

I give three talks: “Winston Churchill’s Toyshop”, “The Sky at Night” and “Military Moments circa WW”2”

“Winston Churchill’s Toyshop”

Only nine years ago did I learn that the premises from which, as a schoolboy, I nicked a couple of Blacker bombard anti-tank missiles and a box of L-delay fuses was "Winston Churchill's Toyshop", the UK's premier weapons experimental station in WW2.

I wrote to the BBC suggesting they make a documentary: their response was:

The BBC **“does not accept ideas for programmes of a documentary or factual nature”** so I decided to put together my own Powerpoint presentation. The title is arrived at in that when becoming PM Churchill knew of the massive War Office red-tape; to by-pass this he appointed himself Minister of Defence and created just one Department – MD1 located at Whitchurch just north of Aylesbury.

The department was to be under Churchill's direct control via Lord Cherwell and over 50 weapons were invented which went into service. I have carried out extensive research at the Nuffield library in Oxford reading the papers passing between Churchill and Cherwell – fascinating stuff and the source of much information for my talk. James Tuck was a very important member of the team: he was a nuclear scientist who made a fundamental input into the allied war effort and yet the military seek to efface him from history.

Giving the talk at The National Army Museum in Chelsea three MOD weapons experts in the audience e-mailed to say they were **“enthralled with what they heard”** – it is such an untold story and I manage to find some humour too. I did persuade the Discovery Channel to make a TV documentary but they only scratched the surface of the topic.

The Sky at Night

As a keen amateur astronomer this talk covers astronomical topics of contemporary interest both amateur and professional. I have a passion for Deep Space imaging and have built a state of the art observatory adjoining my house: I explain how this operates. Sir Patrick Moore filmed a whole “Sky at Night” programme at The Crendon Observatory and asked me to write a book about it in his astronomy series. It is published by Springer and entitled "My Heavens". I am a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society. It is a staggering topic but there is room for humour.

Military Moments circa WW2

Such a broad canvas but I have put together a collection of events where the great majority is likely to be novel to the attendee: even if known about I may well introduce an unexpected slant. Chosen topics are across the spectrum of utter bravery, incredible nerve, espionage, humour, deception, endurance, stupidity, survival, and the macabre.

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