

The Royal Military College of Science 1965 - 1975 - *My Career, and some people*

The Military College of Science came to Shrivenham in 1946 and became the Royal Military College of Science in 1953. It was well supported as the Army's "University" for the next 20 years, and I was fortunate to be there at the best time. Since then, there has been a long succession of changes driven by Government policies, and now it no longer exists. However Shrivenham is now the main site of the tri-Service Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, operated in association with Cranfield University.

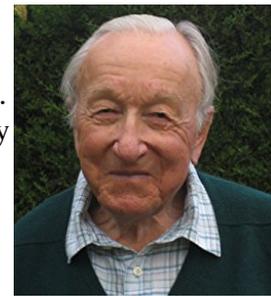


RMCS was under the command of a Major General, and there were four holders of the post in the 1965-75 period. I remember Major General Napier Crookenden best. He had a most distinguished military career. And he was a helicopter pilot; he took me (and others) on a flight over Shrivenham.

My lecturing to Army Staff Courses meant that I was in closer touch with the Army side of Shrivenham, particularly the more senior officers, than with the civilian side which was headed by the Dean.



Sir Donald Bailey - the Bailey-Bridge inventor - was the Dean in 1965, but he retired very soon after that, to be replaced by Francis Farley, a notable physicist from CERN. This was the first of a number of appointments of relatively young men to senior posts at RMCS - "new brooms" from outside the College. Farley remained Dean for some 15 years, but I rather think he was never personally popular. He's still alive at 96, and in 2012 he published "Catalysed Fusion", a steamy 'true to life' fantasy based on CERN.



In 1965 the Head of the Electrical Engineering Department was Professor Charlie Holt Smith. Holt was a christian name, but he always used it as a prefix to plain Smith. I'd known his son at Cambridge - and he used Macdonald in the same way to become Macdonald Smith



Holt Smith had been a radar pioneer at Malvern. As a result he received a CBE. After his death, son John, then Rev John Macdonald Smith, inherited the medal. However he returned it to the Queen as a protest against the award of an Honorary Knighthood to Casper Weinberger.

Holt Smith retired in 1966. Michael Potok (Head of Electronics Branch) should surely have replaced him then, but was passed over in favour of a "new broom", Dr Fred Hyde. Events proved that to be unfortunate.

Summer 1969 was traumatic. First Eric Pearson. Eric Pearson was the Head of the Control Engineering Branch. There was said to have been a lot of pressure on him from above. He committed suicide. His son was Sebastian Pearson, an "Antiques Road Show" expert. Sebastian was said to have been deeply affected by the deaths of Eric and of his mother Kit soon afterwards.

Then Fred Hyde. He dived into the shallow end of the College swimming pool, hit his head on the bottom and did not survive. I was on a small internal enquiry panel. No blame could be attached to anyone except Fred Hyde himself.

Michael Potok then took over as Department Head, first temporarily and then in a confirmed appointment. That meant that the post of Head of Electronics Branch had to be filled. The "new brooms" policy was applied again and an extremely young appointment made. Peter Hill, whose background was in BBC Engineering, was aged about 35. He was very pleasant and competent, but did not move on further. Following retirement he has found a role conducting "oral history" interviews with notable scientists and engineers.



Figure 1. Professor Jim James.

There was one member of Electronics Branch who could have been appointed as Head of Branch at that time. That was Jim James, a world-class expert on small antennas. He was later recognised by special-merit promotion.

Well, what was I doing throughout this? I was hardly affected by this staff turmoil, or by the changes to the Degree Courses which were happening (from External London Degrees to CNAAB backed Shrivenham Degrees) I (together with Tam Garland-Collins in particular) was getting on with the teaching to the Army Staff Courses.

And I had two areas of research which were very much 'mine'. To start with there was the "tunnel diode" work for Frank Warner at RSRE (That took us on a family trip to Stockholm!). Later there was "Wavefront Analysis" for GCHQ.



In 1974 I had a lengthy attachment to GCHQ working with Phillip Gething. Aden Beresford was the Group Head, and because his house near Elkstone was on my way from Shrivenham to Cheltenham, we travelled together from Elkstone to Cheltenham. Aden's sister was Elizabeth Beresford, and Tobermory Womble was reliably reported as being based on Aden (who actually went to live on Mull after retirement!). Eventually I occupied the same post at GCHQ as he had filled.

That attachment led to my permanent move to GCHQ. That move was supported by the remarkable Ralph Benjamin, then Chief Scientist at GCHQ.

