

# Touchpaper

JUNE 1993

ISSUE 6

## the waltham abbey newsletter

### NORMAN LAMENT

Yes! I know it says Issue date JUNE and I know that, technically, publication anytime within these 30 days is valid.

Nevertheless, I am aware that you, the readers have come to expect your copy at the beginning of the month of issue and, as Editor, it is a deadline that I try my best to keep to.

This issue is later than usual for 2 reasons; firstly because I have been exceptionally busy of late and secondly because I have been waiting for articles to print.

Apart from the few faithfuls there seems a dearth of news and items from you out there. I know it's an Editor's constant moan but it's still very true!

From the comments I hear I know that the Newsletter is read and, I hope, appreciated. To keep it going we do need some feedback in the form of news, articles, reminiscences etc.

I hope to be contacting representatives of various groups in the next couple of months with a view to setting up a network of 'reporters' who I can badger just prior to each issue and I will be glad to hear from any volunteers.

Meanwhile, while this issue is still 'hot' in your hands, why not send something in NOW for the next issue due early September.

Norman Paul  
Editor

### PUBLICATION ADDRESS:

DRA Fort Halstead

SEVENOAKS

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# TOUCH BASES

## LONDON CALLING

### (Calling LONDON)

Chandos Meetings restarted on Friday 19th March when a select band (6 actually!) reconvened at the Chandos Pub, just off Trafalgar square.

Ike made it from Bristol!, so where were the rest of you? Following the example of the oldies (sorry LOSW) it has been decided to maintain a fixed date and place:

Venue: Opera Room, Chandos Pub  
- entrance on William IV Street.

Date: 3rd Friday in each month.

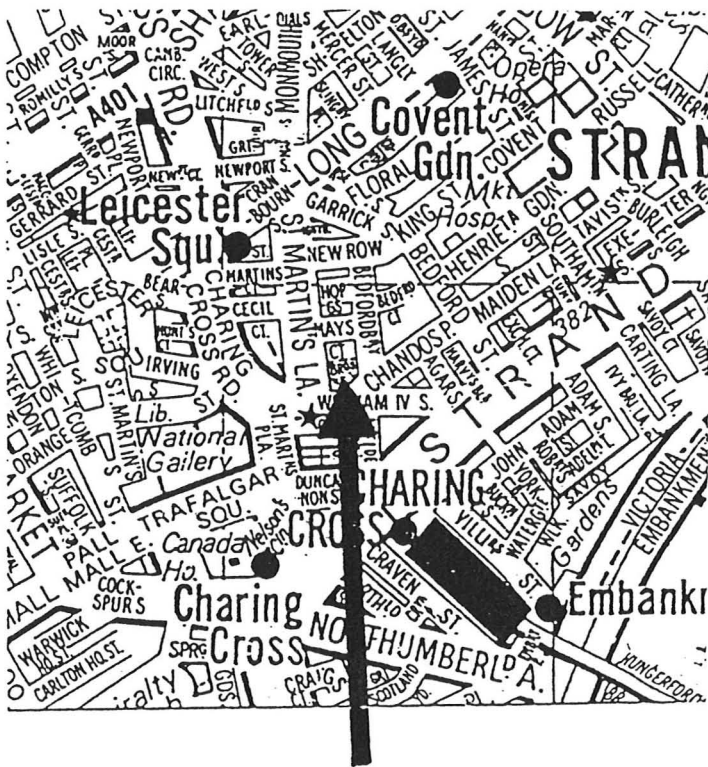
The next meeting will be on 18th June, starting at 12.30. Hope to see some of you there - all Waltham refugees welcome.

Diane Howse.

*Diane has recently been in hospital and will be off work for some time but she hopes to struggle along on the 18th. We all wish you the best Di and hope you have a speedy recovery. Ed.*

### REPEAT REPEAT REPEAT

While Diane is away Ted O'Day has manfully stepped in as point of contact for the London Group and he has most thoughtfully provided a map giving the exact location of the Chandos - no excuse now!



## THE CHANDOS

For further information contact Ted O'Day in  
Empress State Building - 071 385 1244 extn 2347.

## LOSW

*This should have been a report from the LOSW but as you will see, our intrepid reporter didn't actually make it to the meeting.*

### YET ANOTHER DAY IN THE LIFE OF TWO RETIREES

Drove from Waltham Abbey to Stanstead Abbots.

Loaded three instruments (for calibration)

Drove down A10 to North Circular Road as far as Neasden and offloaded one instrument.

Round North Circular to M4

M4 to M25 then M23 as far as Croydon [very delicate series of decisions when on non M roads] ie *Got Lost!*

Offloaded second instrument.

Back along M23 to M25, through Dartford Tunnel  
Stopped for snack at Granada [probably cheaper to fly to the one in Spain!] Back on the M25 to M11 and on to Woodford, offload third and final instrument.

Drove to 'The Owl' hoping to catch the end of the LOSW meeting. Just missed Dicky Doe but managed to catch the Colley's to give them their copy of Touchpaper.

I was fairly whacked when I got back to my flat, and I was only navigating!

The moral is; "Travel light, Stick to Travelcards and Never go 'consulting' on the last Friday in the month.

Bryan Howard

PS The instruments had to be recovered after the calibration - but that's another story, involving the navigator falling down a hatch and the driver touring the byways of East Anglia.

### .... AND NOW IT CAN BE TOLD:

*Yet another contribution from Bryan:*

If you were not directly involved in rocket propulsion it was difficult to understand what the Rocket Motor Executive did. They were to be found in the very best office block at Westcott on an upper floor, well above the mundane, practical world of the Rocket Motor 'S' Division (housed in a collection of old WW2 airfield huts). The RME seemed to be omnipresent at the Paris Airshow and other exotic 'jollics' and was always in the driving seat for the dispensation of alcoholic refreshments at meetings. One day the RME invited members of 'S' Division and P1 WA to meet some Swedish scientists visiting Westcott with a rocket requirement. After formal introductions the business started but one visitor was clearly puzzled about the role of the RME and sought clarification. There was a long silence until I said that "by analogy with the auto industry - He makes the car", pointing to S Div., "We make the fuel" and pointing to the RME chap "and He's the car salesman!".

Laughter and understanding all round but I don't think the RME ever forgave me for that one.

Bryan.

## The Powdermill Club R. I. P.

It is with great sadness and a sense of loss that we have to report the demise of the Club, especially after the most optimistic report in our last issue.

An initial problem was the unsafe state of some of the electrical wiring causing, it was thought, a temporary suspension of activities.

The situation then changed rapidly and the Club was served notice to cease operations and vacate the premises as soon as possible.

It appears that plans for the redevelopment of that part of the site were much further forward than expected.

A full situation report is being circulated to all current Club members and a copy of this has just been received. Rather than attempting to extract the main points the full text is given further on in this issue.

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### FUTURE REUNION ?

It was hoped to run another re-union this year, possibly late summer/early autumn.

This now looks to be very difficult to arrange since an alternative venue would have to be found. It will also cost more!

Investigations are in hand and we hope to be able to bring you more news in the next issue.

Some feedback from the readership would be helpful in planning

- ie. an indication of willingness to pay
- would an alternative venue be acceptable - if so, where or would it be at the old site or nothing?

WATCH THIS SPACE.

## E Branch Reunion

Twenty One people enjoyed this event on the 14th May; held at the Civil Service Club in London. Our thanks to Cyril Beck who, being a member of the Club, sponsored our get together.

As Pam Garrod and I were getting out of the taxi, which had brought us safely through the traffic from Marylebone, we were surprised to see an honour guard forming up to greet us. This consisted of Ray East and Mike Healey in full civil service uniform (dark suits), so we had an escort across the road and into the club.

On reaching the Trafalgar Room on the second floor we found about eight people standing in a circle making polite conversation with absolutely no evidence of either bar or food, although both had been promised. When the bar did open it was soon discovered that it did not stock any beer (a comment on the normal clientele?). Cyril soon sorted this out and things began to warm up; even the rather belated arrival of the food was hardly noticed, at first! (a comment maybe on the buffet contents?).

Everything then went so well for the next three hours and everyone (including Cyril) enjoyed themselves so much that there was general agreement that we should have another reunion in 2 or 3 years time (Watch this space in 1995-96!).

The numbers attending were less than we had hoped but four people had withdrawn at the last minute (for fully adequate reasons). It was good to welcome Cyril's predecessor as head-of E Branch - it's first superintendent, George Whitbread. The prize for maximum distance travelled was won (or would have been if we actually had a prize - which we didn't) by Mike Bagley who travelled 165 miles by train from Sheffield in the morning and then had to leave straight after to get the train back!

It was a very enjoyable afternoon which is certain to be repeated. All our thanks to Cyril Beck for his efforts.

Ken Bascombe

**NEXT ISSUE  
OF TOUCHPAPER  
WILL BE**

**SEPTEMBER 1993**

**The deadline for articles  
is  
mid-August**

**DO NOT FORGET**

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# Touch Bytes

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## EXTRACTS FROM YOUR LETTERS

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...many thanks for my copy of Touchpaper. It is so nice to be able to read about old friends and colleagues.  
Vera Chaplin.

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...the phenom noted by 'Downcast of Nazeing' in Touchpaper 5, is certainly widespread in the Upshire area. These pale brown loops, originally known as 'caoutchouc bands' are insoluble in water and as they invariably fall on 'stony ground' (or even Stonyshotts) they are sterile fruits. I can confirm however that the Post Office spend £6M annually on these resilient rings. Not a lot of people know that!

Bill Makinson

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... thanks for my first copy of Touchpaper. Although I correspond with Paul Bunyan and Norman Blay at Xmas each year it is surprising how many faces and names one forgets.

I found it very interesting and it brought back many happy memories, particularly the photo of the Organic Section 1954/5. This was only part of the Section, the rest being on the South Site and included John Griffiths and Walter Batty.

In case there are any "Old Boys" with memories worse than mine, in the photo from left to right:

Jim Jeacock, XXXX, Brian Hollingsworth, Bob Simkins, Myself, Alan Owen, Phillip Coxon and Bob Cox. The face if XXXX is familiar but I can't recall the name. Had Alan Owen been the size he was when I last saw him in 1981, I would not have appeared in the picture at all. My wife thinks this would have been a good thing as she thinks it makes me look like Charlie Chaplin!

Dick Dedman

*Can't agree Dick! Charlie Chaplin was much shorter Ed.*

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.... following conversation overhead at Christmas 1992 Waltham Abbey Reunion:

"When we were at Waltham we always THOUGHT that we were better than the rest. Since I've worked at the Fort and Farnborough, I now KNOW we were right!"

Roy Atkins

P.S. Might be advisable to replace Farnborough with xxxx, otherwise the originator may be identified.

*Oops! I forgot to edit that bit out!*

Dear Hon Editor,

"O Wise One Who Can Forsee the Future". Do please tell me where I can procure that wondrous crystall ball that you possess and also the high tech camera that shows what we will be doing in December 1993 (on second thought, perhaps not!). I must say that it's jolly comforting to know that Geoff H (to name but a few) will still be supping his ale and that none of us will be getting any older. Do you think we could get a rebate on our life assurance premiums on the strength of this evidence.

Yours

Back to the Future

Eric Kendrew

*Alright Smartxxxx! It was a mistake, I admit it, but you were apparently the only one to spot it, or maybe the others were too polite. May I suggest that you increase your life policy before we meet again? Ed.*

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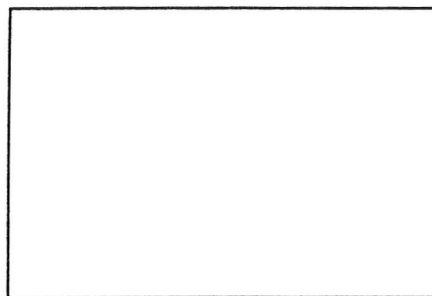
## COMPETITION RESULTS

In the last issue we ran a quiz competition devised by Bill Makinson

Each answer to a set of simple clues was a make or model of car

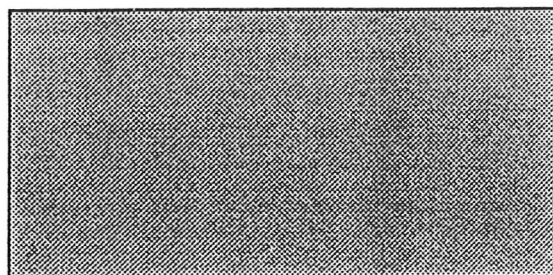
### Readers's Response

Replies listed in order :-



Yes A Zero Response!  
MAYBE IT WAS ALL TOO DIFFICULT

The correct answers will now remain a secret and are not listed below:





# FIRST IMPRESSIONS

by John Vernon

I joined ERDE in 1953. They said they wanted someone to do 'Rheology'. I didn't know what it meant either, but I needed the job. In an advertisement in the Manchester Guardian it was printed as "theology" and got some peculiar applicants!

They put me on the North Site and gave me a bicycle, apparently made by a blacksmith on an off day from assembling steam engines. Riding along the high level runways, I leaned back on the pedals to relax and enjoy the scenery. When I picked myself up from the mud below the runway I realised that if I knew little about rheology, I knew even less about back pedal brakes and how they can throw you off.

The week I joined they abolished Saturday working. The lab workers were very pleased. They only tidied the lab on Saturdays and were now trying to explain to a puzzled management that in future they wouldn't do work on Friday afternoons but would spend the time tidying the lab.

My first boss was Phil Freeman. He was remarkably good at predicting the results of an experiment. This puzzled me until I learned that he doubled his income at Walthamstow Greyhound Track and brought the same infallible predictions into play in his day job.

My first instructions on joining were "Be nice to the Temperature Recorders" I had always thought that these devices were smudged purple ink traces on chart recorders and it took me a long time to find out that they were people.

Living far from home I had to find lodgings and my first digs were in Cheshunt with a dear lady who gave me the same meal every night for five weeks, including dumplings and runner beans. We only used the kitchen with the oven door open and the gas on (Fortunately the gas was lit). Then I moved to the hostel (where the tennis courts are now) and stayed there until I got married. They later closed the hostel and the various single people who had ignored each other for years over breakfast now married each other (just to have somewhere to go).

If you think the present day canteens are terrible then count your blessings, they must have improved since then. One of my assistants only ate there once but objected to the Elastoplast in her stew.

We may not have obeyed the hygiene rules but we did follow the Health and Safety Rules. For instance, when Geoff Church assembled a home made seismograph he earthed it to a water tap. Admittedly he used the first bit of wire to hand, which was Red, but he put a label on it - "NB This wire is Green". Incidentally, the seismograph was because George Whitbread was accused of making bangs that shook our building, broke our tensile test specimens and spoilt our graphs. This very same seismograph was very useful later when Whitbread was accused of cracking the Abbey church tower with his bangs and he was able to prove that ringing the church bells shook the tower far more than his distant ERDE bangs.

I had a new assistant testing the fracture strength of cordite who tried to take home a pocketful of samples to show his proud parents. He got stopped at the gate and do you know, I never saw him again!

I was once stopped at the gate myself and I was carrying a book home which happened to be my PhD thesis. The policeman on duty stopped me and asked "Is that your book Sir?" and I said "Yes!". "Are you sure?" said the policeman. "Of course" I said "It's got my name on it in big gold letters". When I emerged from the search room half an hour later I had learned another new thing - NEVER TRY AND TEASE A POLICEMAN!

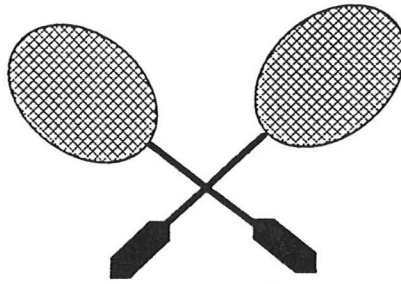
I must have learned other things whilst I was in the Rheology Section - but that's another story .....

AN EXCELLENT ARTICLE  
LET'S HAVE SOME MORE OF THIS TYPE  
FROM OUR READERS

- OR ELSE

I'LL GET JOHN TO WRITE ANOTHER ONE!

# POWDERMILL BADMINTON CLUB



This year sees the 21st anniversary of the move to the Paternoster Sports Centre from the Victoria Hall. we only had one court in the Victoria Hall and the ceiling was rather low for badminton, although it was more friendly there. Play usually stopped for tea and, sometimes, biscuits; carrying on an old tradition from the Hoppit Hall days.

John Scrivener was the chairman when the move was made, I was the secretary and Derek Needham the treasurer. One reason for leaving the old hall was that court fees had been raised in 1971 from 25p to 75p per hour. It's interesting to note that we now pay £5 per hour at the sports centre 21 years later! The playing fee back then was 10p per night with an annual sub of £1-50. We now pay £2 per night (2 hours) but with no annual fee. We also have 2 courts per night instead of one.

One big difference, apart from the height of the hall is that feather shuttles have been replaced by plastic ones which were adopted with some reluctance. However, modern developments have produced feather shuttles which allow for replacement of broken flights and which also enable the speed to be set by twisting the base while holding the flights so as to splay them, thus giving the desired speed. For those of you who think that a crafty change of speed between serves is possible, there is a small polythene peg that locks the flights into position (watch out for players carrying pliers in their back pockets). Needless to say there is resistance to changing from the old, well loved, plastic shuttles, back to feathers!

Les Dingle was interested to hear of variable flight shuttles; he has a similar problem with variable flight golf balls!

We used to have an annual Badminton match against Les's club at Chingford and another one against Dick Watkin's club at Great Parndon. Somehow Dick's side always won by the odd game, one of the skills of a glass engineer!

Anyone still in the vicinity, interested in playing on Tuesday nights will be welcome to join us at 8pm in the Paternoster Sports Centre - We're still there after 21Years.

This invitation includes the Touchpaper Editor who used the move of house as an excuse to stop playing!

**Bryan Howard**

*Bryan fails to mention the main reason for moving to the Sports Centre.  
The Victoria Hall didn't have a Bar.*

# MEMORY LANE - 1

The picture below was taken at the first of the  
PR Christmas Shows entitled "A Mock Opera"



**"We are the Process Workers - Happy Boys and Girls"**

We hope to bring to you further pictures from the  
various Shows in the late 70's and early 80's

Unfortunately many of the later shows were recorded on  
video and we do not yet have the technology to process these  
into stillpictures - we are, however, working on it.

In the meantime -

LOOK OUT FOR THE SPECIAL  
PAGE 3 PIN-UP IN THE NEXT ISSUE

## In Memoriam

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### Colin Meek

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Old friends and colleagues will be much saddened to hear of the death of Colin at his home in Wadebridge on 28th April, after suffering from cancer for several months.

Colin's name was, of course synonymous with ISRG, to which he devoted most of his career. Having been involved from its pre-war origins, he became Officer in Charge at the end of the war, a post he occupied (apart from a short spell in Headquarters) until his retirement in 1971. His wartime contributions were particularly significant and his valued services were recognised by the award of an OBE.

He will be remembered as the exemplary English gentleman: a gentle giant courteous and cheerful, with a quiet manner underpinned by a forceful determination. His technical integrity was backed by an archival memory and a talent for lucid explanation. His encyclopaedic knowledge was called upon to great effect by ISRG historians in recent years.

Colin was a man of many interests; ranging from bridge to meteorology, and was much involved with a heart charity during his retirement. At Waltham Abbey he was a keen Rotarian and once, very tongue in cheek, gave his fellow Rotarians an hour's talk describing his job. Clearly his second wife, Margaret, well known to many of us as the successful authoress of several mystery stories, was not the only fiction writer in the family.

To Margaret and the family, we send our condolences and share their loss.

Ron Campbell

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### Jim Ashton

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Jim Ashton joined the MoD at Waltham Abbey in 1960 starting in the Drawing Office and then in ISRG from 1964 to 1970. After returning to the main DO he left the MoD in 1971 to emigrate to South Africa before retiring to Australia in 1989.

Jim died on 25th December 1992 in Sydney

After completing his apprenticeship Jim enlisted in the Royal Artillery where he met his first wife, Joan, on an Ack Ack battery. He later landed in Normandy on DD+2 as a Gun Tiffy. He used to love to tell how Monty sent him to win the battle of the bulge; down to their last few rounds he had his guns spiked expecting to be overrun when the panzers ran out of fuel in front of his position!

Jim was an unusual type of PTO, he used to come into the labs to share ideas and test prototypes with us. His service experience always ensured that the final designs were what we now call "user friendly". In Johannesburg he worked on the design of components for APCs. Joan died in South Africa and Jim married his second wife in Oz.

Roy Atkins



# MEMORY LANE - 2

P1 Group photograph June 1981



# A Touch Amusing

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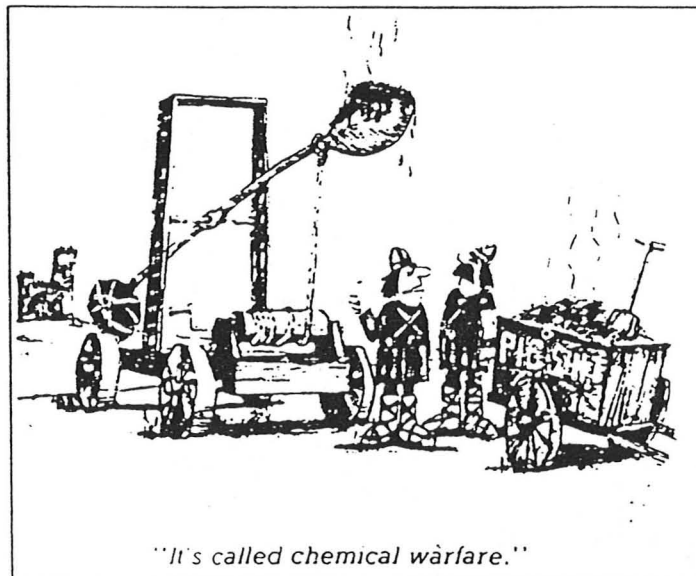
## DEFINITIONS FROM Marcus Philipus of BRIDGWATER

### ONE + TWO =

MATHEMATICIAN	3
SCIENTIST	$3.00 \pm 0.01$
QUANTUM PHYSICIST	somewhere between 2.9 and 3.1
DESIGN ENGINEER	$3.01^{+0.00}_{-0.01}$
MANUFACT. ENGINEER	$2.99^{+0.01}_{-0.00}$
MAINTEN. ENGINEER	I think it's about 3, but let's say 9 to be on the safe side
JOURNALIST	a higher than expected 3!
POLITICIAN	2.82 but in line with our prediction of 3, when seasonally adjusted.
THEATRICAL AGENT	2.7
DIVORCE LAWYER	1.5 each
ESTATE AGENT	A spacious 3 which could, with a little imagination, be converted to a roomy 4
ACCOUNTANT	What figure had you in mind?
BUSINESS MAN	Are you Buying or Selling?
BARRISTER	Undecided; no precedent in law.
COMPUTER ANALYST	I'll have to work it out bit by bit
THEOLOGIAN	One

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## Defence through the Ages: Number 1068



MANY THANKS TO OUR RECENT RECRUIT DICKY DOE FOR THIS OLD CARTOON WHICH HE TELLS ME WAS DOING THE ROUNDS AT WALTHAM ABBEY ABOUT FIFTEEN YEARS AGO!

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WHY NOT SHARE WITH US ANY CARTOONS OR JOKES THAT YOU COME ACROSS, AND NOT FORGETTING THOSE OLD PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE ABBEY.

# FULL TEXT OF POWDERMILL CLUB NOTICE

We wrote to all members a number of weeks ago to notify them that our tenure in the Powdermill Club premises was under threat, because our landlord, the Defence Land Agent, had asked us, as soon as possible, to return the building to the Ministry of Defence's Central Disposal Unit with vacant possession. We told members in that letter that we would be writing to give them a report on developments and details of a forthcoming general meeting that would determine the way ahead for the Club.

Notwithstanding the fact that the problems with the roof and the electrical supplies were overcome, and in spite of vigorous negotiations by the committee with our landlord, we were able to negotiate but a short-term reprieve, and were ordered to cease trading at the club premises on Sunday 23rd May 1993, and to vacate the premises by 31st May. In view of these circumstances and after due consideration of the finances on settlement of outstanding debts, the committee has determined that membership fees paid this year should be subject to a two-thirds reimbursement, and that sum will be returned to those who have paid a 1993 subscription.

The committee sees two possible alternatives for the Club.

- a) To dissolve the club, sell the assets and distribute the proceeds to the share-holding members.
- b) To put the assets of the club into safe keeping, and to elect a trustee committee to investigate whether new premises can be obtained, or alternatively whether the Powdermill Club can merge with another club in the Waltham Abbey area.

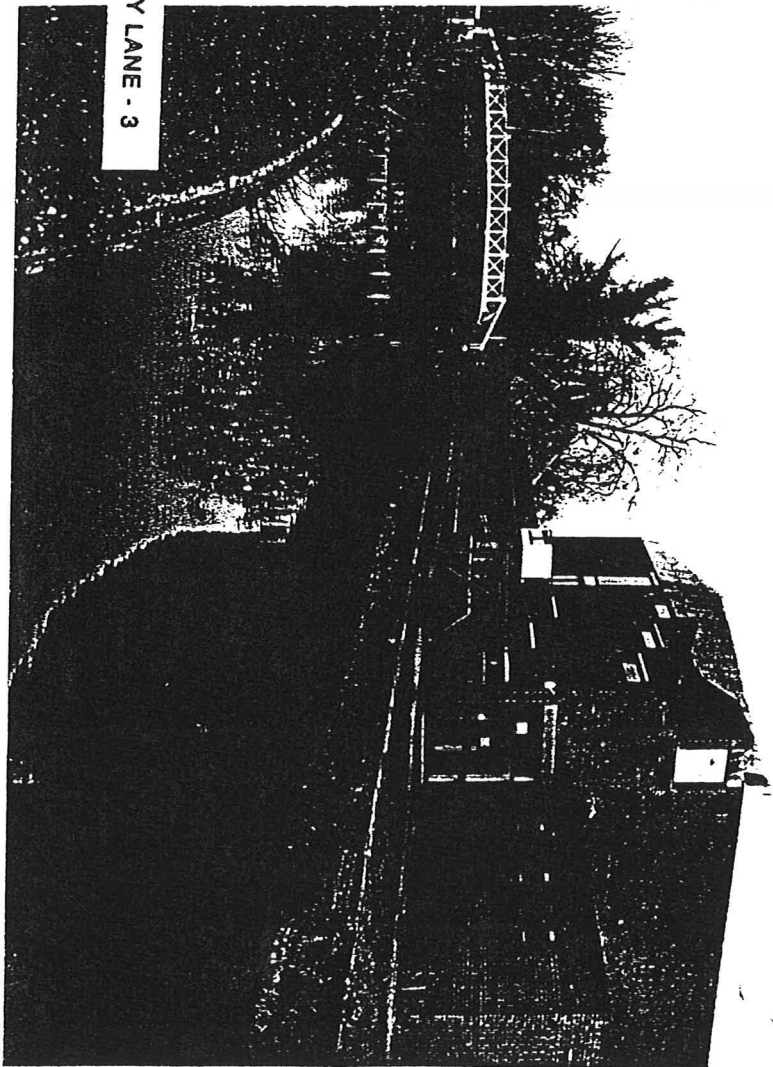
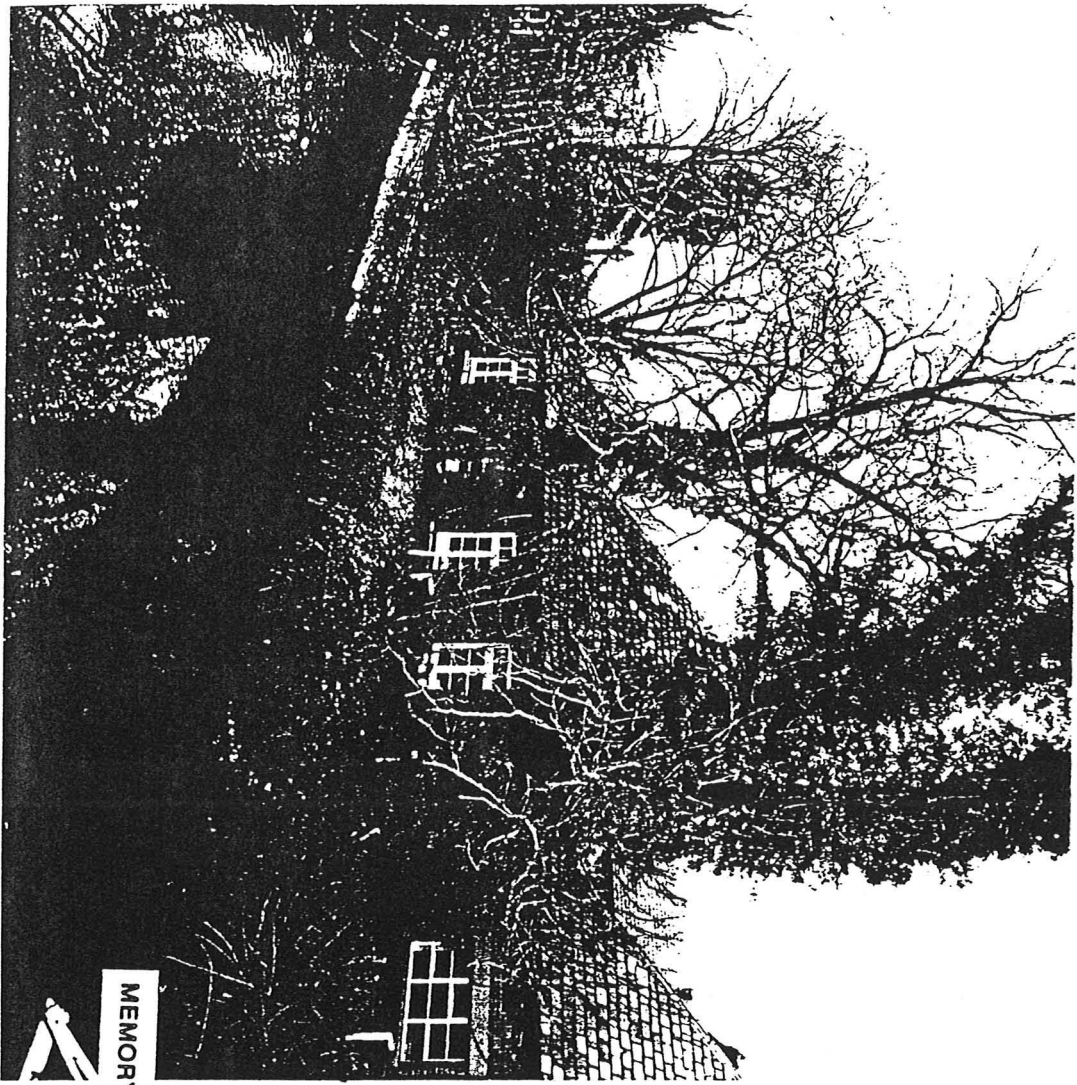
Circumstances have now dictated that the club assets are now cash only, however the options are still the same.

A general meeting of the club will be held some time in July at a venue yet to be decided. Only holders of a 1993 membership card will be admitted. (There will be no licensed bar facilities at this meeting)

Members will be notified by letter of the date and venue of the meeting and the motion proposed. The audited accounts for 1992/1993 will be available at this meeting.

The period of time available to us to vacate the premises was short to the extent that we had no option but to turn our assets into cash by auctioning off the stock and the fixtures and fittings. Ten days of normal trading enabled the Club to dispose of most of the "liquid" stock, unopened spirits and unstarted crates were returned to the suppliers for credit, remaining stock was sold to the members and other social clubs. An inventory of all other assets was drawn up and members were invited to make sealed bids for any item. As a result of this the building has been virtually gutted and a visit to any watering hole in the area will reveal something familiar to regular users of the Club. No bids were received for the Chairman though the picture of the Queen can now be seen at the British Legion. Several members of the committee have been working full time at the club for a week in order to maximise our assets, and though the time available did not enable us perhaps to get the best price for everything, we have done the best we can in the circumstances. The padlock on the gate has now been changed and access to the building is limited, it is expected that the building itself will be flattened very shortly. One item that has come to light is the Suggestions book dating from 1968, this priceless and historic document can be published or suppressed depending on the donations received from interested parties.





"TOUCHPAPER" ©

Independently Produced  
Printed on Liberated Paper



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# Touch Register

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THE NEXT FULL REGISTER WILL BE PUBLISHED IN  
THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE

MEANWHILE THE FOLLOWING ADDITIONS  
AND  
AMENDMENTS HAVE BEEN RECEIVED

## AMENDMENTS:

<u>name</u>	<u>currently at</u>	<u>WA dates</u>	<u>WA section 's</u>
Eric Kendrew	Fort Halstead [semi-rtd]	1947 - 91	E Branch/ISRG
Dave Manners	P&EE Foulness	1951 - 90	Propellants/Hazard
Laurie Nisbet	Barclays Bank, STAFFS	1979 - 84	Design Office

## ADDITIONS:

<u>name</u>	<u>currently at</u>	<u>WA dates</u>	<u>WA section 's</u>
Tom Burton	RAF Brampton	1979 - 84	P1
Harry Davis	Waltham Cross[rtd]	1977 - 88	Stores
Dick Dedman	Louth Lincs [rtd]	1952 - 81	SEI/GC
Dick Doe	Bury St Edmunds [rtd]	1935 - 76	RGPF/P1/E Branch
Bernie Howes	St. Giles Ct. LONDON	1968 - 88	CE/NM/ISRG
Liz Howes	Colchester	1972 - 88	NM
Roy Love	Waltham Abbey [rtd]	?	BWD
Louie Owen	Ellingham NORFOLK	1979 - 87	L 134
Ken Peck	Waltham Cross	1953 - 91	BWD
Kevin Potter	SINTEF Norway	1974 - 83	PE
Barry Ransley	Prospect House LONDON	1978 - 1990	PD1&2/PR/P2
Bob Richards	Dunmow [semi-rtd FH]	1956 - 91	DMXRD/NM/PR/ISRG
S E Smith	Swanage [rtd]	1936 - 54	RGPF/Chem
Roy Stenson	Waltham Abbey [rtd]	1957 - 81	P1/Adhesion &
John Wilkinson	Kings College LONDON	1978 - 91	P2/NP4

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Please continue to keep us informed of any changes in details.  
and  
If your current details are incorrect or incomplete please up-date.