

**British Antarctic Survey Archives**  
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**A recording of the Retirement Presentation to J.C Farman of the British Antarctic Survey.**

**Date :**

**Location : British Antarctic Survey**

**Part 1 (A)**

**Dr R B Heywood :** We're here this lunch-time to say farewell to a person who has the continuous - the longest, sorry - continuous service with BAS. He joined, I think, sometime in February 1956, or at least that's when the contract was signed. Now, at a dinner last week to celebrate Joe's retirement, Brian Gardiner gave a very skillful and most humorous presentation, trying to convince us that Joe, in fact, was Sherlock Holmes, re-incarnated. I think everybody was enthralled by the presentation but I wasn't convinced by the argument. Sherlock Holmes loved the limelight and, in fact, he even stuck with a very pompous Watson because Watson chronicled everything he did. Whereas, the Joe that I know likes to work in secret, alone, he's very much against pomposity, in fact he'll probably tell me to shut up shortly [laughter] and he, I am sure, doesn't really like the popular acclaim that he has at the moment.

What you may not know is that Joe was a very able mountaineer in his youth and took part in that famous escapade of putting the Austin 7 on the roof of the Senate House. Now, had that been Holmes, he would have ensured that it was in the papers and that Watson chronicled the very fine detail of it. As it is, to this day, people do not know how this feat was achieved and Joe will not tell.

In 1953, Joe joined de Havilland Propellers Ltd. to work on guided weapons and was involved in the Blue Streak Project. They had a, when Joe joined they had this problem with the stability of the thing, it kept wobbling about all over the place and they daren't really fire it, but Joe solved this problem by some work on stabilising thins. As you may recall, this project was cancelled, but this didn't really upset Joe, I don't think. I'm having to guess now, because I think that the project offended his logic. He would not understand how you could possibly win with a weapon that caused mass destruction – what would you win? Joe, I think, had been thinking on the lines of something that was very small, unsophisticated, cheap, therefore capable of being mass-produced, and you could give it to every soldier in the field, but it would have a deadly short-to-medium range, but in fact would only take out the soldiers, wouldn't damage property or the environment. And he spoke to the MOD about this and they received it very enthusiastically and, in typical military fashion, they called it a "Joint Operations Europe, Small Piece Infantryman's pyrotechnic equipment", which was quickly short-named to "Joe's Pipe" [laughter].

Now, clearly, this had the potential to be a very deadly weapon, and so in 1956 it was agreed that Joe should be transferred to the then little known Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey and transferred to the very isolated Argentine islands, with a group of minders, the infamous

Met Men. This was later copied, of course, by the Americans and they called them Minute Men, but Met Men.

And so from 1957 to '58, Joe was working in secret in the Argentine Islands. In 1958 he was the Base Commander and that probably took some of his time up, because we could only guess that the project was not completed.

In 1959, Joe was working at the Fids Science Bureau in London and by this time, the potential for this deadly weapon was beginning to be realised. I know Her Majesty's Government got rather worried, because they were just down the road, so as with the Pole Tax, they decided to transfer to Scotland and Joe was sent to Edinburgh University in 1961. His cover for this secret project was that he was the Head of BAS Geophysics Unit and he had the University status as Senior Research Fellow.

Now, things were not running smoothly. There were setbacks, occasions when the scale models fired out of control and there were stories of Joe being seen wandering down the corridors with a flaming waste bin, shouting rather feebly, "fire, fire", which had been set on fire, as I say, by uncontrolled firing of this scale model. There were, of course, field trials of the real weapon. In 1962, Joe was en route to Halley. He was going to be taken in by the San Martine, but there was an accidental firing at Heathrow, which put the airfield out of action for two days. Now, this was very skilfully covered up by the media and it was described as fog [laughter], but it was effective and Joe didn't go to Halley.

And again, in 1971, the same thing happened again at Heathrow, and then a few days later in the USA, and of course one has to speculate, was this sabotage, why was Joe taking a circuitous route to get to Halley? We will never know and Joe will never tell.

Well, we do know that the project was completed because the rather grateful government gave Joe a very watered down civilian version, which you've seen him play with from time to time. He has used that to good effect, he's a mild man but he has used his Joe's Pipe to considerable effect from time to time. There's many a rather irate person gone storming down the corridor to throw open Joe's room, seeking long overdue library books, and I have to say – considerably longer overdue manuscripts [laughter] – to be faced by this grey wall and in spite of all macho feelings they may have had, they've retreated in disarray, because they knew that were they able to hold their breath long enough to walk through the mine fire – minefield - of strategically placed books on the floor, by the time they got to Joe they wouldn't have the strength left for any prolonged argument.

And Joe has also brought to book Chairmen, and made them sit up and cut down committee waffle by merely taking out his pipe and fingering it.

Well, we must only speculate as to the effects of the real weapon. I mean, what was the significance of this lorryload of pipes, erm, being stopped in Greece en route to Iraq? Was there any significance in the name on the side – Bruno Dunhill? The issue of protective clothing to the United Nations forces in the middle east at the moment – why has it been issued? What is the weapon? Which side has got the weapon? Well, of course, we shall never know. But what we do know, that the world at large and BAS in particular, will be extremely grateful for the meticulous work that Joe has carried out in atmospheric chemistry, which has led to the identification of the ozone depletion problem. And, furthermore, to his steadfast work in persuading governments to take, first of all, him, and then the situation, seriously.

And it's consoling and pleasing to know that although Joe is retiring from BAS, he's not giving up this work, he's continuing this crusade through the Ozone Secretariat.

So Joe, it is my pleasant duty on behalf of the Director, who unfortunately is in Canada, to thank you most sincerely for the many contributions that you've made to BAS and to wish you, on behalf of us all, a long, happy, active and productive retirement. Thank you. [Applause].

Now [speech inaudible] ..... and something I believe you have long wanted.

**Joe Farman** : Thank you very much indeed. These are Gilbert White's "Natural History of .... [inaudible] I shall read it and treasure. Thank you all very much indeed.

I suppose one has to make a speech. Er, I have sat through several of these occasions and wondered from time to time, er, why none of the victims, for I think that's what we may safely be called, every emulate the Scotsman in the sixteenth century, er, who we are assured, er, in a certain sermon and sermons in those days, er, were much more serious things of course than they are now, but he said after, when, after some three hours, the preacher paused just to grab breath, he rose to his feet and cried out, "Go on, Sir, for God's sake, go on". And I feel, really, this is what one should do with the sort of speech we've just heard, because I may say, they are as revealing to the, er, recipient as to anyone else.

Well, thank you Barry for those kind words. What can I say to you all? Erm, First of all, I do hope some of this has rubbed off on you, the claim which the Survey has got, because everyone in this room, and lots of people not in this room, have contributed, in their ways, to it. No one person can do everything and, in your ways, you all help.

I suppose if one has to go, erm, this is probably almost the most appropriate time of the year to go, because next week, the Conference starts in Girton and some more young men, er, are going to be indoctrinated and sent South to Antarctica. And that's what this is really all about. If we come back to the Sherlock Holmes business, you may remember he did say on one occasion, "It's a capital mistake to theorise without data". And if nothing else happens, let's keep going to Antarctica, let's keep collecting the data.

Finally, I think, all I can say to you is that, um, I tried to check this quotation but as usual I failed. Er, it goes something like this. "The game is greater than the players of the game". And that I think is the message – that the game will go on, that the Survey will go on, and may I wish it every success. Thank you all. [applause].