WAOH

WARGM Oral History Audio Archive

Interviews by Ron Treadgold

Cross Reference Index for

Audio Tape – Compact Disk – Mini Disk

and

WARGM Oral History Audio Archive

MP3 CD Collection

WAOH - WARGM Oral History Audio Archive
Interviews by Ron Treadgold on MP3 CD

Compact Disks (CD) - Mini Disks (MD) - Audio Tapes (AT)

CD 1 - Track 1 MD6 AT 4 - Side B
Norman 'Bob' Elliott (1936-82)
Recorded 10.8.1999
N.E.Drawn map of north Site Millwrights shop. Beam engine shafting taken away in WWI.
People named in shop, on map (map in RT) connections with RSAF (Enfield Lock). Jobs and
people doing them in various parts of Factory, Blanchards etc. Cordite extrusion dies 080
(Tea up!) Advent of WW II. Dies for AA shells – remade from scratch. 120
Technology of cordite dies, etc, plundering of factory and loss of equipment.
Uses of cordite sizes in various arms. Many details included 210
Called up 1941, machine shop manned by small arms factory (Griffiths), acid factory
management. Acid factory details (a few) 280
(NG manufacture) Boiler houses for acid factory, drying houses in the woods(steam engines)
details of steam stoves, heating etc. 320
1940 explosions (5) viewed by B Elliott from M/C shop, damage therein, narrow escapes 350
details of explosions. More re acid factory 400
South Site acid vats/retorts burst through fire hole and killed one (Palmer).
South Site projects (Dr Pride, Wallace) Cyanamide plant (Ron Ayerst) 460
His suggestion to prevent ammonia gas leaking to furnace (Norman Elliotts') 600
No acknowledgement! Humour – men smoking inside chimney shaft! 650
Details on shop plans Ends 690

CD 2 - Track 1 MD2 AT 6 - Side B
Dicky Doe (1935-76)
Recorded 8.10.1999
This tape was recorded by himself at home in Bury St Edmunds and given to Ron Treadgold
on 8.10.1999. This account is very detailed.
1935 lab assistant. Staff at Main lab early history of Main lab and staff involvments (very good
recall of characters!). Other people at RGPF and ERDE. Lab assitant jobs at Main Lab in the 30's
on. Geography, bikes. 040
Searching, Office staff, messenger, no women, wages on Fridays, Woolwich barges, flood
problems, Refinery bridge, stores boats (AdmiralTrevor Peck!) Sampling. Frozen in winter, too
hot in summer, all hand carried sacks etc. 1940 War – Chile saltpetre, Lower Island acetone store.
1936,37,38, Latimer School recruits CE dust problems (dermatitis!) South Site buildings etc.
RDX. Concentrators, acid analyses and laboratory control testing 185
Accident in acid plant, two men involved, one died, other seriously disfigured. 220
[NB 220 better from Arthur Wilson 3.2.99]
Army awards. Air raids, shelters, incendaries. Late 39 explosion in NG section. Jan '40 labs
started at Bishopton. Chemists recuited. Parachute mine '41 on reel store and another on WA.
Type of explosive made. 310
Grass snakes. GC taken to Fishers Green for storage. Paste manufacture – mineral jelly –
carbamite into dough mixers – extruded as cordite 340
Blending houses – other products – GC slabs, primers – types of packaging South Site labs –
water tower – RDX production 350
Lab detonation tests – hospitals, doc and 2 nurses, earth closets (tomatoes!) – water wardens
to maintain levels. Main lab glycerine nitration test by Walter Blanchard. 450
1937 Planning office planned ROF Bishopton started factory at Bishopton in 1940 Ends 475

CD 2 - Track 2 MD2 AT 6 - Side A
Dicky Doe - Second Interview
Recorded 9.10.1999
Phone call from Ron Treadgold to Dicky Doe at Bury St Edmunds 490
Further account (essay) given to Norman Paul re Main lab. Talked about power supplies,
Long hoursin lab, 8:30 classes, home ca 10pm!
Proposes to do history of plastic propellant early work – another tape?

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CD 3 - Track 1 MD 3 AT 1 - Side A
Sis Ward (1940-?)
Recorded 1993
Processing cordite, packing, blending, weighing, headaches, times of work 070
Work on South Site, occasional rules broken!
Court marshal, clothing (clean vs. dirty)
bombs, canteen, lunch breaks 140
wages, marched in groups, trucks, boats 207
sing-songs, lab samples, hospital visits 270
"characters" met, staff structure Ends 315

CD 3 - Track 2 MD3 AT 1 Side B
Tom Gladwell (1936-?)
Recorded 1.6.1994
Born Essex – farming, ploughing, later out of work, found jobs pipe laying, worked with brother in nurseries 1936. Into RGPF 1936 046
Started North Site, then South Site packing pressing cordite, reeling, "women better" 100
Interview for the job, foreman, Powdermill Lane, 15 on board, appointment confirmed 190
Blending houses, little "lessons", 340
Duties Of a foreman, drunkenness 423
Incidents; stove blow up, bombs, colouring of skin by CE, work on NG, headaches 520
End of war, to Covent Garden toll returned to ERDE. 545

CD 4 - Track 1 MD4 AT 2 - Side A
Arthur Witham (1933-82)
Recorded 28.1.1999
1933 - Cycles, boats, no roads, railways.
Asphalt path to top end 1936. 032
Discipline, D.B. visitors, learnt glass blowing, went to chemical plumbers 055
Work on plant, wages, searching, (leather shop) and aluminium work 108
Safety – 30 staff covering? other metal w/leather. Later lead work specialised 1940
Explosions, NG nitrating conditions. 175
Acid factory, accidents 255
Post war work, SOUTH Site press explosion 331
Dancing etc at Club (Glad Witham!) 400
Carbon fibre work, fire stations around estab, black powder wood sheds (charcoal)
Water transport 490
Canteens, NG(2) heat own food, lunch breaks one half hour. People in Main lab (Arthur made the tea)
Gardens outside Main Lab – rabbits! 570
Enjoyed working in factory. 627

CD 5 - Track 1 MD4 AT 2 - Side B
Alf Nicholls (1935-74)
Recorded 5.6.1999
Father in RGPF in WW I, local schooling Family history, how appointed.
1935 Teasing room, drying room, wibbower?? 031
Temp control important (for 'guncotton' read cotton!) wages (£2.7s.3d – '35) '36 NG section stoving of guncotton, temp recording 077
Picrite, NG Hill, boat transport (larks!) 125
Canteen facilities(clean v. dirty) CE! No thanks! 150
Work on NG hill 200
Bishopton transfer of some staff 1940, Poole. Bishopton set up on NG v. WA G/C nitration. 270
Quinnan stoves, various misdemeanours! 300
Quicker drying in Quinnan stoves, also at Bishopton
Explosion at Bishopton, incidents 350
Return to WA (wife fed up with Bishopton!) 363
Put on safety section (ca 1950), other staff on safety section, Gravener, Cole. 400
How he kept order in the group etc!! 470
Caught somebody in compromising situation!! 510
Retirement in 1974 540
Rather lonely life now Ends 630

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CD 5 - Track 2 MD5 AT 3 - Side A
Alf Nichols
Recorded 11.6.1999 (inside RGPF)
Walking around Site bike lamps forbidden. Chem stores, Queenmeads, NG samples, the hill, state of buildings, friends 055
L157, L153 Freeman, Vernon, L155 two sunken boats
Whitbread, burning waste, old chimney stack used! 150
Gravener, musing about old incidents – smoking as he went in gate! Tree damage 217
Clean v. dirty toilets. Inside car going to top end 260
Water warden's cottage and people there. Old water wheel press house 320
Alf doesn't remember water wheel working 333
What's going to happen to Site? Little done for years. On to acid factory by car.
"Procedure on arrival at gates" rules etc. 410
mealtimes, changing time, routes (reading from notes) clothing, names of personnel 455
Long Walk. Acid Factory. Retorts (not a lot known) fumes, acid sent to hill (hooter) 690
hill procedures, charges etc. Ends 735

CD 6 - Track 1 MD6 AT 4 - Side A
Dennis Mansell (1949-87)
Recorded 10.8.1999
Local paper ad for job Previously at Northampton Poly.
Wages. Left and started at RGPF. Electronics group. Names. Canteen cakes. Bldg H16 048
Poor lighting. Functions of various bays and personnel. Cordite winding in one bay.
Smoking in canteen 090
Scope of electronics section. Service section. Allowed to use Supts. Office to do homework after work! 1950-51 140
Jobs done by various people. Humour. 160
Methods of measuring rocket performance – early apparatus. Crossing canal in barge to reach canteen. Building chassiss etc for equipment 270
Went dancing in Town Hall, where met wife Married 1952. Practised jokes, including dead fish!
Rides on train (charging shed nearby) occasional derailments. Retired '87 362
(short time on South Site) become Royal Ordnance + bureaucracy Ends 438

CD 7 - Track 1 MD7 AT 7 - Side B
Norman Blay
Recorded 30.11.1999
Rang at 10:00am. Talked for 1½ hours ! on two sides of tape! – and theres more to come!
Main lab, guncotton lab, night work, wartime, bombs, accidents, spilt mercury under floor etc.
(plenty of charge still left in batteries - used batteries to avoid interference from radio signals)

CD 7 - Track 2 MD8 AT 8 - Side A
Norman Blay
Recorded 30.11.1999
Talk continued – include social life, "dancing club", (45 min).
Win Blay at RGPF for only year 1945-6. Fort Halstead group at WA, with Freeman on plastic prop. Arrival of Woolwich 'QA' group (ca 1946) sampling, opportunity to walk around plant.
Social life, "lunch hour library"(1940's) loss of local friend by call up advent of "dancing club".
(includes numerous recollections by myself)
Home guard established, personell involved, weapons training, commissions, transport of CE by horse and cart to WX railway, from RGPF light railway. Procedure for cotton nitration on South Site, acid recovery, analyses of acids, washing of GC stoving, gunpowder workers clothing. Floods in 1946 very bad – evacuation of Main lab! Floating logs.

CD 8 - Track 1 MD8 AT 9 - Side B
Norman Blay
Recorded 7.12.1999

CD 8 - Track 2 MD9 AT 9 - Side B
Norman Blay
Recorded 7.12.1999

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CD 9 - Track 1 MD7 AT 5 -Side B
Lynne Lennard (1979-?)
Recorded 3.9.1999
Interview in North Site office. Current Royal Gunpowder Mills Site Manager. 015
23 years in Waltham Abbey, born in Wales, father at RAE Aberporth, then safety officer at Waltham Abbey.
1979 started South Site Charge machining for tests. Machines used, lathes, coolant. 030
Then rolls house, paste. Procedures, hazards, safety devices. Then to extraction of NG from 080
dynamite, with warm water – layout of tanks etc., NG headaches. 135
To fire station control room after hurting back (father displeased) Ends 150

CD 9 - Track 3 MD9 AT 10 - Side A
Graham Tant (1939-41)
Recorded 7.4.2000
Mostly about life in the Main lab 030
Schools 1939 RGPF interview W. Blanchard in Main lab. Life in measurement room, lunchtimes in local cafes, RGPF library, "clocking in", washing up lab ware, grinding cordite; a dangerous prank 100
Wages, work times, cycling to work, work on South Site, explosion at factory (ca 1940), lab girls, Home guard formation. 275
Other lab assistants, entered Fleet Air Arm, RGPF library again. 350

CD 9 - Track 2 MD9 AT 10 - Side B
Ron Long (1954-?)
Recorded 3.6.2000
Mostly about naming of staff etc.
Crystallography, old motor bike for £2! Wages, recruitment campaign by MOD.
Various names recalled. Wife in Main Lab 100
Partime study, to Northen Poly on motor bike, fogs, walking home, sailing club, 1963 freeze up on River Lee, moved to RNCF near Poole (home area) 350

CD 10 - Track 1 MD10 AT 11 - Side B
Bert Skinner (1934-?)
Recorded 12.6.2000
Explosion RGPF, on Long walk early 1940 conscripted to Forces. Later returned to RGPF 025
after 6 years. Now 83 years old. Started in RGPF 1934. Cordite, uncle in Factory Bil Perry (safety) and uncle Bill Watson (fire brigade – mum's brother). Worked as "puller up" in cordite grinding, extruded cordite from press along the "chopping up table". Finnish at 10 press house. After war back in ERDE as fitter and later in labs under Ziebland, Needham, Ron Smith (recording lost at this point)

Bert Skinner (Second Interview) 085
Earlier part repeated about relatives etc. 106
Then working in H10 labs. Time in forces started back at RGPF. Other members. Explosions, visits to the "Tin Tabernacle" 240
Copped Hall outings, carnivals, fair in Market , Parties in Hoppit canteen 350
"Narrow escapes" working with Hans Ziebland 500
40 minutes Ends 620

CD 11 - Track 1 MD11 AT 12 - Side B
Cyril Povey (1939-43)
Recorded 11.5.2000
Largely ref to Home Guard period.
Latimer School – heard of jobs at RGPF Getting to work. Start battlecraft school in connection with Home Guard. Usual round of jobs at main lab. 122
Now living in Sussex – Lindfield. Incidents at lab 168
Didn't like measurement room. Remembers the explosions, lab breakages.
Formation of Local Defence Volunteers, renamed Home Guard Signals section 270
Given corporals stripes. Further history of Home Guard, training school etc 360
Met wife Jean at Royal Gunpowder Mills in 1942. Into coal mines as "Bevin Boy" 515
Ends 700

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CD 12 - Track 1 MD12 AT 12 - Side A
Leslie Grinrod (1935-?)
Recorded 9.8.2000
Modest introduction "I've nothing much to offer". 1939 end September called up for army. 027
Recalled after 18 months. Wrexham. After Dunkirk escaped France in Lancastrian disaster from St Nazaire ship sunk – 3000 lives lost – pulled out of water 100
6 months at Waltham Abbey then Wrexham. Born Edmonton, my sister in law in his class. 170
Likes cycling. Ernie Cook met in Waltham Cross. Old friends from lab days. 320
(lots of us have passed on!) Ends 420

CD 12 - Track 2 MD12 AT 13 - Side A
Dennis Ashby (1949-ca 1970)
Recorded 29.9.2000
Telephone Engineer at RGPF
Earlier jobs ca 1946 with Post Office Phones from Wood Green. Post war repairs.
RGPF demolition by Dimmock – lead floors 061
Magneto phones (given to WA museum) 100
Has book of early RGPF telephone system 160
Describes early RGPF telephone system - George Whitbread - Don Hodge 220
Accidents - messenger Arthur Suggate died Dec 2000 (who is Arthur?) 280
Burning of old buildings, including water mill 320
Gunpowder buildings, unnecessary destruction.
He was bombed out 1940. Ends 430

CD 13 - Track 1 MD13 AT 5 - Side A
Mary Jones-Fuller (1930 -?)
Recorded 1996
Interviewed by Ron Treadgold at LVRP Art painting course
Did not work at RGPF, father owned a dairy at WX. Horses used in RGPF for towing to RSAF, friend killed in RGPF 1940. 030
Worked part-time in office of RGPF. Summer craft shows. 065

CD 13 - Track 2 MD13 AT 7 - Side A
John Harker
Recorded 9.11.1999
Nursery Sewardstone – a local industry.

CD 14 - Track 1 MD14 AT 14 - Side A
Jim Brent (1935-?)
Recorded 6.11.2000
This tape is poor quality - batterry getting low and I did not realise.
Working with his father in shop (stores at Nazing) – testimonial for {from?} local dignitary to get job at Mills ("The Captain") visit to the "Big House" 030
Got taken on as "temp" at RGPF (did 44 years). Packing cordite 100
Loading "Lady of Lea" 30 tons, Black Ditch. Horse down Lea, sails on Thames- Sewardstone rail link with road – "notes" sent in boxes to Woolwich & Enfield – blending, reeling 140
Rework of old cordite (WWI). Air Force 6 years – liked life in Mills 180
After return – digging gang (cess pits) – interview with Crossman 250
In charge of German POW gang 260
Carpenters mate, 1947 floods, running for it!, deluged 280
(after this there is much distortion but is "readable")
On the barges, towing, cold in winter, letting barges down the cut on a winch, carried on by water flow, locks. Number 41 stove blew up, caused by bullet from Enfield Lock? 360
Fire drill, hand pump, dealt with the fire, commendation of this (W. C. Blanchard) 400
Safety section for last 12 years, talk to Rotary club – Nov 85. Journey from Colombo to Karachi Ends 630

CD 14 - Track 2 MD14 AT 14 - Side B
Peter Hilton
Recorded 19.11.2000
Didn't actually work in Royal Gunpowder Mills, but good account of members of family who did.. Ends 366

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CD 15 - Track 1 MD13 AT 13 - Side A
Norman 'Bob' Elliott (1936-82)
Recorded 30.10.2000 (Second interview)
Work on RGPF railways. Types of locomotives used. Motor launch used on canals, through to Bow Creek and over to Woolwich. Sold eventually for £850 530
Lady of Lea also sold ca 1953
Locos serviced in Millwrights shop 620
Description of mechanisms, brakes 750

MD13 AT 13 - Side B
Recorded 30.10.2000 (Continue second interview)
Track laying – railway to be installed again at Royal Gunpowder Mills- Bob would like to see the trains when they arrive! – gauges 050
wooden rails for danger buildings – making his own model engine (tank) nearly done.
Would probably like to walk around and offer advice etc.
Visits to model engineering clubs. Would Royal Gunpowder Mills like one of his old lathes 160
Ends 180

CD 16 MD1 AT 11 - Side A
Ron Treadgold (1939-43 and 1954-83)
Recorded 7.6.2000 (45min)
Starting work with Government Chemists Dept. excise duty, move to Covent Garden, transferred to WA. Cycling to work from Walthamstow 085
Clocking in, paths to Main Lab, work in ML, measurements, NG head, acid factory, 115
"safety", odd jobs in Main Lab, work in CE, 150
skin staining by work in explosives, lunchtime in Powdermill Lane Library, snooker, celebrations in local pubs, Eric Speller tandem episode(!) 249
S Site stunt with Percy Smith's lab 300
Home Guard formation 350
Dancing club founded with office staff 370
Marriages, (transfer to De Havilands) 430
Woolwich staff toilets (practical jokes) 470
First flight in jet from Hatfield, back to ERDE 1954.
Death of Joe Archer. Lovely scenery and wild life on South Site. 45minutes Ends 650

CD 17 - Track 1 AT 15 - Side A
George Savill
Recorded 26.10.2001

CD 17 - Track 2 AT 15 - Side A
George Savill
Recorded 2.11.2001

CD 17 - Track 3 AT 15 - Side B
George Savill
Recorded 2.11.2001

CD 18 - Track 1 AT 16 - Side A
Doris Day
Recorded 28.04.2001

CD 18 - Track 2 AT 16 - Side B
Pat Barge
Recorded 11.11.2001