eCHO

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CULHAM SCIENCE CENTRE & HARWELL BUSINESS CENTRE **APRIL 1999**

Unravelling the 'Riddle of the Skies'



One of the more unusual customers seeking the expertise of AEA Technology's Materials Characterisation Service (MCS) was a London film company. As part of a television series for Channel 4 called 'Riddle of the Skies' the programme makers had assembled a collection of strange samples thought to have extra-terrestrial origins. For the millions of people who believe we are not alone in this universe, this was the evidence which could settle the issue once and for all.

MCS manager, Dr Alison Crossley, and her team in B551 at Harwell were asked to analyse the artefacts and try to determine whether they had indeed come from outer space. Five samples were supplied, each with a tantalising description of its proposed origin.

The third programme in the series, screened in February, shows Alison and colleague, Dr Keith Rogers, a crystallographer at Cranfield University, describing the properties of a metal fragment sent anonymously to an American science journalist and broadcaster called Linda Howe. With it she had received a letter suggesting that it had been recovered from the legendary UFO crash site at Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947. Linda had

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DIDO blister is no more

The demolition of DIDO's 30-year old 'blister' building was completed in a week.

The blister building was constructed in 1969 to house a much-needed heavy-duty equipment lift and relieve pressure for space in the reactor shell. Data logging panels for a variety of reactor core experiments were placed in the upper storey. The remainder of the space was filled with a heavily shielded experimental light-water loop together with its heat exchangers and control room.

The driver of Callaghan's demolition crane skilfully controlled a swivelling cutting device, 50 feet above his head, that rapidly 'deconstructed' the reinforced concrete walls and floors. The demolition, during March, was managed by Vectra Technologies on contract to UKAEA.



Nibbling away the DIDO blister.

This Month

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approached the major US alloy manufacturers who could not identify where it had come from or its likely application.

Alison and Keith confirmed from their analyses that the sample was manufactured but of terrestrial origin. However neither could identify the actual use of the material.

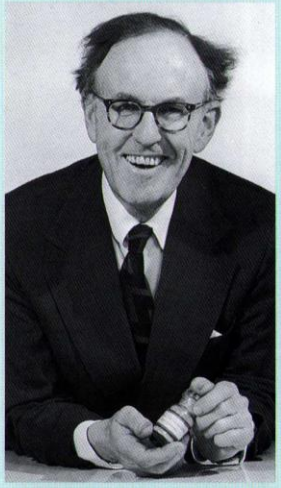
Alison was then asked about some tiny spiral structures that geologists had found in the Russian Ural mountains and that 'ufologists' thought could be 100,000 years old. Her team identified the spirals as tungsten filaments. Some were wound around a molybdenum core. They closely resembled lightbulb filaments!

Though not televised, equally feasible explanations were found for other samples which debunked the theory of their extraterrestrial origins.

The initial approach was made by a word-of-mouth recommendation. "It was a great opportunity to promote one of AEA Technology's specialist services on national television." says Alison.

Obituary

E J S Clarke
1913–1999



John Clarke died on 29 January after a battle with Parkinson's Disease.

John won a scholarship to Magdalen College Oxford, reading PPE and rowing for the college. Having visited Germany as an undergraduate he saw Nazi rallies and foresaw the coming conflict. When war broke out he was already an officer in the Royal Artillery and saw active service in the Norwegian campaign, being promoted to captain in 1941 to command a gun battery in Gibraltar, before being posted to Northern Ireland where he met and married his wife, Dorothy Smyth.

He was transferred to the Cabinet Office in 1944 and, as he spoke German well, was one of the first British officials to visit the bombed Reichstag building. A piece of Hitler's desk was a prized possession. John then worked with Professor Lindemann, later Lord Cherwell, and attended the Yalta and Quebec conferences as Cherwell's personal assistant. He was present at the famous Crossbow committee meetings in 1944 where Britain's response to Hitler's V-Weapons was decided. John remained in the TA after the war, having been promoted to major and awarded the Territorial Defence decoration, with bar.

After the Labour victory in 1945 he became principal private secretary to Aneurin Bevan and was closely involved in the launch of the National Health Service, a cause he supported passionately.

In 1951 John went into the Treasury and assisted Lord Cherwell in the formation of the Atomic Energy Authority. John's first job in the UKAEA was principal metals officer, responsible for procuring uranium and other special materials required for the nuclear energy and weapons programmes. He moved to Oxfordshire to become financial controller of the Harwell and Culham laboratories in 1971 at a time when efforts were being made to lessen the dependence on atomic energy and boost funds from external sources.

Retirement gave him more time to devote to his second great interest, local government. John had entered local politics in Oxfordshire as soon as the family moved to Harwell and was a founder member of the Vale of White Horse District Council in 1973. He also served on the county council for twelve years.

Remembering John's outstanding contributions, Lewis Roberts, former director of Harwell, said, "We shall miss a good, loyal and wise friend who will be remembered as a great gentleman and exemplified the very highest ideals of public service."

He leaves a son and two daughters.

RETIREMENTS

John Phillpott

John Phillpott retired on 7 February after more than 36 years with UKAEA and AEA Technology. He entered the organisation as a graduate apprentice in 1962 and in 1964 he joined the Fusion programme at Culham. Here his main achievements have included setting up the Culham Lightening Studies Unit and holding the position of international engineering manager for the Reverse Field experiment which was eventually constructed in Italy.

In 1982 he moved to Harwell to take over the active handling programme, was promoted to division head in 1985 and managed Engineering Design & Manufacture Division and later Engineering Sciences Division. In 1990 he was assigned to Decommissioning & Radwaste and in 1998 moved to Nuclear Engineering where he held the post of director, Engineering Projects Division.

At his farewell Phil Holden, managing director of AEA Technology Nuclear Engineering, said that John had made major contributions to the company in project management and international business development. In his reply John thanked everyone for their friendship over the years and wished everyone good luck for the future, his concluding words being "as you slide along the banister of life, may the splinters always face the right way".

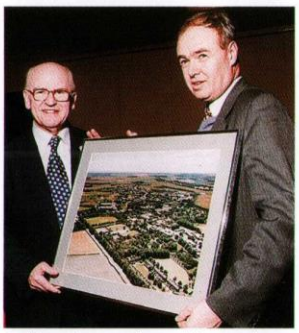


(from left) Phil Holden and John Phillpott with two of John's former Culham bosses, David Smart and Trevor James.

Bernard Partridge

After more than 42 years with UKAEA, Bernard Partridge, former manager of Harwell Radwaste service, has retired.

Bernard joined as a post-graduate apprentice in 1956 and a year later entered the chemical engineering division. During his long and distinguished career he has accomplished much important research and development work. He was group leader of a team of 40 staff whose projects included development of fast reactor fuel reprocessing. He also co-ordinated work at Dounreay and Springfields on fuel dissolution and solvent extraction equipment. In 1990, following UKAEA's reorganisation, he became responsible for the safe disposal or storage of all radioactive waste at Harwell and managed a staff of 70.



At his retirement farewell Bernard was presented with a framed photograph of Harwell by head of site, John Wilkins.

Hazel and I would like to thank all friends and colleagues for the very generous gifts received at my retirement party on 26 February. I have greatly enjoyed my long period with UKAEA and look forward to continuing the interaction with you in the future. Good luck to you all in your various enterprises!

Bernard Partridge

Police posse pursues yellow peril

The Nirex car park was the location for an episode of 'The Drivers from Hell' programme by London Weekend Television (LWT). The programme, to be shown on ITV later this year, recreates the bizarre story of the stolen dumper-truck chase in May 1998.

The story started on the Bristol-London train when 30 year-old Mark Sabaroche of Bethnal Green robbed a woman passenger of her handbag, pulled the communication cord and jumped off at Grove. He burgled a house, hi-jacked a yellow dumper-truck and, donning a workman's hard hat and fluorescent jacket, careered towards Wantage - in the dark and with no lights!

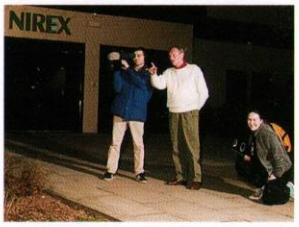
He swung into Harcourt Road, demolished a streetlight, and shouted to startled pedestrians: "Which way to Didcot?" Taking periodic refreshment from a bottle of whisky, he headed towards Rowstock at a top speed of 10 mph, hotly pursued by a Thames Valley panda car with 'blues and twos' wailing and a helicopter. In an attempt to shake off the police posse the hijacker took to the fields and headed up the hillside to the Harwell site.



Tree stops hour-long crazy chase

Geoffrey Horsely, a retired staff member living in South Drive recounted: "I heard the noise of the chase and saw the police helicopter with its search-lights on. The driver drove along Icknield Way and then headed up the field towards Nirex." Roy Millard, Nirex facilities and security manager took up the story: "He obviously didn't see our fence and drove straight through it, narrowly missing the only parked car before crashing into a tree at the rear of Bloomer's Sandwich Bar. He limped away and fell off the fence into the garden where he was arrested." Roy took the photograph of the crashed dumper-truck used in local newspapers.

Katy Lock of LWT said the police had provided a video recording of the chase and the story was unusual because of the slow speeds involved. She was pleased to get permission from UKAEA and Nirex to film some additional scene-setting footage and said it would make a unique contribution to their "Drivers from Hell" series. The driver was later sentenced to 21 months imprisonment. *(We will publish the time and date of the programme in a future edition of ECHO - Ed)*



LWT film crew outside Nirex

Studying the birds and the bats

Staff at Nirex in B587 will know all about the birds and the bats, if not the bees, this spring, having installed six nesting boxes on trees outside their office windows at Harwell.

They decided to use some funds from the facilities budget to encourage local wildlife. Nirex already has an environmental management system in place and is certified to the international standard, ISO 14001.



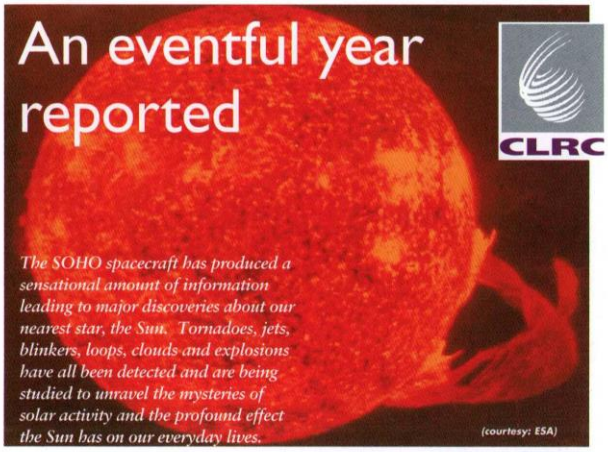
Potential bat home



Nesting box designed for tiny tree creepers

"I noticed blue, great and long-tailed tits, and colleagues have seen woodpeckers, tree creepers, robins and a tawny owl, so that's how we decided which boxes to order," comments environmental manager, Kara Chatwin. "Our facilities and security manager, Roy Millard, is a keen bird watcher and now that Nirex is consolidated at this site we wanted to enhance the working environment for staff. We're hoping they'll attract some tenants and will know if they're a success when the boxes are taken down in autumn to be cleaned out for next year."

The boxes, each individually designed for its occupants, are made by a company advertising in the RSPB magazine. Before installation Kara sought advice about optimum positioning, including height and aspect. They are attached approximately two metres up on a smooth part of the trunk without branches and are facing north east. Kara has only recently moved to Harwell from the company's former investigation site in Cumbria where the farm location attracts many wild species and conservation measures are in place for badgers and barn owls.



The major achievements of the Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils (CCLRC) have been published in the recently published Annual Report. The document reviews a successful year of scientific and technological excellence at its three sites including Rutherford Appleton Laboratory at Chilton. For more details visit the CCLRC website at http://www.cclrc.ac.uk/

Helen stars on TV

Dr Helen Walker, a scientist and astronomer at Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, met her hero, Patrick Moore, when she appeared on the BBC's 'Sky at Night' programme a few weeks ago. As an expert in her field, she was interviewed by Patrick Moore about the ways in which stars and planets grow old. Helen discussed several dramatic images of stars, including the Sun, and explained the various stages of ageing. Addressing a different audience, Helen recently gave a talk to the Chilton Young Stars, the astronomy club at Chilton Primary School.



Dr Helen Walker of RAL greatly enjoyed meeting Patrick Moore.

New Oxon Partnership meets at Culham

Culham Science Centre was chosen as the venue for one of the inaugural events of the newly formed Oxfordshire Economic Partnership (OEP). The Special Breakfast Seminar, held in March, attracted over 100 delegates from the business, academic, local authority, cultural and economic development communities and from the voluntary sector.



The meeting was organised by the Heart of England TEC. (L to R) John Bridgeman, Andrew Smith, Sir Martin Wood, Anne Dawson, Barrie Giles, Prof. Clive Booth and Richard Flint.

Chaired by Central TV's Anne Dawson, the event focussed on the role of the new voluntary Partnership and the issues it would address. Of particular significance was its potential relationship with and influence in the South East England Development Agency.

The opening address was given by Sir Martin Wood, Chair of OEP and well-known founder of Oxford Instruments. Presentations were also made by John Bridgeman, Director-General of the Office of Fair Trading, Rt Hon Andrew Smith MP, Oxford East and Minister for Employment, and Professor Clive Booth, Vice Chair of the South East England Development Agency.

Steven Moss, Head of the UKAEA's Property Development Unit and the UKAEA contact for OEP, commented afterwards that "there was considerable support for a more coherent approach to economic and social development in Oxfordshire and for a positive voice in the new RDA for the South East. The UKAEA's sites at Culham and Harwell are already significant centres of science and technology enterprise but have the potential to make a greater contribution to the success of Oxfordshire and the region and we welcome this new initiative."

Out & About

April lambs



New-born lambs can be seen at Cogges Manor Farm near Witney on many occasions throughout April. Other attractions during the month include patchwork and quilting on Sunday 11 April and talks on organic gardening at 1.30 and 3pm on Sunday 18 April. Maypole dancing will take place on May Day, 1 May, folk singers, Bill and Heather Long on Sunday 2 May, and hurdle making on Saturday 8 May. Call 01993 772602 for more details.

Mallard lookalike steams into Didcot

The streamlined pacific no.60007 'Sir Nigel Gresley', of the same design as 'Mallard', will arrive at Didcot Railway Centre on Easter Monday for three weeks. Mallard is well known as the fastest steam locomotive in the world. 'Sir Nigel Gresley' will join no. 60800 'Green Arrow' at Didcot. This express passenger and fast freight train which served the East coast mainline of the London & North Eastern Railway. The engines were due to appear as ECHO went to press but readers should check before visiting by calling the railway centre on 01235 817200.

Spring Craft Fair

Hagbourne School PTA will be running a Spring Craft Fair on Sunday 23rd May from 11.30am-4.30pm at Hagbourne School and Village Hall. There will be over 60 stalls displaying the best in Oxfordshire Crafts. Home-made refreshments and lunches will be available. Admission 50p (children free). Details from 01235 817972.

Harwell Lecture tackles mystery of life

by Debbie Hembury, lower sixth, Didcot Girls School

'The Cell Cycle' was the subject of this year's MRC Harwell Lecture given by Dr Paul Nurse, director general and head of the Cell Cycle laboratory at the Imperial Cancer Research Fund in London. Dr Nurse is a recipient of many prizes for his cell cycle research including, most recently, the Albert Lasker Medical Research Award, which is considered second only to the Nobel Prize.



Dr Paul Nurse gave a most entertaining and thought-provoking lecture.

The lecture began by posing the all-encompassing question 'What is life?' in which evolution and cell theory were introduced. Paul Nurse then presented work performed by his research team which has employed fission yeast genetics to identify key genes which regulate the cell cycle. He described the techniques used to establish cdc2 as a key regulator of the cell cycle, and the discovery that the cdc2 gene is highly conserved among eukaryotes.

He then spoke about his laboratory's efforts to further define the functions of cdc2, which led to the understanding that cdc2 encodes the catalytic component of cyclin dependent kinases. He concluded that cdc2 is a universal controller of the cell cycle, and as such is part of a cell division mechanism which has clearly been selected for during evolution.

Dr. Nurse entertained an audience varying from A-level students to professors, whom he engaged in a lively 'questions and answers' session following the lecture, held in the Cockroft Hall.

NRPB

First report on ionising radiation

Diagnostic uses of radiation in medicine and dentistry represent by far the largest man-made source of radiation exposure of the population of the UK. The NRPB Advisory Group's first report proposes a framework for quantitative guidance on levels of patient dose. It aims to ensure that radiation doses are as low as possible, consistent with the clinical purpose of the examination. Recommendations are given for conventional radiography, mammography, computed tomography, fluoroscopic examinations, angiographic and complex interventional examinations, dental radiography and for nuclear medicine.

Lower mortality rates

A major new analysis of health risks to radiation workers has been published in an NRPB report. Based on one of the world's largest studies of radiation workers, the report has found a strong 'healthy worker effect' and that death rates, from all causes including cancer, are less than the general population. The findings partly reflect the selection of healthy people for radiation work and the rigorous medical entry standards.

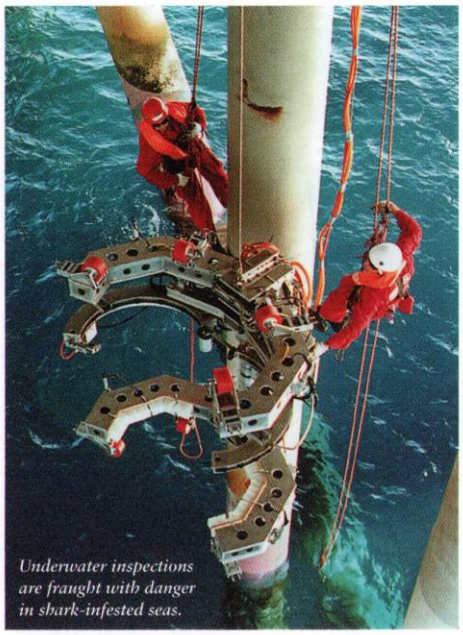
'BRUCIE' the robot saves Aussie divers

A robot has been developed to perform some of the dangerous tasks currently carried out by divers on offshore oil and gas platforms.

AEA Technology and its Australian partner **pndt** worked with Ocean Industries to develop BRUCIE (Big Robotic Ultrasonic Caisson Inspection Equipment) which has already carried out successful inspections at the Goodwyn Alpha gas production platform off the west coast of Australia.

Inspection of the pipes or caissons by divers was impeded by heavy sea swell so the platform operators were looking for a robotic solution. The companies worked together to produce a robust robot that could shin down the pipes in rough seas, negotiate the bolts and use ultrasonic techniques to pinpoint any changes in pipe wall thickness through the 4mm thick protective paint coating.

AEAT has provided the ultrasonic equipment and dedicated software to interface with BRUCIE. After two years of design and testing the robot has completed an inspection on the platform which is on a large gas field 135km off the Australian coast. It does not require a support vessel and is therefore a cost-effective solution to underwater inspection which can now be employed on oil and gas platforms around the world.



Underwater inspections are fraught with danger in shark-infested seas.

Cleaning up road run-off

With more than 25 million vehicles on Britain's roads, the Highways Agency is looking at ways to deal with the harmful substances which can pass from highway drains into the environment.

The agency has asked AEA Technology to investigate methods of destroying degradable contamination such as petrol, oil and diesel before they reach rivers and streams. Road run-off is washed into gullies below which are sediment traps. The traps are periodically pumped out and the polluted material taken way for disposal. During heavy rain, however, the contamination can be disturbed and swept out of the traps into the environment.



AEAT will assess ways of treating pollutants in the traps and, if successful, these methods will be tried out on major roads in several parts of the country, allowing for different climatic conditions.

Site pass changes

Arrangements for the issue of permanent (hard plastic) site passes for access to the fenced area of the Harwell International Business Centre are being strengthened to ensure that new entrants have received the appropriate site safety briefing. First-time applicants for a new pass will need to demonstrate that they have attended the site safety induction course. Persons attending the course will be given an attendance certificate which they will need to present at the Pass Office when collecting their pass.

This requirement applies to applications received in the UKAEA Pass Office from 1 April 1999. The site safety induction course is held in the Harwell Conference Centre, B455, each Monday morning (or first working day after a Bank Holiday) at 08.30, and lasts approx. 1½ hours. Any questions about arrangements for the course should be directed to Barbara Jury, UKAEA Training and Development Section, on H6971.

AEAT supports schools science fair



Scientists of the future from nine local schools attended the annual Abingdon Science Fair last month. Sponsored by AEA Technology, the theme of the show was 'Science, Past, Present and Future'. Students displayed experiments from their classwork and explained how and why they work. To add a competitive edge an 'Egg Race' was organised where teams were set a problem to solve. Now in its second year the fair was the brainchild of Lynne Pebworth of John Mason School in Abingdon.

Never to early to learn

Children as young as five are being taught computer skills at a local primary school with support from AEA Technology. The 400 pupils at All Saints CE Primary School in Didcot are using new 'Kids Designer Pads' to draw pictures on-screen.

The pads are like an electronic pencil and paper and are invaluable for children too young to master keyboard skills. AEAT gave £250 towards the purchase of the pads in response to a request from David Blaikley who works in the company's products and services division at Harwell and is also a governor at the school.

Blood donor clinic

The next Blood Donor Session at Harwell will be held in the upstairs function room, Social Club, Harwell between 10.30 to 12.15 and 14.00 to 15.45 on Monday 26 April and Tuesday 27 April. Donors are asked to note that the transfusion team will be on site for two days only. New donors are always needed and will be made particularly welcome.

Harwell Laboratories
RECREATIONAL ASSOCIATION

Tennis season starts

March 1st saw the start of a new season for the HLRA Lawn Tennis Club. All existing members should by now have received their Membership Renewal Form. If not, or if you are a new member wishing to join the club, please contact our membership secretary, Derek Parkinson on N2714. The first club session for the new season is scheduled to take place on Friday 9 April at 4:30pm on the Ridgeway Courts. An organised tournament will be held at the club night on Friday 16 April. All existing and potential new members are most welcome.

Sports pitches

The Harwell sports pitches are licensed by UKAEA to the rec. association and their use is exclusive to the association and its affiliated clubs. Members should also please note that they cannot use any pitch without prior permission from the rec. association and the affiliated club concerned. Non-members cannot use any of the licensed pitches at any time.

Angling AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Harwell Angling Club will be held on Thursday 8 April 1999 at 7.30pm in the upstairs function room at the Social Club.

Communications

Members wishing to contact the rec. association are advised of the following numbers:

Telephone H3296
Fax H3250
Email
sec@recsoc.freeserve.co.uk

AEAT Daughters take top honours

The daughters of two AEA Technology staff have won first and second prize in a prestigious scientific essay competition.

As one of the first events in the SET99 programme, the Oxfordshire Science Writing Competition had invited compositions from school children throughout the county on the subject of important scientific breakthroughs of the century.

Fourteen-year old Sophie Atkinson, from Sutton Courtenay, and Alexandra Crossley, 13, from Abingdon, attended the recent prize-giving ceremony at Oxford's University Museum with their proud mothers, Rita Atkinson who works for AEAT Nuclear Science and Alison Crossley, manager of AEAT's Materials Characterisation Service.

Sophie's essay, which won first prize in the 14-16 years category, gave a thought-provoking overview of cloning and was called, 'A Clone in Sheep's Clothing: the Lamb named Dolly'. Alex was runner-up for the second year running and had written about the marvels of the ubiquitous microchip in her piece, 'Chips with Everything'. The girls are in the same year 9 class at St Helen's & St Katherine's School, Abingdon.



Prizewinners pictured with Prof Susan Greenfield, Fellow of Lincoln College and director of the Royal Institution, and Prof Peter Atkins, Fellow of Lincoln College and Professor of Chemistry.

Photo courtesy Oxford Times.

Fab forties inspire charity ball

The 'fabulous forties' provided the inspirational theme for the tenth Harwell Charity Ball. Held for the first time at the Harwell Social Club, special thanks are due to the Recreational Association for providing the venue without charge. The club was decked out with spectacular parachute silks and camouflage netting in addition to 300 helium balloons.

Around 150 revellers had a 'tickety boo' time and just about £2,000 was raised for the five nominated charities: Riding for the Disabled (Blewbury); Hearing Dogs for the Deaf; Huntington's Disease; Fairmile Hospital and The Ark Animal Rescue.

Entertainment was provided by The Unbelievables band, Electroloom disco and the committee's extraordinary raffle which took longer to finish than the Gettysburg address!



Committee on parade, from left, Grahame Murphy, Susan Bowman, Janette Boram, Paula Manfredi and Paul Sedwards.

Since the ball was first organised over £25,000 has been raised for local charities. Members of the committee wish to acknowledge the generous sponsorship of UKAEA, AEA Technology, Johnson Controls and Pryor's Taxis.

Spotlight on local orchestra



Oxford-based St Giles Orchestra is now the proud owner of a set of professional lights, courtesy of UKAEA. Members are pictured here at a recent concert at St Andrew's Church, Linton Road, Oxford.

Conductor Geoff Bushell, who works for AEA Technology, said, "When the Harwell Restaurant closed down, I realised that the lights which had been used for exhibitions in the restaurant building would be ideal for the orchestra and was delighted when UKAEA kindly agreed to donate them."

Harwell Business Centre is well represented in the orchestra. In addition to Geoff as conductor, James Bretherton of UKAEA plays bassoon, Jonathan Dukes of RAL plays trumpet and AEAT's Charles Dickson plays violin.

The orchestra's next performance is a gala concert in Oxford Town Hall on Saturday 17 April at 7.30 pm. The programme is Copland's Fanfare for the Common Man, Saint-Saëns' Organ Symphony and Carl Orff's Carmina Burana.

Beware! Postcode scam

Be on the lookout! Details have been received about a postcode based scam being operated by criminals in certain parts of the country.

Female employees are being targeted. They receive an external call claiming to represent the Post Office and asking for confirmation of your company's postcode. If you provide the information you become eligible for some gift vouchers. However, the caller then asks for your home address and/or postcode in order that the vouchers may be sent there.

The criminals then know the address and assume that the house will be unoccupied during the day. There have been cases where the address has been given and the house has been burgled shortly after. The Post Office has confirmed that no such survey is being carried out by them. Police are keen to warn Oxfordshire organisations.

Fun and fundraising for Comic Relief

Staff entered into the spirit of Comic Relief day with great enthusiasm and raised hundreds of pounds as a result.

Everyone entering the Harwell site by the North and Library Gates were greeted by Johnson Controls staff dressed in eye-catching costumes and funny hats while shaking the cash buckets. The people underneath the costumes were Jane Hornsby, Russell Dulieu, Kate Corcoran, Carol Chubb, Chris Miles and Gale Stroud. Together with a raffle they raised a total of £709.



JCL's Russell Dulieu dressed as the Budweiser man and tiger Jane Hornsby catch staff at the Library Gate.

Red clothes matched the red noses in B424 where raffles were held to win a red nose cake made by Marie Page and a big teddy bear. A collection throughout the building and raffle proceeds totalled £278.



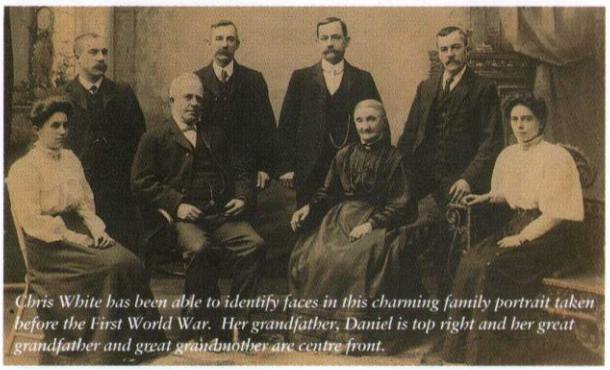
Seeing red - AEAT nuclear engineering staff in B424.

At 11.30am children and staff at Kids Unlimited crèche joined 32 other sites across the country to sing a special red nose song. To mark the day everyone had to wear pyjamas and there were various red nose related activities including face painting, baking clown cakes and biscuits and collecting funds from around the site which amounted to £172 in all.



Time for bed at Kids Unlimited.

Tracing your family tree roots



Chris White has been able to identify faces in this charming family portrait taken before the First World War. Her grandfather, Daniel is top right and her great grandfather and great grandmother are centre front.

The quest to discover whether your ancestors were princes or paupers is easier than you may imagine and living in Oxfordshire is a good start, according to Heather Clark and Chris White. They have both been bitten by the genealogy bug and have created a fascinating picture of how and where their ancestors lived.

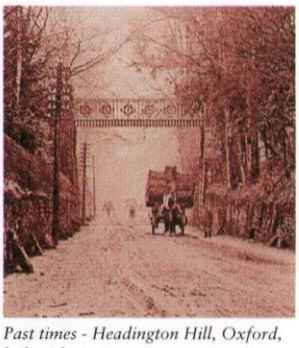
"Being brought up in the services I moved around a lot and never had any family roots" says Heather who works in the UKAEA Culham Division, PR department. "I took an evening class at Abingdon College and realised that much of the initial information was on microfiche at the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies."

Since that first visit to the Oxford Library in the Westgate, she has traced five generations back 160 years and discovered a direct line of ancestors including a clergyman, an artist - who exhibited at the Royal Academy - and four uncles her father never knew he had! Heather traced a relative to Hitchin where he was vicar and, when visiting, found a picture of him in the vestry together with cuttings on him held in the town museum. She is still investigating a mysterious Brazilian connection.

Chris White, who works in the Culham Division Directorate, had the unusual maiden name of Kightley. She has found that she is descended from a long line of craftsmen and women including a shoemaker, upholsterer, lacemaker, coach-maker, blacksmith, farmer, butcher and baker - she has yet to add a candlestick maker!

Records of all births, deaths and marriages for England and Wales are held at Oxford together with the national population census for 1881 and extensive newspaper archives for the local area. Beyond this researchers can visit Middleton Street in London (formerly Somerset House) and progress to field research in the locality where ancestors lived and worked, where parish records are very revealing.

The most productive leads will however come from living relatives. A couple of hours reminiscing will usually unearth some fascinating family gossip. From here you can begin to explore the genetic source of your identity.



Past times - Headington Hill, Oxford, before the car!

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