

Prospero satellite - First British satellite to be launched on a British rocket (Black Arrow)



The Prospero satellite, also known as the X-3, was launched by the United Kingdom on October 18, 1971. It was designed to undertake a series of experiments to study the effects of the space environment on communications satellites and remained operational until 1973, after which it was contacted annually for over 25 years. Although Prospero was the first British satellite to have been launched successfully by a British rocket, Black Arrow, the first British satellite placed in orbit was Ariel 1, launched in April 1962 on a US rocket.

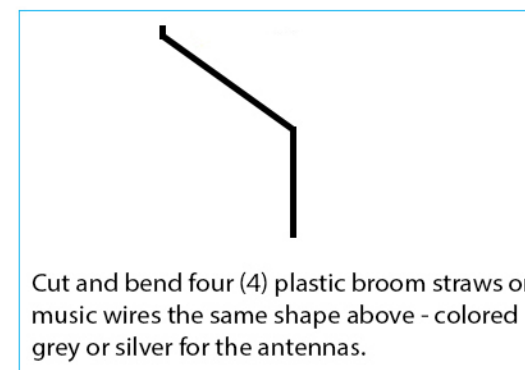
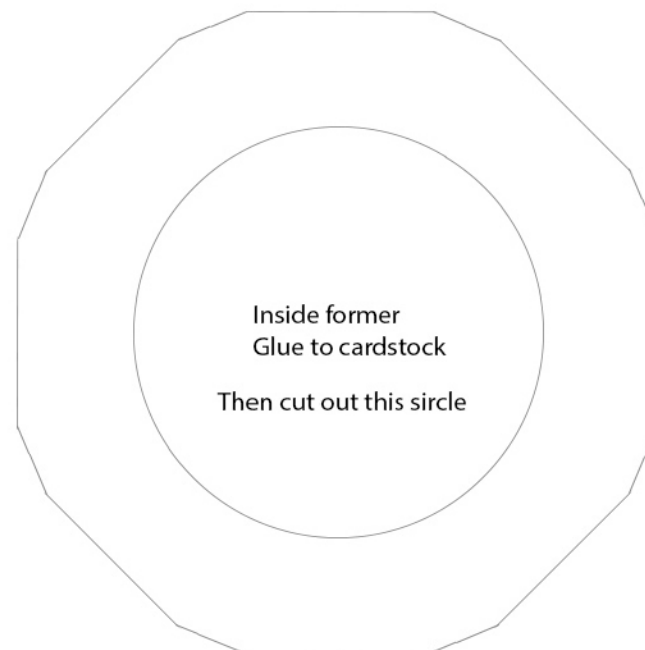
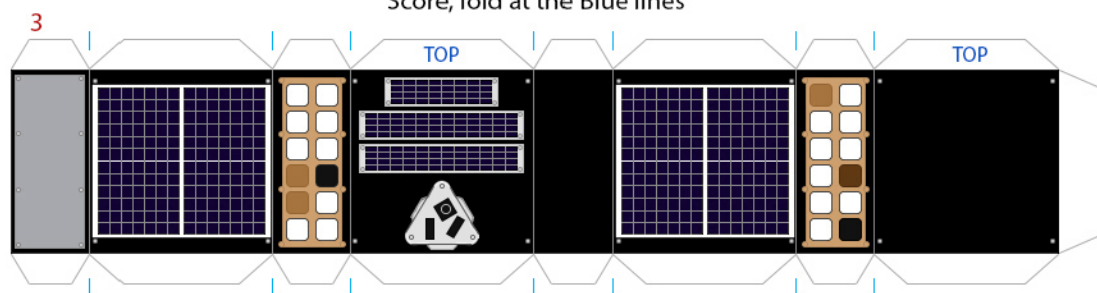
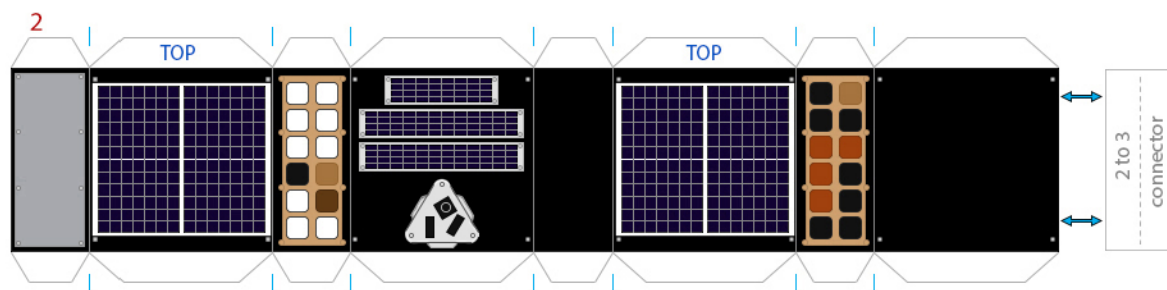
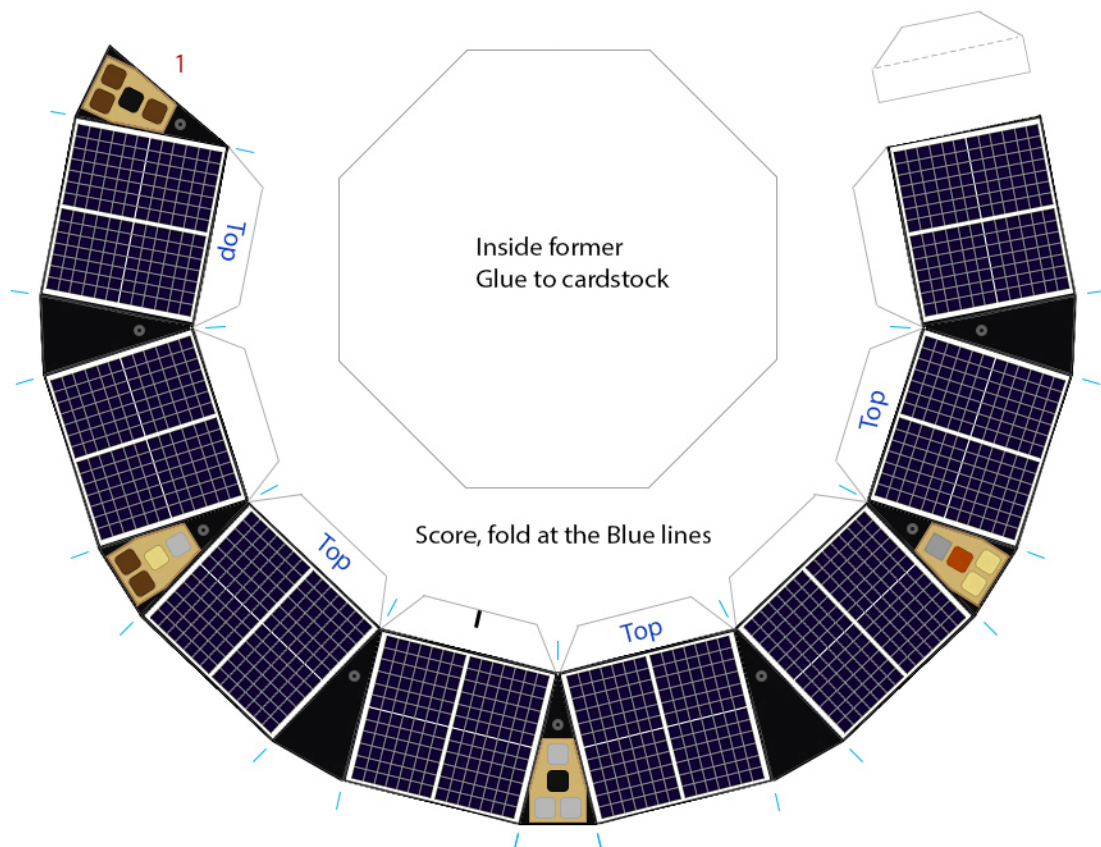
This makes Great Britain the sixth country to orbit a satellite (after the Soviet Union, the United States, France, Japan and China).

Prospero's tape recorders stopped working in 1973. As was noted in an episode of the BBC television series *Coast*, radio transmissions from Prospero could still be heard on 137.560 MHz in 2004, though the signals used in the episode would actually come from an Orbcomm satellite, rather than Prospero (as the later Orbcomm used the same 137.560 MHz frequency since Prospero was considered no longer active). Prospero had officially been deactivated in 1996, when the UK's Defence Research Establishment decommissioned their satellite tracking station at Lasham, Hampshire but the satellite had been turned on in past years on its anniversary. It is in a low Earth orbit and is not expected to decay until about 2070, almost 100 years after its launch.

In September 2011 a team at University College London's Mullard Space Science Laboratory announced plans to re-establish communications with Prospero, in time for the satellite's 40th anniversary. As of September 2012, not much progress had been made in establishing contact with the satellite due to time constraints. At perigee, Prospero can be seen through binoculars at magnitude +6 overhead, steady.



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