



KLAXON

Newsletter of the Independent Research Group Orford Ness

October 2023

Welcome to our first newsletter! Here we will share what we are currently working on as we research and publish the extraordinary range of previously top-secret projects carried out on the “military technology park” that was located at Orford Ness. See what we have already done and or join us at www.irgon.org.

Olaf Kirchner, Chairman

Discovering military history of Orford Ness – IRGON continue to explore new avenues of information, much of recent work has focussed on The National Archives at Kew. The group is piecing together the history that is buried deep in the archives and aims to bring to life the military history of Orford Ness.

WW1 – Recent research by IRGON members has shown that from mid 1916 to the end of World War 1 over 600 experiments and equipment evaluations were undertaken by members of the RFC, later RAF, a figure which greatly exceeds previous estimates. Analysis of the current data shows that there were seven experimental sections, previous studies had identified three, with work ranging from bomb ballistics and gunnery to pilot protective clothing. Towards the latter stages of the war the experimental work undertaken on Orford Ness was used to develop tactics and procedures for accurate high and low altitude bombing and air to air and air to ground machine gun operation.

Bomb Ballistics Building (BBB) – Any visit to Orford Ness will undoubtedly lead you to the BBB. This unassuming building was in operation from 1932 to the 1960s and unrecognised was its pioneering role in the development of cutting-edge science. The developments in high technology made here have currently been forgotten, but it is hoped in 2024 to bring a spotlight on this to show how important the results generated within this building were.

Development of Radar - Orford Ness became the centre for radio research with the building of the Black Beacon navigation transmitter in 1929. In 1935 Robert Watson Watt and his small team based at Orford Ness succeeded in transmitting a 6MHz radio signal that detected the presence of a distant aircraft. He and his greatly expanded team moved to nearby Bawdsey Manor to develop a fully operational radar system which is generally accepted to have had a significant impact on the course of WW2

Model Range – Whilst little remains of this building, IRGON have created an animation (IRGON.org) that demonstrates how the movement of scale models of shells was precisely measured, using shadow projection to visualise shock waves as it travelled through the air. This research played a crucial role in developing the shape of many of Britain’s nuclear weapons.

Cobra Mist – This large grey box-like shape building (not part of the National Trust) dominates the skyline of “the Island”. Built as part of a US / UK over-the-horizon radar project, many of its details are still shrouded in mystery. IRGON is unearthing new information and helping piece together the details of this troubled project.

Mathematics of Ballistics – Before computers, just how good were the mathematician “boffins” working on Orfordness, assisted by only the humble slide-rule? IRGON wants to check the accuracy of the original work and pay homage to the impressive expertise of those who developed precision bombing analysis on the Ness. This project is currently under development.

www.IRGON.org Website – An updated website has just been launched that has the most up-to-date information and discoveries made by IRGON.

National Trust Collaboration – Most of Orford Ness is managed by the NT. IRGON is sharing its research and discoveries with the National Trust, so together we can help more people discover and understand what an important role Orfordness played in our national military history.

Publicity Leaflet – Look out for the new IRGON leaflet helping to raise awareness with the public of the work that IRGON is doing.

Want to know more or join us? – If you have an interest in military history, if you have a personal or family connection to the work carried out on Orford Ness or access to information that may help us further document this history, please contact us on www.IRGON.org. Thank you!

