

The sixties have meant mockery for some very determined people. But they still hold their heads high. LEONIE GRAYEFF visited four groups whose members are . . .

Martyrs of the Sixties



Almost everyone accepts that this view of the earth was photographed by the Apollo 8 astronauts during their lunar orbit mission.

Samuel Shenton, secretary of the Flat Earth Research Society: "All those humps and bumps which are put in front of our eyes in photographs are simply distortions of the camera."

The International Flat Earth Research Society, Doyer, England.

Dear Sir,

The Ptolemaic Society (the name derived from Ptolemy, the ancient geographer) is a student association interested in everything to do with geography. Since your group is also geographical and advocates that the earth is flat, something very interesting to us, we ask you to supply us with reasons and proofs for your belief.

Thank you,

P. L. JOHNSON

Every day since the Apollo moonflight about a dozen such letters have come from all over the world to land on the doorstep of Mr Samuel Shenton's house in Dover. Mr Shenton, the secretary of the flat earthists' society, takes the letters upstairs to his workshop, where he ties them up in numbered bundles to await attention.

Eventually the Ptolemaic Society in Rhodesia will receive a duplicated, 7-sheet document inscribed on the cover:

"For those who have eyes to see

ZETETIC COSMOGONY

Reveals

THE "PLANE" TRUTH

A modest pamphlet with a great aim—to re-establish in young people, FAITH in The Creator and a truer conception of their earth environment." Samuel Shenton, an elderly, balding man with a generous physique and large, gesticulating arms and hands, has become almost the

sole champion of the plane earth. Although he claims that his society has 100 supporters, the actual research is done by "one or two of us". When the president died some years ago: "It was up to me to shoulder the banner," said Mr Shenton.

Practically, Mr Shenton waves his banner by answering the shoal of letters, giving numerous lectures to inquisitive, highly critical audiences, and simply by being on telephone call: "I'm never given the chance to sit down and fathom anything out. If a space shot is shown on TV, in five minutes the telephone would be ringing and some broadcaster would be saying: 'Where did *that* spacecraft go?'"

Samuel Shenton is extremely sensitive to ridicule and dislikes being pointed out as the local eccentric whenever he goes for a quiet drink to a nearby pub. A pertinent sentence of *The Plane Truth* states: "We trust that no more gibes about 'Flat Earthers' will be occasioned from Prime Minister Wilson of the Socialist Party and Enoch Powell of the Conservative Party." He is certain fear of mockery accounts for the paucity of professed flat earthists: "People are afraid to be linked with the Flat Earth Society because they get the finger of ridicule pointed at them—'Ooh, he's one of them, you know', people say.

"It's hard enough for me. I've been a flat earthist since 1920, trying to sort things out." After years of cogitation Mr Shenton is deeply convinced that almost everyone on earth is misinformed: "You and I were taught that the earth is small, a

miserable little pill of a world spinning in space. The flat earthist has reason to believe that the earth is vast in every direction and we only occupy a small portion. Space, instead of being illimitable, is relatively small. That makes a good story. It's not far-fetched or anything. All the hodge-podge of teachers and preachers who speak of a self-evolved earth are anti-God because God says that the earth is absolutely still and unmoving."

Samuel Shenton is a religious man and he says: "The earth lies at the base of a vast pit. The son of God at his resurrection had to pass through all heavens to the highest heaven—so there must be more than one. And the Bible says that he who first passed through the heavens was the same who first descended to the lowest level." His host of heavens are piled on top of one another like orange boxes, with space in between for living creatures.

The world "known" to man turns out to be quite unknown. The North Pole forms a central icy point around which the earth's land masses are spread in an enormous, flat circle. Its circumference is the Antarctic and the ice there is a barrier beyond which man has not yet passed. "It's as though all the world we know were contained in one circular room. It is reasonable that the floor continues beyond the walls, beyond the barrier. People haven't gone beyond that barrier yet."

There are several proofs for the earth's undoubted flatness. First, the earth was not always circular; once it was a square land mass. But in the days of one of our ancestors called Peleg, believes Shenton, that land mass was torn asunder, something which could not have happened on a globe: "You would upset the supposed law of gravity. If the earth were a globe, when the portions of the land mass were loosened in the days of Peleg, they would have flown out into space, wouldn't they?"

Second, one must consider the curvature of the earth—if it is a globe. Mr

Shenton pointed out: "From the North Pole down to the equator there has got to be a vertical drop of 4,000 miles. Take the Suez Canal. It was built to a datum horizontal line and is 100 miles in extent but there is no dip or curvature in it at all."

Third, there is the sun. "You and I were taught that the sun was a vast body overlapping a tiny little earth way down in space. If that were true, the sun would flood everything with light. We think the actual sun is a relatively small body only 32 miles in diameter not far away from the earth—just like a suspended light bulb."

The sun and the moon are both—perhaps surprisingly—accepted as being spheres. At no time has Mr Shenton received so much attention as during and following the recent Apollo moonshot. Shenton is adamant that the evidence and photographs supplied by the lunar orbiters were trumped up by the American government to fool the world's population: "All those humps and bumps which are put in front of our eyes in photographs are simply distortions of the camera." Admittedly, there is such a thing as a fish-eye lens. The astronauts shot up off the surface of the earth and they were simply going round in a very small circle and on arrival at what the rest of the men on earth thought was the moon: "The astronauts had been so trained with simulations that they interpreted everything accordingly."

Shenton's platform has really become too much for him to cope with by himself, but with a dearth of equally convinced and eloquent helpers he has to carry on. His retirement is dedicated to his conviction: indeed it has become a calling from which he cannot escape.

Just as another physicist has become synonymous with his law so Samuel Shenton: "Newton denied that he was responsible for the law of gravity but he is stuck with it. For me it's the same. I am committed to the flat earth's existence."