

C B W—Visit to Porton, Discovery of Nancekuke Title 160

A four hour tour of the Chemical Defence Experimental Establishment at Porton followed the dramatic demonstration of CS. Chemically, we were told, CS is osmium-chloro-benzylidene-malonitrile, originally discovered in America, but greatly improved by chemists at Porton. Its production and use were covered by British Patent Number 967 660, entitled "Improvement in Apparatus for controlling Riots" of 14 November 1960. Standard issue to the British Army but not the Police, CS is synthesised in the UK, exported and employed world-wide, as for example in the Vietnam War. The owner of the patent was the British Ministry of Defence, which apparently found it a profitable export item and received royalties from its patent before it expired.

Our tour in 1964 of the microbiological and chemical divisions at Porton covered seven laboratories, 30 minutes for each scheduled, where we saw only standard laboratory equipment. It was obvious that our visit was 'a carefully laid on demonstration' as I noted at the time. Our queries were frequently answered with: "I am not allowed to answer your question". No possible spy among our group could have learnt anything of value and I decided that nothing I had heard or seen, would interest any reader of the *Daily Telegraph*.

It was four years after the first press visit to Porton, on 22 July 1968, that the *Daily Telegraph* had another of my stories on this subject "Poison Gas Disaster Fear in Cornwall". During my regular holidays in Cornwall I had met local inhabitants and one of them pointed me to a security area at Nancekuke Common. I checked the excellent library of the *Daily Telegraph*, but nothing was known about the place nor of any secret activities there. My scoop!

Nancekuke proved to be the 5000-acre outstation of the Chemical Defence Experimental Establishment of Porton, roughly extending between Porthreath to Porthtowan on the North Coast of Cornwall. It was surrounded by a high security fence with many notices "Official Secrets Act—Prohibited Area" and it was this which naturally raised fear among the locals, depending on the summer tourist trade for much of their income. I drove in my Land Rover along the road from Porthreath to Porthtowan and through the hedges I could clearly see what looked like a large chemical plant with a high white chimney, which I estimated as 75 m high. In my article, the first ever press report about Nancekuke, I stated that the outstation was being used for manufacture and for field trials on animals and human volunteers.

Three days later, a letter was published in my newspaper by the Chemical Director of Porton, G.N. Gadsby, stating that no field trials had ever taken place at Nancekuke and no accidents had occurred during the last 12 years. It was therefore a well guarded, long established and secret production plant.