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ACCORDING to what they are primarily intended to do in eventual passing back of scientific information, things rocketed into space by man may orbit the earth for anything from a few days to a million years. Continually in such orbit at present are between 400 and 500 objects "such as rockets, sputniks and other pieces of flying ironmongery—even refrigerators, perhaps," said the Rev. Lawrence G. Inge, Rector of Orcheston, at the special public meeting on Friday night at Warminster Town Hall.

The meeting, called by Mr. Emlyn Rees, chairman of Warminster UDC and local businessman, was to discuss all available evidence about The Thing and try to sort out fact from fiction. Or as he put it: "To assure the population that they have nothing to fear from the astral phenomena which has plagued them for at least eight months now."

Mr. Inge, who operates an observation post 12 miles from the town and spends many fine nights scanning the heavens with binoculars, plotting location and course of all flying objects to relay information — together with timings—to Government research centres at Slough and Farnborough, said most were explainable as satellites, rockets burning up or operations by military authorities. Yet he admitted that 25.94 per cent. were unexplainable.

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Human sight is amazing, he stressed. Astronauts in Gemini 5, who were 150 miles up, could look below and pick out not only cities but streets from that distance. He felt it feasible that life in some form existed on other planets and could not imagine the Creator of such a vast and wonderful universe peopling only earth from such galaxies of thousands of millions of stars.

Yet terrifying noises heard by local people, and strange "glowing, cigar-shaped" sightings, could be attributed to either low or high-flying helicopters, the latter equipped with landing and other lights, he suggested.

Evaluating officer of the British UFO Research Association, Dr. John Cleary-Baker, has been investigating reports of aerial phenomena for 14 years. He has to decide whether they are unidentified objects or caused by such things as aircraft, birds, hallucinations, hoaxes, etc. At the meeting he said he was satisfied from recent happenings in Warminster, evaluating evidence, that hallucinations and hoaxes could be ruled out.

Local descriptions tallied with and were similar enough basically to reports from all parts of the world. These phenomena were not unique to Warminster. They had been known as long ago as the time of the Pharaohs in Egypt. "If unidentified flying objects do not exist, why are many governments spending thousands of pounds each year to investigate these things?" he asked.

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"Do not be alarmed," he advised. "If any harm was going to come to earth from people from other planets, it would have happened long ago. I suggest that the real interests of our friends is in the military establishment of the Plain be it the Government's biological warfare establishment or the rocket ranges. Facts are higher than theories. But rest assured—whatever it is, it will not attack.

"There is no need to fear the phenomena. We should welcome their arrival in the sky and the rare opportunity of studying things which are becoming increasingly common throughout the world. They have been reported since the days of the Pharaohs and no physical harm has come to anyone." He was certain things seen in the sky were genuine, yet not particularly concerned with the town of Warminster itself.

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said. "I went to the window and saw a brilliant object like a massive star. It didn't frighten me at first—but the noise went on for half an hour. I've come here to see if I can find out what all these things are and what they signify."

Mr. Roger Rump, the town's head postmaster, described how he had been working until late on Christmas Eve. Early next day, he and his wife heard sounds which corresponded to the rough pulling off of the 5,000 tiles on their rooftop; then their being put back on again with the same clattering noise, accompanied by a humming tone. He lives in Hillwood-lane. Of six witnesses at the meeting, only four were local. Mr. Inge felt this reluctance to come forward in public was "natural shyness and the fear of being ridiculed."

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The sceptics defied

DR. E. R. DOEL, chairman of the National UFO Association, told the meeting: "We are struggling to explain these phenomena. We defy sceptics to find any explanation that will satisfy people that these things are not from outer space." He agreed with Dr. Cleary-Baker that "You should not feel afraid. You are privileged to be able to investigate them."

Dr. Cleary-Baker suggested that Cley Hill, near Warminster—probably the highest mound in Wiltshire—might be a "homing beacon" for the flying objects seen in the area. It was used to light warning fires when the Spanish Armada was first sighted centuries ago. He urged that the only method of obtaining concrete evidence was for local volunteers to establish a listening post—even if only manned at weekends on a rota basis. Observers, with a tape-recorder, binoculars and a good camera, could record every strange object seen or heard in the night sky. Such evidence would also be welcomed by his association.

Mr. Inge urged anyone who saw or heard anything unusual to note time and place, sending such data with a brief description of what happened to the Government research centre at Ditton Park, Slough. And Dr. Cleary-Baker rejoined: "In confounding the critics we may make a very substantial step forward in understanding the universe in which we live."

Had some levity

THE meeting was not without levity and flashes of humour. During it, for example, Mr. Reese was handed an urgent telegram, sent off that afternoon from nearby Westbury. He opened it and read: "Investigations completed. Invasion fears are unfounded—Dr. Who." (Mr. Rees complained next morning that a number of people thought this an unwarrantable gimmick—that he had sent it to himself. But a gentleman whose initials are "W. B." was the culprit, we understand.)

Then Mr. Joe Brownell, ex-Australian Army soldier and local travel agent, invited everyone to "come along and see flying objects in Weymouth-street tomorrow afternoon. You won't be disappointed—Warminster is playing Devices at football!" (Mr. Brownell is on the local F.C. executive

number of questions fired at speakers from the body of the hall. Missing from the meeting was Mr. David C. Holton, of Crockerton, who first advanced the theory of spacecraft and information about pigeons being killed when flying into sound waves. He burnt a dossier containing evidence of strange happenings, after conducting private research into aerial phenomena. "This whole business has degenerated," he said before the meeting. "It shows signs of becoming a pseudo-circus. With every respect, having the Press and television present brings in an entertainment aspect.

"If I had gone to the meeting with my file, it would have given a very unfortunate and unfavourable impression to people who gave me confidential information. I had between 100 and 200 cases on that file." Convinced that sky objects are extra-terrestrial phenomena likely to occur with increasing frequency, Mr. Holton said he was an agnostic but not a materialist. "One must accept that there is an intelligence behind them," he added—scoffing nevertheless at wild things some folk said had happened.

Quite a number have knocked at his door and told him about little men getting out of spaceships — and even of farmers' cows being transported to Venus. Mr. Joe Brownell said at the meeting: "If people who make statements are afraid to produce evidence to back them up, then what is the evidence worth?"

Invited to the meeting, senior RAF officers failed to turn up; nor (as far as could be seen from the Press gallery) did members of the Army. Among the more sober views expressed as to the cause of strange noises and glowing objects were: Helicopters, lit at night; natural pockets of methane gas (a witness said he carried out proving tests that day); Army or Air Force tests in research or experiment, secret and uncommunicable to the public (the Army School of Infantry is based at Warminster, Salisbury Plain nearby and six airfields within easy flying distance); weather balloons reflected in sun's rays or moonlight; a geological fault line in the south of the town.

Good for trade

MUCH of the debate and addresses by leading speakers gave fascinating food for thought, although one national newspaper stated "most people went away no better informed or the wiser than when they went."

The Rev. L. Inge said matter from stars which exploded into fragments billions of years ago had gradually linked up to form solid belts of rock, as much as 300 miles across, hurtling around the solar system at 15,000 miles an hour. It was just possible, he elaborated after the meeting, that smaller portions had been orbiting the earth for millions of years.

Warminster really hit the news headlines after the meeting, anyway, if only scantily and sketchily in some organs of the Press. One Sunday paper claimed that The Thing started cash tills ringing... Tourists from all over the country, it reported, were pouring into the Wiltshire town of 11,000 souls.

Mr. Hugh McLaren, Scots landlord of the Anchor Hotel, said: "This could do us as much good as the Loch Ness monster did for Scotland." All hotels and inns were apparently full up. Mr. Pat Kelly, licensee of the Weymouth Arms and secretary of the Warminster-Westbury LVA, said: "The Thing could keep our season going right through the winter." Mr. Rees said: "One man from London has already volunteered to man an observation post at weekends. We might even get the Observer Corps in on it."

Aged 74 and member of the town's Tourist Committee, Mr. Joe Brownell (what—again?) said: "If these visitors expect to see The Thing I think they will be disappointed."

A charming lady named Miss Anderson rang our reporter up from a nearby village and said: "I suppose the final answer will be that The Thing is really something, quite ordinary, a natural force rather than supernatural. I expect it is something on the Army or Air Ministry secret list—but wouldn't it be terribly exciting if a flying saucer, complete with crew, landed around Warminster?"

"Then—and only then—would I believe in their existence." Amen to that!