

Film footage of Oliver's Castle, 11 August 1996 by Francine Blake

The night the film footage was taken at Oliver's Castle on the 11th of August 1996, I was at home in the Vale of Pewsey, a couple of miles away as the crow flies. I can well remember the weather conditions that evening and during the following night as they were unusually foul even by British standards. Our guest from London had been delayed by the rain which had been so heavy at around 10pm that her car's windscreen wipers, even at top speed, had not been able to cope with the amount of water coming down and she'd had to pull off the road and wait for some time. The crucial aspect of the weather was never considered by those who dismissed John Whaley's film footage taken at Oliver's Castle that night.

I was not at the Barge Inn (a former Wiltshire pub meeting place for crop circle researchers) that Saturday night when John turned up to ask people to join him on a nightwatch at Oliver's Castle, a neolithic hill site near Devizes. As the weather was already starting to look bleak everyone declined and he went alone. A few hours later the conditions had deteriorated into such a serious downpour that parts of the nearby town of Wootton Bassett were flooded and some people had to be rescued by boat the next day. This was subsequently shown on BBC local television news.

John Whaley had gone to Oliver's Castle with his old fashioned video camera. He related being unable to venture out of his tent to watch the valley during most of the night because of the heavy rain and he had gone to sleep instead. He was woken up at dawn on Sunday by the silence when the rain had finally stopped. Putting his head out of the tent he saw small white orbs flying about in the valley and stepped out with his camera. It was reported by the Barge Inn's staff that he had called in at midday on the off-chance some crop circle researchers might be in the pub. Returning in the evening, he showed the video to the first person connected to the subject he encountered saying he thought crop circle people would be interested in seeing it.

The original footage was shown a few days later in the billiard room at the Barge to a group of crop circles enthusiasts, of which I was a part, who happened to be in the area at the time. In the original version, which was much longer than the one we now have at hand, we saw the valley being scanned by the camera and heard John describing the lights and wondering about their whereabouts. Some of us who were there that evening agree that the whole film had lasted about five minutes. It was shown several times, so stunned were we by this amazing sequence. A few days later it was taken away to a laboratory but resurfaced minus most of the footage, retaining only the few seconds where the lights are seen circling above the wheat making the formation and which was repeated several times. None of the sweeping shots of the valley and John's commentaries were ever seen or heard of again.

The whole episode was very much 'cloak and dagger'. I never managed to meet John Whaley although I did ask the person who by now had the film if he would let me have John's contact details, but he flatly refused. I then wrote John a note proposing an interview for our magazine, *The Spiral*, and asked this man to pass it on as he was on his

way to see him, but I never got a response. Maybe he didn't receive it. The shortened version was made into a video but it was difficult to get a copy and the cuts from the original film simply vanished. I was told they were lost, perhaps they were thrown away; no-one knows.

The initial euphoria that had greeted the arrival of the film soon turned to paranoia as so often happens with crop circles. The fear of losing face should any of these happenings turn out to have been faked seems to be the prime motive behind much of the dismissal of this phenomenon, overriding expert opinions, scientific evidence as well as climatic conditions and common sense. John Whaley, at the time just nineteen years old, had given his film for free but instead of gratitude, he was accused of hoaxing it and was subsequently made to regret his generosity. He removed himself from the scene and the intense debunking that followed killed the interest in the film which then became a taboo subject.

John was using an old fashioned celluloid film video camera when he spent the night on the hill. Judging by the pale mauvish light in the valley it would have been around 4.30am when he took the film. It is clear that it was dawn. The assumption at the time that after filming the landscape sequence early on Sunday morning and gathering his camping stuff, he had gone to a design studio somewhere to superimpose a computer animation onto his newly acquired film footage before arriving at the Barge Inn at midday to show it was never realistic.

Computer technology for domestic use was not very sophisticated in 1996 and animation is slow and tedious work. Even today making such a sequence would be a logistical nightmare (when the film is slowed down, the small lights pulse and change shape at every frame). All the professional analyses made at the time, and even now, determined the film had not been tampered with. Terje Tofteness in 2005 when producing his DVD 'Crossovers from another Dimension' instructed some professional animators to try and construct a replica of this footage, and even with their sophisticated equipment and three full days working at it, they were unable to produce anything resembling the original one. They said the big problem was that in John's film, the camera wobbles up and down because it was hand held, not fixed to a tripod. This, they said, makes it impossible to fake as each frame of film would need to have the animation lain over in exactly the same position each time so that the path of the lights remains constant, painstakingly slow work and unachievable even with the advanced technology of today. When asked to comment if it would have been possible to produce such a fake in the short time prior to John reaching the Barge Inn (between 6am and 12pm) and particularly with his old fashioned system, they thought it completely impossible.

In addition, if it was a put up job the crop circle would need to have been made by a team during the night and we have reliable witnesses who told us it was not there at around 9.30pm and it was pouring with rain by 10pm. The formation was not virtual; it was an actual design laid down in a field of wheat growing in heavy clay soil in the valley below Oliver's Castle. When a few seasoned crop circle researchers visited it the next morning, the wheat, although thoroughly soaked, was lightly pressed and in pristine condition: no

damage, no footprints and no mud. However, the researchers reported that by the time they had reached the design their shoes were so caked with sticky mud from walking down the tractor lines that some pairs had to be thrown away on their return home. You cannot walk into a wet crop circle with muddy footwear without dropping clay all over it, damaging the plants and leaving tangible marks of your presence, which would have been the case had this design been constructed by hand during the downpour.

The thought that a perfect fractal design measuring over 300ft in diameter, with complicated layering of crops, fine delicate details and unusual radial lays, all in pristine condition, could have been made by hand in such adverse conditions is way beyond credence. Yet none of this was taken into consideration at the time and John's video was written off.

We are proud to be able to show this footage and the analysis of it on our site to inform people of what really happened that night.

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