

# Mr. H. W. Forshaw O.B.E.

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By Carl Whiteley



Mr. H. W. Forshaw, O.B.E.

**IT would appear that Mr. Henry Watson Forshaw, O.B.E., Director of the Signals Research Development Establishment was destined to spend the latter years of his distinguished career in Christchurch.**

In the course of his duties he has been transferred from the district on three occasions but was never away very long. And when he was finally brought back to Christchurch in 1954 to take complete charge of the Establishment the appointment was a very popular one with the rest of the staff.

He succeeded Dr. G. W. Sutton as Chief Superintendent, a position which is now termed Director of Establishment.

Mr. Forshaw first came to Christchurch in 1939 as Principal Scientific Officer in charge of the radar division of the Air Defence Research and Development Establishment.

## MOVED TO MALVERN

The whole of this Establishment then moved to Malvern in 1942. Mr. Forshaw returned to S.R.D.E. in October, 1943, as Superintendent in charge but moved again in 1947 to the Ministry of Supply Headquarters, eventually returning to Christchurch five years ago.

Aged 58, he was born in Blackburn, Lancashire, where his father was a farmer and innkeeper. The family moved to Somerset when he was six months old and his father continued farming near Wincanton.

**He received his early education at Sexey's School, Bruton, and had the choice of staying at home and taking over the farm or following a career in electrical engineering.**

"My father was a man who wanted me to do whatever I wanted to do", said Mr. Forshaw. "I chose electrical engineering and I think I was influenced in this way because I found physics at school an easy subject. And I had always been interested in mechanical things. As a young boy I loved tinkering about with bicycles, lawn-mowers or any other mechanical gadget I could lay my hands on".

Although most of the boys at Bruton went on to Cambridge to take natural science, Mr. Forshaw became the exception and rather against the advice of his head-master entered the Manchester College of Technology.

## SERVED IN ARMY

Prior to entering college at the age of 19 he served a few months in the army during the latter part of the first world war.

At college Mr. Forshaw obtained his B.Sc. and M.Sc. in electrical engineering and spent his last year on wireless research.

From college he joined the Signals Experimental Establishment of the War Office at Woolwich and was there until 1938. During this time he was engaged on wireless and line communications for the army and saw the development of radio telephony for use by the army.

In the early 1930's his Establishment made a complete overhaul of line communication equipment for up to that time the army had been using equipment designed during and before the first world war.

**In 1938 Mr. Forshaw moved to the Air Ministry Research Establishment at Bawdsey where he took charge of the War Office component of the Establishment. His position was**

## **Principal Scientific Officer and deputy to the Superintendent.**

### IN CHARGE OF RADAR

Mr. Forshaw was put in charge of radar for the army and although the early work on radar was in progress when he arrived he contributed a great deal to the real beginnings of the system. Considerable progress had been made when the Establishment was moved to Christchurch in 1939 and it was not long after the arrival here that a system which could give a complete definition of the position of a target was demonstrated.

While at Bawdsey, Mr. Forshaw recalls a visit by the then Mr. Winston Churchill who was a member of a Parliamentary Defence Research Committee.

### "MODERN CRUSADE"

"I think Mr. Churchill viewed our work as a form of modern crusade which would enable us, from a political point of view, to regard ourselves as an island once again", said Mr. Forshaw. "Radar was to get us back to our island policy which had more or less been taken away by the advent of the aeroplane".

Mr. Churchill's visit was one of the highlights of Mr. Forshaw's career and he will never forget the reactions of his staff when Mr. Churchill, after being shown how to use the equipment, was "spot-on" target. Looking through the telescope the aircraft could not be seen—it was behind the cross-wire!

The future Prime Minister was very impressed with the possibilities of radar.

**Mr. Forshaw also recalls the efforts of three young members of his staff at S.R.D.E. who worked in their spare time to develop a germ of an idea for radar controlled searchlights.**

This idea reached the ears of the Prime Minister who gave instructions to proceed with production of 24 of these new devices before the next moon phase. A searchlight school was set up at Walkford where the army was trained in its use.

There was one particular night during the demonstrations that Mr. Forshaw will always remember. The school was the subject of a direct attack by a lone bomber which dropped a line of bombs across the Walkford site.

"One of my staff was so engrossed in his work that he never noticed the aircraft and when the bombs hit the ground he was the only one in sight. The others had quickly disappeared", recalled Mr. Forshaw.

A man who enjoys a quiet hour by his own fireside, Mr. Forshaw lives at "Frithwood", Belmore Lane, Lymington. He was married in 1924 and they have one son and two daughters. His son, Philip, is with the British American Tobacco Co., in Java, one of his daughters went to Australia on a working holiday in 1953 and stayed and the other daughter, a B.A. (Lond.), is working at Cambridge as assistant editor of a magazine which deals with Chinese literature.

### MODEST

Mr. Forshaw is modest when describing his own contributions to the field of electrical engineering. "My contribution", he said, "has been more of an administrative nature — encouraging others and seeing that they get what they want".

But Mr. Forshaw is responsible for the smooth running of a highly important Establishment which is contributing to the scientific achievements of our country.

Locally, the Establishment has helped to stimulate technical education and provided employment for many people.

S.R.D.E. at Christchurch is regarded one of the most popular and happiest of Government Establishments in this country. This reflects great credit on Mr. Forshaw — a man who has gained the respect and admiration of hundreds of people.