

# Bradbury Mercury



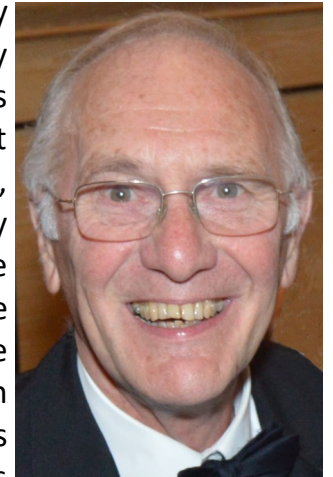
## Our Chairperson's Message

It's that time of year again and here's hoping you all experienced a wonderful festive season. Another year's over and the 60s 16ers enjoyed another cracking reunion in Oxford. Thank you, Tom, and everyone else involved in making it such a success for without your selfless, time consuming efforts we would not be the successful reunion club that we are today. Each year the organisers help us to bond and retain our uniqueness as a club.

Unfortunately, Sheila and I can't make it to the recee this year as I must undergo major, lifesaving surgery next month and will not have recovered sufficiently to be able to attend. I also understand that some other committee members will be missing due to previous commitments. It has come to my attention that doubts have been cast regarding the ability of the IOW Tours company to help Dave Walker organise this year's reunion. I would like to stress that they are **not** taking control of the

event but are merely assisting Dave by following his instructions to help facilitate the event **we** as a club want. Also, they will be closely monitored by the committee and will not be allowed to do anything we don't agree with. With that in mind, please let's get behind Dave and his team to make 2019's reunion another resounding success. Bournemouth here we come!

Our thoughts have been with those members who are currently, or have recently been, unfortunate to suffer ill health and Sheila and I wish you all a speedy recovery and a happy and healthy 2019.



*Chris Abbott*



View from top of Craigton Park where the Victorian 178 year old cannon is located. This shows a small selection of new houses. In the area beyond you can see a few of the remaining buildings of ROF Bishopton that still have to be cleared. The actual area of the ROF was about 2000 acres of which over 500 acres has been decontaminated and made suitable for housing. There are plans for three schools to be built on this site, two primary and one secondary. So far I have not seen any plans showing their locations. Maybe I will see them built but probably not.

*Iain Haldane*

## *Iain's Ramblings*

I have been doing a lot of thinking about what nonsense I should ramble on about for this edition of the Mercury. These thoughts came about during the visit to Costco to top up the car and of course a wee bit of shopping. As I was reversing the car out from the slanting park slot, taking extra care as I had a Ginormous SUV to my right. As usual when you reverse you will always see a car trying to make it past you as fast as possible in case you take their place on the line out of the carpark. Maybe I should invest in an armoured car and have fun. Sorry, my thoughts got away from me there. To continue, we headed out of the Costco car park and made our way on to the M8. Driving out of the slip road on to the motorway my thoughts began to operate in overdrive. Is this the new sport? The Mall Grand Prix or in this case the St Rollux Grand Prix. St Rollux is the name of the Mall that includes Costco, Tesco, and Lidl. Coming to a Mall near you, any dimwit boy/girl racer can take part. No entry fee required, just the disgust and horror from all around you when it all goes bang. What makes a normally idiotic scatty driver become a raving looney when confronted by the order of a one-way car park with a speed limit of 5 miles per hour? Ok rant over for a bit. Well maybe not.

I have made a little list, just a little list of things that if I could do something about I would.

### **At the Gym.**

- Not showering before entering leisure pool, sauna or jacuzzi.
- Not picking up personal debris after showering e.g. towel, tissues, contact lens



empties,

- Doing breadths in the pool when everyone else is doing lengths.
- Not being able to see much less read signs like POOL on the door leading to the POOL.

### **On the Road.**

- Drivers who wave you on while you are at a give way or stop sign and you can see cars, they cannot see coming up behind them.
- It makes you think someone is trying to get rid of you. That is if you are paranoid which I might or not might be! Maybe!
- Cyclists, who always obey traffic lights, jumping the RED because they can.
- People who drive in the middle lane of a three lane road, cos it is safer there. Only question that comes to mind is how to they get to and from the middle lane.

Ok Now to the good news, Rita has been passed fit to Fly e.g. that is on aeroplanes not just on her broomstick. We are now planning a trip to Copenhagen. Then we might go to somewhere sunny, too cold here but still not as much snow as the Southwest. I must apologise for the late publication of the Mercury. Only thing that held it up was the brain freeze by a grumpy old man trying to say nice things about the world in general. Ok that's me done for now.

Last but not least , to all you readers, I need articles for the next edition. Anything will do, all I ask is that it be in your own words, in electronics format with words and pictures as separate files. You can do the article in a text document and embed any pictures where you want. I can put it all together in Publisher.

*Happy Writing from Iain Haldane*

<i>Subject Matter</i>	<i>Page Number</i>
<i>Chairperson's Letter — Chris Abbott</i>	<i>Front Page</i>
<i>Iain's Ramblings — The Editor</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Der Flügelmann — Steve Icton</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Lorna Almonds-Windmill's Krefeld Story!</i>	<i>4 &amp; 5</i>
<i>Oxford Group Pictures — Iain Haldane</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Finders Ranges — Sheila Abbott</i>	<i>7, 8 &amp; 9</i>
<i>Some more Jokes — Anon</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>RFO Bishopton — Iain Haldane</i>	<i>11 &amp; 12</i>
<i>Nobel Industries, Ardeer, Ayrshire.</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Craigton Park Memorial Cannon — Iain Haldane</i>	<i>14</i>

# Der Flügelmann

A few months after my arrival in March 1966 in 16 Signal Regiment, Krefeld, a huge parade was held involving the whole regiment. It was in aid of a visit by NATO and BAOR Top Brass who decorated the saluting dais in front of the massed ranks of the Regiment. All the troops were drawn up in squadrons including the WRAC. and featured the use of a Flügelmann. He was situated at a second-floor window of the block facing the square. Nobody had ever heard of or knew what a Flügelmann was. But there stood a Signalmann in Number 2 dress with a Number 1 dress cap as were the rest of us. The difference was that he was wearing huge white gauntlets and carrying an SLR. He had been placed on a table halfway up the stairs, the window had been removed so he was in full view to the parade. He could not be seen by people on the Dias. The reason for this piece of military theatre? He copied all our arms drill movements so the C.O. who was taking the parade could see what drill position the massed ranks behind him were in, so he did not give us stand at ease while we were at present arms!! We who were in the serried ranks were fascinated by this man who copied our movements perfectly but was we hoped likely to fall off the table at any moment. The parade went off with the usual Royal Signals precision and the Flügelmann did an excellent job.

I wonder if any one remembers this grand event and the use of a Flügelmann or come across his appearance anywhere else? I never did but have never forgotten him.

*Steve Sceton, September 2018*

A fogleman (adapted from the German *Flügelmann*, literally "wing man" but commonly meaning "file leader") was originally a soldier posted in front of a line of soldiers to serve as a model in their drill exercises. Today, with its more figurative meaning, the word is often used pejoratively as a synonym of "mouthpiece" or "ringleader". "Fogleman" is by no means a common word, but it does appear in the occasional newspaper article.

## The continuing Saga of 16<sup>th</sup> Signal Regiment in the 1960s.

### Lorna Almonds-Windmill's Krefeld Story!

I wasn't supposed to be posted abroad until I was 21. In May 1965, I drove up to Catterick on my 20<sup>th</sup> birthday to begin my Royal Signals 'Q' Course. I wondered where I would go afterwards. It couldn't be Germany as I was far too young. (I had a brother in the Signals, and he had told me to try for a posting there.)

Wrong! Apparently, I was needed in 16 Signal Regiment, Krefeld. I loved technical signalling and lapped up the lectures and in-the-field exercises – apart from the weather. It was supposed to be summer, but it was freezing at Catterick.

A Canadian called Colour-Sergeant Chegwiddden taught radio voice procedure to our all-female course of WRAC officers. A young captain called Ian Sprackling (Sprackers) taught us Radio Relay. We spent the whole of one day setting up three stations before finally achieving comms. I didn't much enjoy the drier topics like Logistics. As an officer cadet, I had perfected the art of controlling my yawns during lectures by resting my chin firmly in my hand with my elbow planted on the desk. But at Catterick, just when the Chief Instructor was taking us through the finer points of the Order of Battle, I fell asleep and right off my chair.



On 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1965, I landed at Dusseldorf where another young WRAC officer met me and took me to Krefeld. After a brief welcome from the CO, Lt Col Desmond Freeland and an instruction to present myself at the Regimental cocktail party that evening, I unpacked in my room. It was on the corner of the building, overlooking the Guard Room. So, I got to hear the guard being turned out at all hours of the night.

Towards the end of the cocktail party, I thought I would phone my parents to let them know that I had arrived safely. The corridor between the Mess ante room and RHQ had a phone booth so I went into it. I had my back to its door. Suddenly, there was a strong smell of alcohol in there with me and a pair of arms grabbed me from behind. I shrieked and attempted to back out, but I couldn't because the male officer behind me (who shall be nameless) was blocking my escape. He then neatly unzipped my tight black cocktail dress. But as I had made it myself, the hook and eye at the top of the zip were very strong and did not break. His efforts were fruitless, and I finally got out and back to my room. So much for brother officers!

The senior WRAC officer was Captain Barbara Neville. The other female officer was Lieutenant Carol Stubbs. Together with Pat Thomas, Peter Crane and Don Bell the dentist, we made up the single occupants of the Mess. We spent our time in the evenings playing canasta, making the occasional trip into Cologne or dancing in the *Pferdeshtalle* discotheque in Krefeld.

I was to take over from Miss Sheila Macey on 'D' Shift in the Tape Relay Centre (RBFA)

and spent a couple of weeks working alongside her. What a fount of knowledge and experience she was. I carried out every task from logging messages in and out, to cross office check and manning the tape factory where duplicates of tapes destined for more than one circuit were created. I had a nerdy sort of brain that meant I before too long I could read Murray code. I soon got to know every member of the shift. I remember most of them, who liked which jobs, who was good at what and who their favourite recording artists were.

We underwent trade training as a shift one day a week and recreational training together on a Wednesday afternoon. I was roped into being the Regimental Football Officer and spent an afternoon stitching all the team numbers onto the backs of the football strip. Sometimes we went out on our days off, one favourite place being the nearby ice-skating rink. Once we arrived and it was closed. The German owner had put a sign outside in English – ‘No icing today’.

Being near the Guard Room meant that as I walked to and from the NAAFI, I often encountered Sergeant Luke who was in charge of defaulters. His choice of language as he doubled the soldiers without their headdress around the camp was not something I enjoyed. He seemed to relish it.

I will always remember the World Cup match of 1966. Three of us (I think Pat Thomas, Peter Crane and I) watched it in the Mess on German TV but with the sound turned down and British Forces Broadcasting Service sound turned up. The next day I saw chalked in the road outside the Officers Mess ‘Brits Auss!’

Carol Stubbs left and was replaced by another officer (who shall also be nameless). One night I woke up and heard a noise outside my room. Peeping out, I saw diagonally across the corridor a visiting officer, whom I had seen at dinner earlier that evening, wearing just his underpants. ‘Joan! Joan!’ (name changed to protect the innocent!) he said, as he rattled the door handle of her obviously locked room, ‘Let me in! Let me in!’. Not wishing to know the outcome, I went back to bed.

It was a good thing that all our bedroom doors had locks...

*Lorna Almonds-Windmill*

Lorna served in the Regiment from July 1965 to October 1968 in Krefeld, Bielefeld and Rheindahlen.



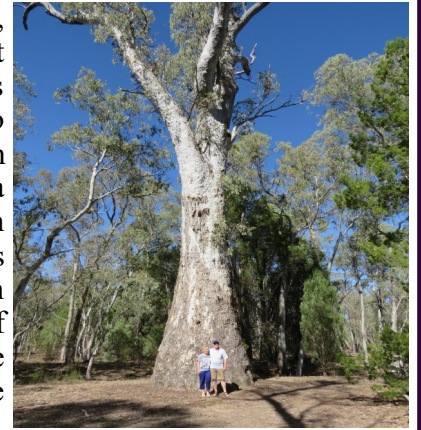
60s-16ers Reunion  
Belfry Hotel 20th October 2018



WRAC and NAAFI  
a.k.a.  
Our Young Ladies

## Flinders Ranges

In April 2018 Chris and I took a six week holiday travelling to Singapore, Australia and Canada. I will not bore you with the entire trip but thought you might be interested in a small part of it. My cousin, Steven, and his wife, Di, wanted to show us the Flinders Ranges where they like to go camping every couple of years or so. It's about a five hour drive north from Adelaide but we stopped at the Wirrabara State Forrest and took a short walk into the woods to see the famous King Tree, a river red gum which, although declining in health, still stands at a height of 35.5 metres and with a circumference of 9.55 metres. We decided to spend the night in the small, historic town of Quorn which was built on the expansion of farming and railways in the late 1800s where links to the age of steam are kept alive via the Pichi Richi Railway, which carries passengers on the historic run through the ranges to Port Augusta.



On the way we passed through Lochiel and Crystal Brook, had lunch in some picnic grounds and visited the tree nursery where the early settlers planted many varieties of non-indigenous trees simply to see which could survive the weather conditions. Steven showed us a cork tree which neither of us had seen before. We drove around one of their favourite camp grounds at Ippinitchi before continuing to Wirrabara where we managed to buy some locally crafted wooden coasters. We continued on to Hancock Lookout overlooking the Spenser Gulf before reaching our accommodation in Quorn.



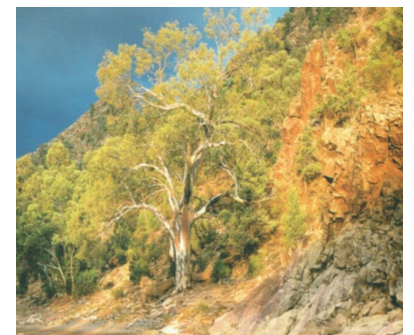
We left Quorn after breakfast and headed towards Beltana, travelling through Hawker and along the Outback Highway. We enjoyed nice scenery of rolling hills and craggy outcrops where we saw a Wedge Tailed Eagle soaring high above the plain. We stopped at the Surveyor's Monument which was quite a desolate place.



**Wilpena Pound**



**Bunyeroo Valley**



**Brachina Gorge**

The best known landmark of the Flinders Ranges is Wilpena Pound which is a huge, horseshoe plateau encircled by a jagged, mountainous rim which the settlers found to be ideal for corralling livestock. The pound walls constantly change colours from red to pink and purple to blue in the sunlight. We drove through Bunyeroo Gorge to the Bunyeroo Valley Lookout and Brachina Gorge where we were fortunate to see a Yellow Footed Rock Wallaby, once common in arid mountain areas, today the species is only found in seven small pockets of land in Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia.

We stopped at the ruins of the Aroona Valley homestead erected by John Hayward, the first pastoralist to arrive in the region, who took up the Aroona run in 1851 and stocked it with 3,300 sheep. His was a harsh life and the profits were small and in some years nil but in 1853 he made a profit of £1,419 from the wool shorn from his flock, which had increased to 9,500 sheep. In 1862 he sold the property and returned to England, but it was not as a pauper. When he first stepped onto Australian soil he had only £40 in his pocket, but when he left 11 years later, he had an enviable fortune of £40,000.



We arrived at our overnight accommodation at the Beltana sheep station where we were treated to a delicious meal of their own reared beef and lamb. We had semi-detached cabins with a wooden deck where we sat outside with enjoying a cool drink, watching the sun set behind the hills. We left the station and headed towards the old town of Beltana which was originally used as a watering hole and rest place for Aborigines, later settled for the copper mining, telegraph system and nearby Ghan Railway, so called out of respect to the Afghan immigrants who worked hard to construct the line. Steven showed us the ruins of two cottages rebuilt from recycled iron and pine telegraph poles which had taken 5 years to complete. While the owner was working on the reconstruction, he spotted a rabbit emerging from a hole in the ground. Following further investigation he discovered an old underground bakery oven. Legend has it that there were two bakeries in the town with wood burning ovens but

wood kept disappearing from one baker's woodpile. The baker decided to take revenge on the thief and concealed dynamite in the logs. Early one morning an explosion was heard after which there was only one bakery!

Travelling on through Palachilna and Glass Gorges where we spotted wild goats, wild horses (sadly looking very emaciated), wedge tailed eagles and plenty of grey kangaroos, we reached Blinman. This small town was named after Robert Blinman, a shepherd, who, in December 1859 discovered a large outcrop of copper ore on top of a hill, used \$10 of his hard earned savings to make a mineral application to secure the outcrop and the area around it, and therefore established a successful copper mine.

Further along the Brachina Gorge Road we took a short walk to the Golden Point, a geological site of great significance. A Golden Spike is a GSSP (Global Boundary Stratotype Section and Point) marker placed at an important internationally agreed upon, stratigraphic section of rock-strata that is accepted as a reference section for a particular boundary on the geological time scale. There are 64 identified golden spike localities around the world. The Flinders Ranges spike was chosen as the base of the Ediacaran Period when the first signs of life appeared following the warming up of Earth after glaciation, and multicelled organisms became widespread in maritime environments.



We walked along the dried up Yulala Creek to see some magnificent rock formations before travelling back towards Quorn where we spent another night. The following morning we left Quorn heading towards Peterborough where Steven's mother was brought up. Her father worked for the railways and we were surprised to see the family home still standing.

Stopping at Orreroo for lunch, we saw this unusual metal sculpture of horses and plough and an enormous red gum tree with a girth of 10.86 meters. To give you an idea of its size, that's Chris standing at the base of the tree.



We continued our return journey via Terowie, where at the station, is a memorial plaque commemorating Douglas MacArthur's historic "I shall return" message to the Australian Press after retreating from the Philippines during World War Two. He subsequently repeated the line "I shall return" in a number of speeches, in a number of other places. It is at Terowie Station where the rail track changes from broad gauge to narrow gauge. This was necessary, at the time of construction, due to funding constrictions. Also in Terowie we came across a property whose owner had created many sculptures in the garden, using scrap metal, including Humpty Dumpty, Jack and Jill, Three Men in a Tub and Rocket Man to name but a few.

After our 1,400 km drive, often along rough, and very bumpy gorge roads, we arrived back in Adelaide. Thank goodness Steven owns a decent 4 x 4 with good suspension! We thoroughly enjoyed the trip, apart from dodging kamikaze kangaroos and emus, the bodies of some unfortunate ones were strewn along the main routes, which did slightly spoil the experience and we now fully understand the need for "roo bars". It was a brilliant weekend and we saw a little bit of Australia that we hadn't been to on previous trips.

*Sheila Abbott*



**Ladies Comeback Lines.**

Man, 'Will you go out with me this Saturday?'

Woman, 'Sorry, I'm having a headache this weekend.'

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Man, 'Is this seat empty?'

Woman, 'Yes, and this one will be if you sit down.'

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Man, 'So what do you do for a living?'

Woman, 'I'm a female impersonator.'

.....

Man, 'Haven't I seen you someplace before?'

Woman, 'Yes, that's why I don't go there anymore.'

.....

Man, 'Can I buy you a drink?'

Woman, 'I think I'd rather have the money!'

.....

Man, 'So do you want to go out maybe?'

Women, 'Sorry, I don't date outside my species.'

**Arrogance of an old guy.**

Yesterday morning I bought two six packs of beer on sale at Tesco.

I placed them on the front seat of the car and headed back home. I stopped at the service station where a drop-dead gorgeous, almost blonde was filling up her car at the next pump.

It was very warm, and she was wearing tight shorts and a light top which was wide open. She glanced at the beer, bent over and knocked on my passenger window.

With her braless breasts almost falling out of her skimpy top she said, in a sexy voice, 'I'm a big believer in barter, old fellow, would you be interested in trading sex for beer?'

I thought for a few seconds and asked, 'What kind of beer you got?'

My wife and I were both members of PETA, only different organizations. Mine was People Eating Tasty Animals. Anyway, early in our marriage, her doctor told her he wanted to run a test on her that involved the death of a small animal. When she didn't think much of the idea, he asked her what she would use. She thought for a minute and responded with politicians, lawyers and convicted felons. After the doctor stopped laughing, he asked her why she saved the convicted felons for last. 'In that order' asked the doctor?

Her response was classic, and the poor doctor never recovered. She said, 'Yes, absolutely. I saved the felons for last because there is an outside chance they can be rehabilitated.'

**One Liners.**

Whenever I want to be left alone, I go to the mall and hold a clipboard.

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The first 5 days after the weekend are the hardest.

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If you give your wife flowers for no apparent reason, it makes her suspicious.

.....

Dinosaurs didn't read. Now they are extinct. Thank goodness the thesaurus survived.

.....

Last Halloween there was a knock on the door. I looked out of the window and then shouted upstairs to my wife, 'Honey there's a witch at the door. What shall I do?'

She shouted back, 'Just give her some candy and tell her to get lost.'

My mother-in-law hasn't spoken to me since.

My wife said to me yesterday, 'Honey, I think we should do something really scary for the kids this Halloween.'

I said, 'Well, we could always take them to your mother's.'

The best part about Halloween is that the cobwebs in my house look like decorations.

.....

Girl gets on a bus, but all the seats are taken by mostly men. She says: 'Anybody willing to give a pregnant woman a seat?'

A gallant but embarrassed man got up and she sat down while he stood in the aisle. He looked down and said, 'Miss, you don't look pregnant.'

She looked up at him and said, 'Well, it's only been a half an hour.'

.....

A wife said to her husband, "When I'm talking and you answer, it interferes with the dialogue between us".

.....

A computer programmer put two glasses on his night table before going to bed, one full of water, and the other empty. His wife asked him about the glasses. He said, "The glass of water is for if I wake up in the middle of the night, and I'm thirsty." "OK", said the wife, but what about the empty one?" He replied, "That's if I wake up in the middle of the night and I'm NOT thirsty."

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**Thought for the Day:  
(or any day in fact.)**

I've been sick and NEEDED a doctor. I've encountered trouble and NEEDED a police officer. I've lived through times of war, when our nation NEEDED our military. I have even NEEDED an auto mechanic, a plumber, a house painter and a lot of other every-day people.

But I have NEVER, not even once, NEEDED a pro athlete or Hollywood entertainer for ANYTHING.

Anon

## Royal Ordnance Factory, Bishopton, Renfrewshire.

Bishopton is only about ten miles from where Rita and I currently reside. This is only half a mile from where my parents were born and raised. I was born in a flat on the third floor of a tenement in Govanhill, Glasgow. This was before the NHS was founded so home births were the norm. In 1952 my Mum and Dad moved the family back to their local area. By this time the family had increased by the addition of my sister and young brother. Growing up I knew off the two ordnance/explosives factories in our area of Scotland. These were ROF



The Grade B listed Dargavel House



ROF Dargavel House In the middle of these woods)  
<http://www.clydesideimages.co.uk/the-formakin-estate.html>

Bishopton, at Bishopton Renfrewshire and Nobel Industries Limited at Ardeer, Ayrshire (Founded by Alfred Nobel in 1871). But that was all, I never had any more thoughts or interest about their existence. I only became curious about their history in the last couple of years. Our son and daughter-in-law decided to upgrade their house, their current place being their starter home. They looked at new houses and choose one located on the brownfield site left behind after ROF Bishopton closed down in 2002. A huge development comprising of up to 4000 houses with completion by 2033 ( At least that is what is forecast on the plans). They moved in in February last year and area is still a building site. The area looks much improved, not sure how many houses have already been finished, but you might

get an idea from the photographs. Since the summer of 2017 the estate where our son and wife have their house (called Phase 1 comprising about 90 houses by Stewart Milne Homes) is almost complete. Eight houses have not yet been released (Two are the show homes) 4 are unsold. There are four other major building firms adding houses all over the reclaimed site. The estate is too new for Google and some of the GPS systems used by delivery companies. Deliveries from everybody except the Post Office resulted in getting phone calls asking for directions to the house. Seems it takes a while for updates to permeate through all the GPS systems. Google Maps Satellite images are at least two years behind although they have got the roads in now.

## Now the History Bit.

The Royal Ordnance Factory was a WW2 Ministry of Supply Explosive Factory. It is sited adjacent to the village of Bishopton in Renfrewshire, Scotland. The factory was built to manufacture the propellant cordite for the British Army and the Royal Air Force. It also later produced cordite for the Royal Navy. The Ministry of Works were responsible for the site. It was the biggest munitions factory the MOD had, with up to 20,000 workers.



The explosives factory opened between December 1940 and April 1941. It was one of three propellant factories built for the MOD. The others were ROF Wrexham and ROF Ranskill. Manufacturing survived on parts of the Bishopton site until 2002. The site is now owned by BAE Systems, who in conjunction with Redrow Homes, have submitted locally controversial proposals to use the site for building new housing. This development is now underway and is known as Dargavel Village. The worry about the site was contamination from the ingredients used in the manufacture of cordite.

The site was built on farm land acquired by compulsory purchase order. Over 2,000 acres of land from up to seven farms was used to accommodate the factory. The land included the Grade B listed Dargavel House and its grounds, the house still survives within the site boundary; as well as several former farm houses and public roads that were absorbed into the ROF site. The southern end of the site included land occupied by the former National Filling Factory (a WW1 munitions factory).

Much of the site lies around 10 metres elevation. This was one of the deciding factors for its location, as UK explosives factories were built near to sea level to take account of their favourable microclimates. Some of the site's high-grounds were used for the nitro-glycerine hills.

Another reason this site was chosen was because of the area's high unemployment rate in the 1920s and 1930s. This meant there was a ready supply of female labour available to work in the factory. Nearby railway links also played a part in locating

the factory at Bishopton.

The site consisted of three, almost self-contained explosive-manufacturing factories; with a common administration group and workshop support service. Building work on the first factory started in April 1937, the second started in April 1939 and the third in October 1939. There was a long delay in opening the first factory due to the critical shortage of a guaranteed water supply. The site had three separate water mains: firefighting, process water and drinking water. A guaranteed supply of about ten million gallons per day was required.



Main gate viewed from Railway Station circa 2000



Main gate viewed from Railway Station circa 2018

Given its function, Bishopton's accident record was generally exemplary, and mishaps were generally uneventful. One exception occurred in February 1956, when Paisley was rocked by a major explosion at the Bishopton factory. A huge nitro-glycerine wash-house exploded, sending a cloud of orange and yellow smoke hundreds of feet into the air. The blast smashed surrounding windows, and people working at the factory were thrown to the ground and covered in debris. Even though more than 30 people were within 50 yards of the explosion, only one man was killed. 19 workers were injured as roofs were torn off buildings within a 300-yard radius, most being struck by flying debris, with some of the casualties caused by material from the cordite section landing more than half a mile away.

As with nearly all MoD related sites, Ordnance Survey maps did not show its existence in Renfrewshire until the mapping was revised around 2000, when most sites that had previously been censored were finally shown.

# Nobel Industries at Ardeer, Ayrshire.

The Ardeer peninsula was the site of a massive dynamite manufacturing plant built by Alfred Bernhard Nobel. Nobel Industries Limited was founded in 1870 by Swedish chemist and industrialist Alfred Nobel for the production of the new explosive dynamite. Having scoured the country for a remote location to establish his explosive factory, Nobel finally acquired 100 acres from the Earl of Eglinton, and established the British Dynamite Factory in 1871, and went on to create what was described then as the largest explosives factory in the world. The factory had its own jetty on the River Garnock in Irvine Harbour serving ships disposing of time expired explosives or importing materials for the works.

The factory was overseen and run by George McRoberts. McRoberts and John Downie raised the £24,000 needed to start the company rather than Nobel himself. It was chaired by the Glasgow shipbuilder, Charles Randolph (1809-1878). Ardeer, on the coast at Ayrshire, was chosen for the company's first factory. The business later diversified into the production of blasting gelatine, gelignite, ballistite, guncotton, and cordite. At its peak, the factory employed nearly 13,000 men and women.

1926, the firm merged with Brunner, Mond & Company, the United Alkali Company, and the British Dyestuffs Corporation, creating a new group, Imperial Chemical Industries, then one of Britain's largest firms. Nobel Industries continued as the ICI Nobel division of the company.

ICI Ardeer was commonly known locally as the 'factory' or the 'Dynamite'. At the time the company generally provided higher quality employment regarding terms and

conditions and pension rights than other local firms. At its peak, the site employed almost 13,000 workers in a fairly remote location and the Ardeer site was almost like a community, and there were so many people employed there that a bank, travel agent and dentist were at one time based on the site.

The former Western Scottish Bus Company provided tens of buses per day to transport the workers to and from the site, and there were even two trains per day to transport workers to a station within the factory which was used solely for workers and any special visitors with business in the ICI plant, and was never a regular passenger stop. Until the mid-1960s, there were two trains per day to transport workers. Although the line no longer exists, the abandoned platform remains, hidden beneath dense undergrowth.

The factory had its own jetty on the River Garnock in Irvine Harbour serving ships disposing of time expired explosives or importing materials for the works. In the late 1960s construction began on a nylon and nitric acid plant, but this had a short life, closing down just 12 years later. In 2002 the division, now named Nobel Enterprises, was sold to Inabata. On 8 September 2007 a major fire was reported at the site when 1,500-1,700 tons of nitrocellulose, stored in an open area, caught fire. There was little property damage and no serious injuries. The site is now a flourishing energetics business employing some 300 people a Scottish Company part of Chemring Group an LSE Public Company.

# CRAIGTON PARK MEMORIAL CANNON

BAE Systems, who now own the area which was ROF Bishopton, donated a cannon which is dated 1841. This cannon was restored complete with gun carriage at the BAE Glasgow Shipyard. Also, the markings on the cannon were hand painted in gold. Painting these marks would not have been done while this cannon was in service. The area where the cannon sits is circular with a wall on the western side. The hole in the wall is positioned to allow the sun to shine through on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November. The wall was built from stone and recovered the former Bolerno House that predates

the ROF Bishopton factory. I contacted the Royal Armouries Leeds to try and find out any more information about the cannon. This was because I was having problems finding out any more details from BAE Systems. It is 32-pounder cannon built by the Walker Company of Tipton, They had been based in Rotherham but moved in 1820. The owner of the company by this time was Samuel Walker, grandson of Samuel Walker who had been the prime mover in setting up the original company. The grandson had bought the original company and moved everything to Tipton.



The words, comments and articles contained in this magazine are written by club members and are for the sole entertainment of club members and in no way reflects, the views or opinions, of the club generally or its officers.

**Any items for the August 2019 edition please submit by 31st July 2019**



## The 1960s 16 Signal Regiment Reunion Club

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