

TASC Clarion 63, Dec 2014 to Jan 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. 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 Macrae, who were instrumental in developing these pyrotechnic devices.

November’s talk was given by our very own airline pilot, Mr Simon Braithwaite. Simon gave us a very interesting and enlightening talk about what it takes to fly a British Airways 747 airliner across the Atlantic from London to Phoenix Arizona. It was quite an eye opener as the majority of us were under the impression that the process is almost completely handled by the on-board computer. This, as we found out, is far from the truth, as Simon explained most of the work was in the pre-flight preparation which included having to wait for passenger numbers and baggage weights to be confirmed before last minute calculations were possible, with main and emergency destination routes to be calculated under various different conditions. He showed us examples of the paperwork and calculations needed to plan a flight, all in all quite a complex task. All this information then needs to be fed into the computer by hand and double and treble checked, not a task for the average man, unless of course he’s spent many years and over £100k on being trained.

Simon also gave us a short introduction into the aerodynamics of how the various wing and control surfaces interact to keep the aeroplane flying, and what sometimes can go wrong: not for the faint hearted!

In January I intend to take a look at what has become known as the “Dark Web”, how it began life and why and what it has evolved into, also why it may be of use to the “common man in the street”. So if you are one of the many people who use the Internet be afraid, be very afraid!