

Churchill's Toy Shop, a talk by Mr Gordon Rogers - 2015

In October we had Mr Gordon Rogers, who runs the Crendon Observatory, give us a very entertaining talk all about "Churchill's Toy Shop", a secret endeavour by Winston Churchill to enlist specialists in developing weapons to produce innovative and novel munitions free from the constraints of the sluggish WWII MOD in London. This all took place at the Firs in Whitchurch, just down the road. He recounted many stories about how he became interested in explosives and how he got to know a number of the characters including Stuart McRae, who were instrumental in developing these pyrotechnic devices.

The following pages contain related bits of information compiled from both Gordon's own website as well as from a local news paper cutting –

"Winston Churchill's Toyshop" by Gordon Rogers

In October we had Mr Gordon Rogers, who runs the Crendon Observatory, give us a very entertaining talk all about M.D.1., also known as "Winston Churchill's Toy Shop". A secret endeavour by Winston Churchill to enlist specialists in developing weapons to produce innovative and novel munitions free from the constraints of the sluggish WWII MOD. This all took place at the Firs in Whitchurch, just down the road. He recounted many stories about how he became interested in explosives and how he got to know a number of the main characters who helped found M.D.1.

Only five years ago did I learn that the premises from which, as a schoolboy, I nicked a couple of antitank rounds and a box of fuses was "Winston Churchill's Toyshop". The BBC having refused my entreaties for them to make a documentary on the topic, I decided to make my own PowerPoint presentation and I do find some humour in this serious subject. I did manage to persuade Sky Vision to make a programme which they sold to the Discovery Channel and this brief resume was aired in May. Having become Prime Minister, Churchill knew of the red tape at the War Office so he appointed himself Minister of Defence and created just one Department, MD1 at Whitchurch near Aylesbury, under his direct control via Lord Cherwell. This department created over 50 weapons that went into production and also paid a pivotal role in the creation of the atomic bomb – a fact that the authorities seem to want to hide.

I have given his talk frequently including at the National Army Museum in Chelsea and the Ghurkha Museum in Winchester with many airings in prospect in the Home Counties. I am not aware that any member of an audience has ever "dropped off" whilst I have been hectoring them.

Gordon Rogers business life was as a Chartered Surveyor partner of Brown and Merry, Aylesbury, specialising in the bringing forward of land for residential development purposes mainly for local charitable organisations. He is an enthusiastic amateur astronomer concentrating on Deep Space with his own state of the art "Crendon Observatory" adjoining his house at Long Crendon (www.gordonrogers.co.uk).

Some of this year's comments about the talk:

"Many thanks for the excellent talk you gave yesterday evening. We were captivated by your account of Winston Churchill's Toyshop, mixed in with the stories of your own adventures, and the time just

flew by. Congratulations on your delivery too. Many speakers find that room quite difficult but your voice was clear and well paced and all the humour was appreciated.” (Haddenham Museum Trust)

“What an amazing morning you gave us all at Hartwell; I have lost track of the number of people who have contacted me to tell me how much they enjoyed your talk and how fascinated they were. I must say I thoroughly enjoyed myself and feel humbled by how much we all owe those boffins.”
(Francesca Wall, PACE children’s charity at Hartwell House)

“I can assure you that everyone present thought that your whole presentation was very good indeed and I was told it was the best talk we have ever had.” (Barnet Probus)

“So much enthusiasm which rubbed off on the audience. A terrific understanding of the subject peppered with marvellous anecdotes.” First class. (Frank Pitkin)

“Thank you so much for your enthralling talk yesterday and for the way you linked what you were saying to the photographs and diagrams on the screen.” (BBO RAF Association)

Some Toyshop Weapons

Blacker Bombard or spigot mortar	Limpet mine
Water bomb (Rhine)	Great Eastern Bridge laying tank
L-Delay fuze	Tank plough for mine removal
“A” bomb for aircraft application	“Kangaroo” aerial bomb
PIAT anti-tank gun	“Kangaroo 3” mortar
The J”JW” Johnny Walker bomb or bobber	“Kangaroo” mine
Hedgehog anti-submarine device	“Puffball” airborne straffing device
Acoustic delay mine	Mine trigger devices
Wreckage clearance mine	One man submarine
“J” bomb incendiary	Clamshell mines
Camouflet railway mine	Hollow charge shells and bombs
“Sticky” bomb	Hollow charge capital ship bomb
“Pull” booby trap	Hollow charge anti-submarine bomb
“Push” booby trap	Hollow charge anti-tank rounds
“Release” booby trap	Hollow charge rockets
The universal switch	4.5”” naval gun with poultice round
Anti-personnel device	7.5” tank mounted demolition gun
Anti-personnel alarm device	“Beehive” steel penetration device
Anti- left device for mines	

Vale's role designing WWII weapons for 'Winston Churchill's Toyshop' – or how one man was arrested at gunpoint for throwing bazooka shells around

Gordon Rodgers - historic researcher looking through a 1944 issue of The Buck Herald

Published on 25/08/2011 10:53

A LONG Crendon man who was arrested as a child during the Second World War for playing around with bazooka shells is to give a talk on Bucks' global contribution to weapons of mass destruction.

Between 1939 and 1945, just off the High Street in Whitchurch, weapons were designed and tested which eventually helped the allies win the Second World War.

Now years' later Gordon Rodgers, 79, who gives astronomy lectures to schools and societies, is planning to talk about what went on in the building which still stands today and is known as The Firs.

Mr Rogers has always been interested in explosives and made the front page of the Bucks Herald in 1944 when he was arrested at gun point, aged 12, for throwing bazooka shells in Aldbury with three friends.

Despite receiving an official warning he was not put off from playing with weapons and six months later was caught breaking into a storeroom in Whitchurch – later known as Winston Churchill's Toy Shop.



Workers at the secret base came up with fuses which could be timed to wait days before detonating, depth charges to sink submarines and attempted to create bullet firing helmets.

One of the men who worked at the site used his research to help design the trigger for the Nagasaki atomic bomb which was detonated in 1945.

At its height the site employed 250 people and was regularly visited by Mr Churchill who came to see the new secret weapons being developed.

Churchill's Toy Shop was the name given to it by senior bureaucrats in the Ministry of Defence who were unhappy at being shut out from what was happening there.



Mr Rogers believes schools in the Vale should be teaching children about the site and its role in the war.

He said: “I think it is a thing of considerable interest.

“It is the top facility on our doorstep, they invented amazing weapons. I would also have thought a TV documentary on it would be a fascinating subject.

“I’m sure it will happen some time.”

Very little was known about the site until 1971 when Lieutenant Colonel Stuart Macrane, who was second in command of the site during the war, wrote a book about it.

No World War Two weapons are still based at The Firs, which is currently used by small firms who rent office space there.

Invented at the ‘toy shop’:

1 DELAY FUSES: Could be timed to last up to a week before they exploded. Used by Colonel Von Stauffenberg to try and activate bombs to assassinate Hitler. The fuses continued being used until the start of this century.

1 MOBILE TANK BRIDGES: Tanks fitted with rockets so they could fire a bridge over a void – allowing a tank to cross over using the bridge.

1 K DELAY JUMPING BOMB: Dropped in clusters they penetrated the ground and were programmed to shoot up into the air and explode at different times. If used, it meant a piece of enemy land could be out of action for a week because the enemy never knew when the next bomb would detonate.

1 JW BOMBS: Dropped into the water they would oscillate up to the surface and then back down again until they found a submarine.

1 RADAR PROTECTION: Aluminium strips were dropped by planes because boffins discovered it confused enemy radar.

1 CASTRATOR: Cartridges were sunk in the ground in a tube, if stepped on they would fire a bullet straight up into a man’s private parts.

1 INCENDIARY BOMBS: Set fire to things.