement had to be hastily arranged). But SCB '97, we're happy to report, was a hugely successful day and worth all the effort. So far, the reactions from the 150 or so who attended have been almost universally positive.

Successor to the first *Bonanza* in 1995, we did cheat a bit this year and condense everything into one day instead of two but this had the happy effect of generating a packed programme with no padding and hardly a chance to catch the breath before the next fascinating item on the programme came along. In fact, some of us were worried that a day which ran from 10.00am to 9.00pm (with liberal refreshment breaks, mind) might leave people nodding off by the evening session, but, give or take the odd snoozer, most were still alert enough to agree that our two unusually-monikered evening guests Turan Rifat and Jazz Rasool were the highlights of the day, well worth waiting for, not to do down any of the other speakers.

Our 'big name' Robert Bauval, who *should* have ended the day, was also well-received but wound up in the morning slot after some near misses as to whether he would turn up at all. Two weeks before the event, we got a blood-draining call to say that Robert would be unable to attend the *Bonanza* due

to a last minute all-important expedition to wherever. Luckily, after a fast schedule juggle, we managed to get our man in the early slot instead. We *nearly* got another call the night before the big day when Robert fell ill, but gallantly, after having scared us once, he managed to drag himself to

Burgess Hill and did us all proud despite his condition. His arguments and evidence, that the Pyramids and Sphinx of Giza form part of some massive encoded model of astronomical information pointing to a date of construction around 10,500 BC - far older than standard Egyptology allows - seem so unarguable it seems incredible that this hasn't been adopted as an

archaeological given, but such is our society.

Centre for Crop Circle Studies President Michael Green then tied Bauval's work neatly into cerealogy with his own take on ancient wisdom speaking to us through encoded messages, this time in the crop circles. In fact, all the speakers of the day seemed to segue perfectly into one another, partly by design but sometimes by happy accident. This was certainly the case with Turan and Jazz, whose speculations on the hidden powers of the mind and how all matter is energy and all energy is consciousness seemed designed to go together. Turan, with his scientific exploration of 'remote viewing', added a touch of *deja vu* to the *Bonanza* with his remarkable resemblance to David Icke, our guest speaker of 1995. (Incidentally, it's a sad reflection on the power of the ridiculous and false Icke-as-Nazi rumours which have done the rounds since that the national Scouting bigwigs who own our venue have stated that he would not be welcome to speak in any of their buildings again.) Jazz (who didn't perform any music) excited many with his theory on how crop is laid down in formations - he believes space itself is bent, taking the stems with it, which would explain some of the strange time-dilation effects which have been reported in circles over the years. (But SC was there first - check out Ronald Thomas' article in SC 31...)

"Bullshit..." "Bullshit..." "Bullshit..." were quiet

remarks overheard from one detractor throughout when Marcus Allen gave his frighteningly plausible scenario of why the NASA moon-landing photographs - and indeed the mission itself - may have been faked. To challenge such a deeply entrenched triumph of humanity cuts some to the quick to even consider that we might all have been fooled and opens too many other doors to wondering how else we may have been misled in recent history. Such adverse reactions to Marcus' presentation are a mark of the power of his evidence, if not its reliability which individuals must decide, and he must be used to them by now; in fact, he seems rather to enjoy the challenge of hecklers. Most though, were impressed despite themselves and found it impossible not to wonder... (Despite the inevitable ridicule from some quarters, Channel 4's recent *For The Love Of...* which featured, among others, Marcus, Barry Reynolds and myself discussing the pros and cons of lunar conspiracy, received one of the largest positive mail responses ever received by a discussion show on the station...) The SC team did their bit too, of course (if you can't at your own event, when can you?), Barry and myself opening with the traditional overview of crop circle history, bringing people right up to date, ready for the day ahead. Barry reappeared in the afternoon to reveal the statistical bar charts he has been compiling from last year's formations which are extremely fascinating. For instance, despite all the endless blather about hoaxing from the usual old bores, only 3% of 1996's patterns are known to be hoaxes, with requisite evidence. Claims of anything bigger are nothing more than loose conjecture. We hope to feature some of these statistics (which cover many aspects of the phenomenon) in SC soon.

Karen Douglas reviewed some of the video evidence of strange luminosities which have been thrown under revitalised scrutiny in the light of the Oliver's Castle video and included one new impressive sequence taken by Dutch visitors at the Wilsford 'thought bubble' formation of 1994 which appeared to show bright bursts of lights arcing inside the standing centre of the large ring.

For the second time in two years I dented my credibility severely by becoming quizmaster for the re-match of the world's only crop circle gameshow, in which the Sussex team (Marcus, Barry & Jason Porthouse - bell) only just won against the rest-of-the-world challengers (Karen, Steve Alexander and last-minute-stand-in-brick Richard Smith

- hooter) despite all my efforts to rig the game in their favour. For those not present but curious, I wore a gold jacket this year instead of silver.

Stan Reynolds and Paul Bura broke up the morning and evening sessions pleasantly with their interludes of 'mind-reading' and poetry respectively. Such are the indignities of being 'warm-up' acts, Stan had to change his act several times when we kept changing the order of the evening speakers in the preceding weeks and Paul had to sit on a dustbin to deliver his heartfelt vignettes. We weren't saying he was rubbish or anything.

For any research groups out there wanting publicity, holding an event like this and sending out press releases is the way to do it. The *Bonanza* picked up lots of local press space and I had to conduct a live interview from the hall on *BBC Southern Counties Radio* in which I was asked whether or not we were all weirdoes. Well, what do you think I said?

But for all the fun of the day, after a furious bout of hall-deconstruction almost as soon as the evening closed, the best moments came when the core organisers retired to the local Indian restaurant for lager and korma, a chance to relax at last and reflect bawdily on the triumph of the day. No other customers came in that night. Strange, that.

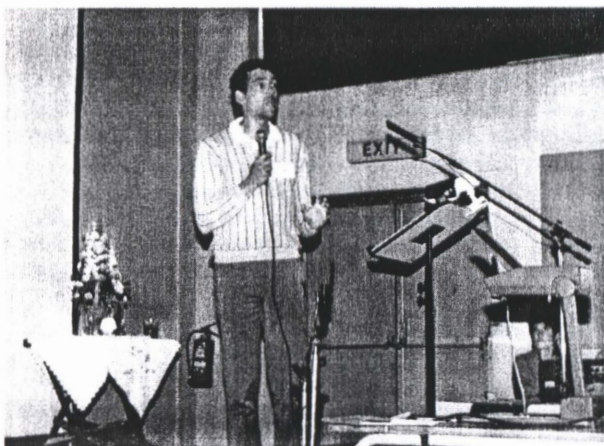
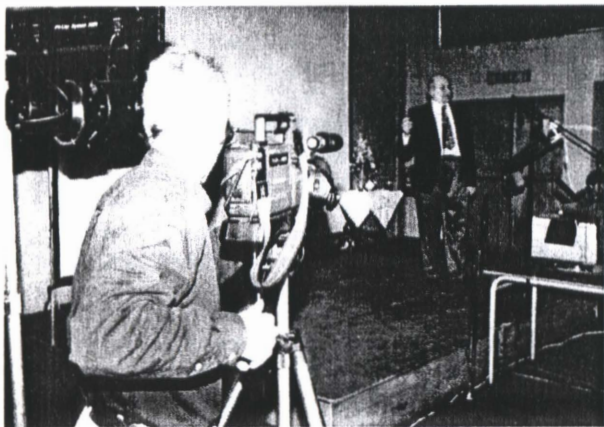
These events don't happen by themselves, and without getting boring, the following have to be thanked for putting their backs into getting everything moving: Jean and Stan Reynolds, for running the 'box office', Linda Reynolds helped by Sloane Noakes and Kaye Thomas for feeding the five thousand (actually, there weren't quite that many there), Martin Noakes for organising sensible sound and lighting (it's such a simple thing really, yet so many events forget to have any), Di Brown and Jason Porthouse for handling the stall-holders and the SC tables, Barry Reynolds and, er, myself for loads of things, and anyone else who helped in any way. Most of all though, thanks to everyone who paid their £15 and were part of such a warm, receptive audience throughout the day. (Apologies for some small unavoidable picks - to the lady who couldn't see past the lectern and to those who froze in the dealers rooms. We'll sort out some better heating next time. It's not quite a perfect world yet.) We're still getting letters and calls of praise and gratitude, and for these, thanks to everyone who has made the effort to contact us.

So, will there ever be another *Bonanza*, bearing in mind they only happen once every two years? We'll see. AT

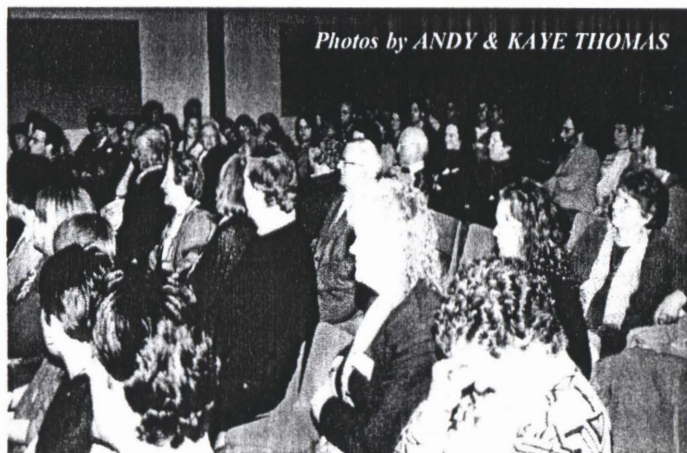
- REPORTS -

THE SUSSEX CEREALOGICAL BONANZA II

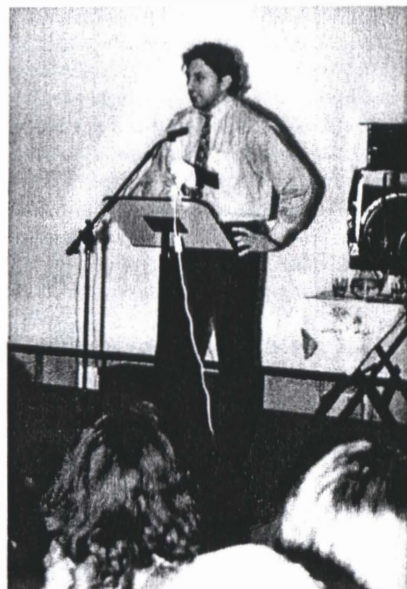
They said it could never happen again... but it did. Yes, ANDY THOMAS relives the second Sussex crop circle conference, held by SC/Southern Circular Research at the Scout Centre, Burgess Hill, on 26th April 1997...



SCB '97



Photos by ANDY & KAYE THOMAS



SOME IMAGES FROM THE BONANZA...

TOP LEFT: Yes, the Bonanza is on video; Richard Salter captures Stan Reynolds in 'action'.

TOP RIGHT: Jazz Rasool, musical instruments not in evidence.

MIDDLE: Turan Rifat does his best David Icke impression.

BELOW LEFT: It's sad the level some editors will sink to for a cheap laugh.

BELOW RIGHT: Proof that there was an audience there. The lady in the foreground is clearly overcome with excitement.

A pool of light in a gloomy room deep in the heart of Hollywood reveals two bored TV executives leafing through the trade magazines. "Hey, Bryce, have you seen this X Files thing? Raking in the viewers!". "Say Brent, this looks like something worth having a go at ourselves. Telephone the boss, I've got an idea... now what do we need? What is it that makes this X-thing so popular? Ah yeah, UFOs, aliens, dark conspiracies. Hello, Mr Head of Paramount, sir? Right, yeah, well we've had a great idea for a new series. What's it about? Well, it's about, er... Oh yeah, UFOs, aliens, dark conspiracies! What's that? You've heard it all before? Old hat? And we can have the money to go ahead right away..? Gee thank you Sir!"

This scenario is perhaps rather too cynical but there's no doubting that the new US TV series *Dark Skies*, currently concluding its first - and possibly only - season in the UK on Channel 4, couldn't have happened without *The X Files*. With the massive popular interest in the paranormal generated by Chris Carter's franchise, it was only a matter of time before the bandwagon set off and producers Bryce Zabel and Brent V Friedman were first aboard, nicking bits from the old 60's serials *The Invaders* and *The Fugitive* along the way. Set in the 1960's, *Dark Skies*' Mulder and Scully are John Loengard and his girlfriend Kimberley Sayers, who, after first being involved with the legendary (mythical?) 'Majestic 12' covert ET-investigation unit, wind up on the run trying to unearth evidence that an alien invasion has begun from 'The Hive', little slimy wrigglers which lodge in the brain and control the mind.

But it wouldn't be fair to write the results off entirely as nothing more than the cheap plagiarism it first appears to be. As the episodes have progressed, so the series has taken on an identity of its own, reaching paranoid heights even its obvious inspiration stops short of. Indeed, the recent decline of *The X Files* into serial-killer horror and its sudden reluctance to commit itself to a clear standpoint on UFOs and ETs, gives this series its impetus. *Dark Skies* basically fills in the gaps left by Chris Carter and does what his vehicle won't anymore - give the

viewers what they want. In the first few episodes alone, virtually every paranormal myth or legend is plundered with about as much subtlety as a cement mixer flying through the window: Roswell, UFO's, MJ12, Area 51, abductions, cattle mutilations, mind control, JFK's assassination, hidden truths behind Vietnam, NASA cover-ups - and crop circles. Meanwhile, real-life names and personalities are drafted in to bolster controversy as key players in this 'alternative history' and thus we meet Jessie Marcel, Howard Hughes, Jim Morrison, Marilyn Monroe, assorted Kennedys and John Lennon. Other, living, public figures will presumably not be amused to see them-

selves portrayed as manipulators and conspirators, Gulf War veteran Norman Schwarzkopf being but one example.

There is a curious if ludicrous charm to this unashamed rummage through the iconography and clutter of the world of ufology and conspiracy theory. It's really nothing more than a wet dream for paranormal paranoia addicts and knows it. Yet one can't entirely dislike a series which in the very first episode reveals everything *The X Files* has spent four years only hinting at. It's a standard plot bravely in reverse; from the start the nature of the whole ET-cover-up conspiracy and those involved is explained in detail and the ETs themselves are unambiguously revealed. Starting with the climax, all events at the centre (John works for MJ12), the rest of the series dangerously trails out ahead, leaving only the fine detail to be explored. Whether any momentum in a story which is proposed to cover four decades of the heroes' lives can be preserved in such a bold reversal of normal narrative structure remains to be seen, although poor viewing figures in the US now threaten its continuation anyhow - cancellation looms.

The plots on which all this hang are neither here nor there, it's the concepts which provide the viewer with a reason to sit through it. Just as well really, given the almost total lack of charisma from the leads which nearly scuppers the whole thing. Visually, the hunk and babe credentials are there in the two main protagonists but sadly the scriptwriters forgot to provide *characters* for either of them, al-

- MEDIAWATCH - WATCH THE SKIES?

As the US series *Dark Skies* draws to a close in England, possibly forever, ANDY THOMAS considers its place in the growing area of paranoia TV...

though Megan Ward's Kimberly comes off better than Eric Close's terminally drab John. Only J T Walsh as Majestic 12's ambiguously-moralised boss injects a touch of class to the proceedings, being by far the most interesting player.

There is some attempt to be original, however. The idea that the real motivating alien forces are not the greys themselves but the tentacled parasites which inhabit them is new and the notion that the US military itself *shot down* the saucer which crashed at Roswell is amusing. Unfortunately, everything's delivered with a po-faced over-sincerity, painstakingly covering each icon of ufology in turn, leadenly weighing the show down to the point where you feel they really are trying to present the 'real' alternative history of the world and entertainment is a secondary concern.

Which leads to the usual old posturing of wondering whether there could really be a *hidden message* behind what appears to be a television series. Could this be another government-inspired ET education/disinformation programme to lead us all into their way of thinking, to prepare us for the 'big announcement'? No, probably not. 'Cashing in' sounds rather more likely. But its very existence does add to the general *ambience*, or *zeitgeist*, to coin an overused cliché, of 'ET awareness' etc, that's so much to the fore these days, and as such it has an effect which, predictably, drags the whole thing down onto a level of *fear*. The aliens are nasty. They must be destroyed. If ETs really are up there watching these sorts of things (*Independence Day*, *Mars Attacks!* et al) what must they think of our attitude toward the possibilities of life elsewhere? As ever, the xenophobia towards ETs expressed by the scriptwriters is really a reflection of the fears about our own race, projected externally. Nevertheless, for all this, there is a nagging drive to tune in each week to see where things will go next. As the first season closes, the two heroes seem to have been drawn back into the MJ12 fold as the scriptwriters begin to realise the hole they've written themselves into. Kimberly's alien-manipulated pregnancy (no *X-Files* influence there then) and absorption into the 'Hive' collective has added a much-needed twist to a story that was beginning to flag (it is hard to suppress a cheer when she beats the hell out of John, who has been crying out for such a thrashing since the series began). In turn, the introduction of deeper characters (presumably to detract from the blandness of the leads) such as a gorgeous-but-deadly Russian lady spy, and less

obvious plotlines, has begun to make *Dark Skies* compelling at last. Ironical then that flagging ratings Stateside now threaten to kill the series just as it's finding its feet. For a story that sold itself on a proposed arc which would take events right up to date come the year 2000, its premature death would rather devalue all the heavy hints dropped about future developments in the script. A fan-based Internet campaign now exists to save it from the chop.

As far as crop circles go, it's good to see them take a proper place in science fiction at last (even if it is, disappointingly, with the usual old evil-alien negative attachments) making one wonder why other TV/movie moguls haven't seen the potential yet. Naturally, this US series manages to lay claim to the States having received the first pictogram... in 1964! Charmingly, close-ups of the Barbury Castle '91-type formation in the first episode show a Hollywood-view of what they *think* the insides of crop circles look like, all complex plaiting and weaving in no discernible swirl; but hey, it's a start. At least they're not talking hoaxers here. Later appearances are more disconcerting - pictogram symbols are used as subliminal signals to trigger suicidal tendencies in one episode and a (rather rough, actually) man-made dumbbell is used to lure a UFO down in another. The secret, by the way, is to dig up the golden plates which lie just under the soil in formations. There you will find a picture of the symbol itself (presumably inspired by the alleged discovery of such objects in a German formation of 1990). Place it just so in any circle and - hey presto! - down comes a flying saucer.

So much for *Dark Skies*. If you're looking for a *real* allegory on alien paranoia and threats from New World Orders, the series you should be checking out is *Babylon 5*, which should be returning to British screens for its fourth season any time now. Far more significant than the *Star Trek* clone its detractors make it out to be, *B5* is probably the finest sci-fi series produced for many years, a kind of *Lord of the Rings* ongoing saga in space, designed to run, like *Dark Skies*, only for four or five years with a beginning, middle and end. Here you will find the Earth has been taken over by a fascistic *coup d'état* and the galaxy is poised on the brink of a final good-versus-evil war with the largely unseen 'Shadows' manipulating events from behind the scenes. The it-could-happen-here paranoia insinuations are so strong that hardly anyone's noticed yet... Check it out. AT