

How an impressive summer residence was turned into a research centre

By [Mike Dewey](#)



In the previous articles we have seen how the premises currently occupied by the Khalsa Secondary Academy in Stoke Poges were originally part of the Stoke Park Estate.

In 1885 Frederick Pritchard from Bayswater, London, bought some 40 acres of land in the Estate to the south of what was then Uxbridge Road (now Hollybush Hill) in Stoke Poges to build a summer residence.

This he called Carton Tower. The Pritchards lived there until around 1900, when for a few years Carton Tower was occupied by Alfred Albert, a bachelor. He sold it to publisher Walter Judd in 1908, who greatly extended the house and renamed it Holly Hill.

Walter Judd died in 1931, but his family continued to live at Holly Hill.

At the start of WW2 in 1939 his widow Florence and 50-year-old unmarried daughter Flora were living there with members of their extended family, and

many servants. During the war years Flora served as Secretary of Stoke Poges Evacuees Committee, which was responsible for those people who had been evacuated to the village.

At some time during the war, part of the house was requisitioned by the military authorities.

The precise use to which this was put is not known, but it was possibly as some sort of convalescence home for wounded Officers.

Just two months after WW2 finally ended with the surrender of Japan in August 1945, Holly Hill, including the 40-acre estate, was purchased by Colonel Wallace C Devereux. As the local press reported Devereux made the purchase not for his residence, but “as the home of the Research Institute he has founded”.

Wallace Devereux was a local man, having moved to Stoke Poges to live in a house called Meads in Stoke Park in the mid-1930s. He had established the company High Duty Alloys on the Slough Trading Estate in 1928 to produce and fabricate alloys based on aluminium and magnesium.

These alloys, collectively known as “Light Alloys” to distinguish them from the much heavier metals like steel and cast iron, which are based on iron, came to be widely used in the rapidly developing aviation industry.

During the war HDA’s factories, which as well as at Slough Devereux had established operations at Redditch near Birmingham and Distington in Cumbria, were in production 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

In the later years of the war Devereux had resolved to develop more diversified industrial uses for these Light Alloys. To do so he needed a Research Institute which could service all the different companies which he planned to assemble into one group, with the name Almin Ltd.

Recognising that there may well be opposition by local residents in Stoke Poges to his plans for the Research Institute, Devereux made it clear in his interview with the local press that he was “resolved that the use of Holly Hill to house the Research Institute shall not detract from the amenities of the district, rather it should enhance them.

"The house and gardens will be fully preserved and any additional buildings that may become necessary will be so designed as to blend in with the architecture of the house."

At this point in time planning permission had not been granted by the local authority for the change of use from residential to research laboratories. The application was submitted to Eton Rural District Council (at that time they were the local authority responsible for the parish of Stoke Poges) on October 30 and considered by them at their next meeting on December 12 1945.

The application was accompanied by a letter from Devereux's architect which asked for "the Council's consent to the use of this property for the purpose of a Research Institute, and stating that (1) the scope of the work to be carried out in the building will be fundamental research and testing and the establishment of process testing procedures of non-ferrous metals.(2) the establishment of a research Library and consultant facilities (3) keeping the portion of the living premises at present occupied; and it is not in the interests of his client to change the present rural and residential character of the building."

The Council's Surveyors submitted a report stating that they had examined the premises and that "the cost of adapting the house for reasonably separate use by families would result in an uneconomic expenditure of labour and material, bearing in mind the structural difficulties, the initial cost, the probable rents, and subsequent reinstatement, and that he has ascertained that five rooms in "Holly Lodge" will continue to be used for housing accommodation as will also the cottages adjacent to the Lodge, accommodation over the stables, and Orchard Cottage".

Perhaps surprisingly, the Council had received only one letter of objection to the proposed use from local residents.

The application was approved subject to six conditions.

These were designed to ensure that the Council could keep control of any developments on the site, "which shall be substantially completed within three years from the date of the issue of the Permission".

So on February 7 1946 the Fulmer Research Institute was formally incorporated as a company situated at Holly Hill in Stoke Poges. Quite why Devereux chose to associate the name with the adjacent village of Fulmer rather than Stoke Poges is unclear. It may have been because the acronym FRI is more appealing than SPRI, or because the telephone number would be Fulmer.... rather than Slough....!

Mr E A G Liddiard had been appointed the Institute's first Director of Research. He was a metallurgist by profession and had been a senior member of the staff of the British Non-Ferrous Research Institute based in London. In June 1946 Dr Philip Gross was appointed as Chief Scientist, he was a physical chemist by profession.

The recruitment of staff and equipping of the various laboratories could now begin in earnest.

The Fulmer Research Institute was formally opened on July 2 1947 by the prominent member of Clement Atlee's Labour Government, Sir Stafford Cripps, who was at that time President of the Board of Trade.

In his speech he stated that "the Institute, the first of its kind, will act as a Brains Trust to industries anxious to translate scientific discoveries into practical industrial processes".

So Colonel Devereux had established the first of what became a new breed of research & development establishments. These spanned the gap between academic research such as that carried out at Universities and the practical development work done in industry.

Known as Contract Research Organisations these operate on the basis of contracts for specific projects which they undertake for companies in industry and for Government Agencies throughout the world.

[Part 4 – From the Fulmer Research Institute to a School](#)