

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

On the 11th of August 1996, I was at home in the Vale of Pewsey where I lived, a couple of miles as the crow flies from Oliver's Castle. I can well remember the weather conditions that evening and during the following night as it was unusually foul even by British standards. We were awaiting a guest from London who arrived late, she had been delayed by heavy rain and at around 10pm she was forced to pull off the road because the windshield wipers, even at top speed, could not cope with the amount of water coming down. This crucial aspect of weather conditions was never considered by the people who dismissed the film footage taken at Oliver's Castle by John Whaley during that night.

I was not at the Barge Inn (a pub in Wiltshire where crop circle researchers used to congregate) that Saturday night when John Whaley turned up, but I was told he had gone there to ask people to join him on a nightwatch at Oliver's Castle. As the weather was already starting to look bleak everyone declined and he went by himself. A few hours later the conditions had deteriorated into a serious downpour. Those who live nearby can vouch that it was hardly possible to venture outside that night as the rain was so heavy 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 the BBC local television news on Sunday evening.

John Whaley had gone to Oliver's Castle with his old fashioned video camera hoping to see something unusual. He related being unable to watch the valley during most of the night because of the bad weather and that he had gone to sleep in his tent. He was woken up at dawn by the lack of sound, the rain having suddenly stopped. Putting his head out of the tent he saw some little lights flying in the valley below and stepped out with his camera. It was reported by the Barge Inn's staff that he called in on Sunday at midday on the off chance some crop circle researchers would be in the pub, but no-one connected to the subject was there at that time. He came back in the evening and, not knowing the ins and outs of the crop circle community, showed his footage to the first person he encountered and offered it for free saying he thought crop circle people would be interested in seeing this.

The original footage was shown 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 shown here, we saw the valley being scanned by the camera and heard John's commentaries about having seen little lights and wondering where they'd gone. Some of us who were there that night agree that the whole thing had lasted a good 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 and resurfaced minus most of the footage retaining only the part where the lights are seen circling above the wheat making the formation, which is just a few seconds long, and repeated several times. None of the sweeping shots of the valley and John's commentaries were ever seen or heard of again.

I never met John Whaley, although I expressed my interest in interviewing him for our magazine, 'The Spiral', to the person who by that time owned the film. This was flatly refused. I then wrote a note with a request that he pass it on to John as he was on his way to see him, but I never got a response. The footage was made into video tapes but it was difficult to get a copy, and the cuts of the original version simply vanished. I've been 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 incidents turn out to have been faked seems to be the prime motive behind much of the dismissals, overriding expert opinions, scientific evidence as well as climatic conditions and common sense. John Whaley gave his film for free in the interest of the advancement of crop circle studies but, instead of gratitude, he was accused of having hoaxed it and was subsequently subjected to a lot of harassment. Not surprisingly, he removed himself from the scene. The intense debunking that followed killed the interest in the film which pretty well became a taboo subject until recently.

John was using an old fashioned video film camera when he spent the night on the hill. Judging by the pale mauvey light in the valley when he took the footage, it would have been around 4.30am. It is clear that it was dawn and the rain had stopped. The supposition at the time that after filming the sequence and gathering his camping stuff he had gone to a design studio somewhere (unspecified) to superimpose a computer animation (presumed already made on his computer, but never verified) onto his newly acquired video footage before going to the Barge Inn arriving at midday to show it was never realistic.

Computer technology for domestic use was not very developed in 1996 and animation is a slow and tedious process. Even today doing 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 Toftness in 2005 when producing his DVD 'Crossovers from Another Dimension' * instructed some professional animators to try and reconstruct 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 on 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 Mr Whaley reaching the Barge Inn (between 6am and 12pm) and particularly with his old fashioned system, they thought it completely impossible.

In addition if, as claimed by people who really should have known better, it was a put up job, the design would have had to have been made by hand during the night, since we have reliable witnesses who told us it was not there at around 9.30pm and it was pouring with rain by 10pm. No-one knew or expected anything and therefore it would not have mattered if it had been postponed a week or two. The formation was not virtual; it was an actual design laid down in a field of wheat growing in clay soil in the valley below Oliver's Castle. When a few seasoned crop circle researchers visited it the next morning, in spite of having been battered by rain the best part of the night, the lay of the wheat was lightly pressed and in pristine condition: no damage, no footprints and no mud. However, the visitors reported that by the time they had reached the design their shoes were caked with mud from walking down the tractor line, which quickly got deposited onto the formation. You cannot walk into a wet crop circle with muddy boots without leaving clay all over it and damaging the plants.

Going out in that downpour to do anything that night would have been difficult but the idea that a perfect fractal design measuring over 300ft in diameter with complicated layering of crops, fine details and unusual radial lays could have been made under such adverse weather conditions is way beyond credence. Yet none of this was taken into consideration at the time and the sequence was written off.

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

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* [Terje Tofteness DVD is available to buy at our online shop](#)