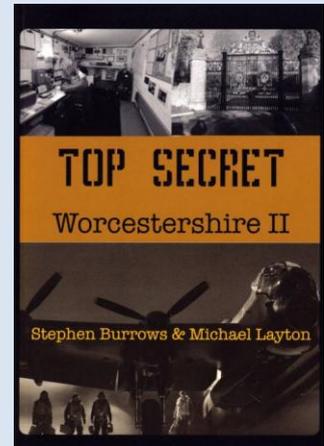


BOOK REVIEW

'Top Secret – Worcestershire II' by Stephen Burrows and Michael Layton. Published October 2020. Book size, 245mm x 170mm wide, 225 pages with many photographs (including almost 100 of aircraft). 'Top Secret Worcestershire', published in August 2018, dealt mainly with the development of radar in the county. In this sequel, 'Top Secret Worcestershire II' covers the Cold War, nuclear attack, rockets, V bombers, Royal Observer Corps and much on aviation in Worcestershire. Do not be misled into thinking this book is for people who solely live in that county, since there is much new and detailed information in the book for the general reader interested in the Cold War, nuclear defence and related subjects.



The book is conveniently set out in three parts linked by theme and geography.

Part I (94 pages), covers the Wartime Broadcasting Services of the BBC at Wood Norton, the role of the Royal Observer Corps 1925 to 1995 and a detailed tour of the ROC Bunker at Broadway Tower, and the memories of a Vulcan pilot. Part II (33 pages) describes the rocket engine testing facility at Summerfield Research Station. Part III (86 pages) contains memories of the interlinking locations at RAF Defford, RAF Pershore and Malvern which were all connected with the Telecommunications Research Establishment (TRE) including radar development.

Wood Norton, just outside Pershore, and 8 miles south east of Worcester, was the nation's wartime emergency broadcasting hub and the BBC bought the site in 1939. This secret facility was also a 'Y' Station for monitoring enemy radio messages in WW2. The development and use of this important location is explained up to its closure in 1992. This chapter also mentions Regional Seats of Government, UKWMO, Fylingdales and Attack Warning Red. The section of the Royal Observers Corps is a large 48 pages and contains some 40 photographs. A very detailed but concise ROC history is given from 1915 to 1995. There are 12 posts in the county of Worcestershire but the main description concerns the one at Broadway Tower 6 miles south east of Evesham. The guided tour of the Broadway Tower ROC nuclear post by Leslie Eales is excellent and very reminiscent of those at the National Trust owned Veryan Bunkers in Cornwall. The ROC section ends with 'spoken from the heart' memories of former observer Leslie Eales and ROC Group Officer Tony Partington. Tony speaks in much detail of life as a Group Officer and explains, very well, many of the more complicated aspects of the nuclear role such as an analysis of radiation! Part I ends with a good memory of life in the RAF as a pilot who later flew the iconic Vulcan and who came very near to delivering a nuclear weapon on the enemy for real. Pilot David McIntyre flew many types of aircraft from Magister to Canberra, he remembers the Suez and the Cuban Crisis and talks about the nearness the world came to nuclear war.

The Summerfield Research Station near Kidderminster designed, built and tested rocket motors from 1950. Much of the information in this account is taken from the memoirs of Hugh Nicholson. Rockets included 'Sea Cat' and 'Sea Slug'. Accidents happened and two workers were tragically killed.

Part III contains the memories of RAF Defford, RAF Pershore and (RAF) Malvern from five very different people. It is this section which has the most aircraft photographs. Michael Barnard was in the Air Training Corps and flew many different types of aircraft from Defford and Pershore. His story contains several superb pen and ink drawings of aircraft and aviation scenes. Harry Badger was an aircraft technician at both Defford and Pershore who also flew in different types including Avro Ashton, Wayfarer, Lincoln, Tudor, Hermes, Vampire, Shackleton and V Bombers. George Perks is slightly different, in that he was a member of the ROC in WW2 in No 24 Group Gloucester. He became a Ch/Obs and served into the nuclear role era. For his national service he joined the Parachute Regiment and after that he carried out electrical work on radar installations in test aircraft which led him back to Defford and Pershore.

The fourth recollection is that of Squadron Leader Frank Leatherdale. In WW2 he was a navigator, he did 29 bombing trips over Europe then joined the Pathfinders. He continued after WW2 serving in Korea and Suez and ended up commanding a Thor missile squadron. Along the way he served at RAF Defford. His short story is fascinating. The last story is not about aviation but about the life of a scientist at the Telecommunications Research Establishment (TRE) at Malvern. Adrian Fray joined TRE in 1955 and his account is sprinkled with words like infra red transmitting glasses, liquid crystals and trackable bullets! His work is far too complicated to describe in this short review, but it illustrates the varied content of the book.

In summary, this book is very varied. If you like WW2, the Cold War, nuclear bunkers, aviation, aeroplanes and a good dose of mystique and secrecy, this book is for you. Its stories may be about Worcestershire but they are symptomatic of similar places and people all over the UK. The detail the book contains is astonishing and in many instances is told as a memory of the people who experienced these unbelievable events many years ago. Price guide Amazon is £14.95.