

Touchpaper

MARCH 94

ISSUE 9

EDITORIAL

This being the first issue of 1994 may I wish you all a belated 'happy new rest of the year'.

I thought we had got away with another mild winter but as I write this the snow is several inches deep outside and the roads are treacherous. Still, spring won't be far behind, I hope!

I'm afraid that news is a little sparse this issue and I can only assume that few of you got a new pen in your Christmas stockings.

Our next issue will be prepared in mid-May so, when the weather clears a bit, why not get out and buy a cheap biro and send me your news in time for the June issue?

Norman Paul

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DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE

20th May 1994

REMINDER

DATE FOR 1994 RE-UNION
AT
THE WALTHAM ABBEY TOWN HALL

Friday 21st October

TOUCH

Thanks for recent Newsletter and for adding my name to the Register. I'm sorry I didn't make the last re-union but hope to attend in future. In the new feature "Where are They Now?" you enquired after Brian Sharp and Dick Cobbins. I met Brian in the Cross recently and he hasn't changed at all. He has recently started working for his brother servicing pub vending machines and works 4 days a week doing the rounds in Herts, Beds and Bucks. I asked him if he had a pint at each stop and he said "Definitely Not!" Regarding Dick Cobbin; after his wife died he met a Welsh lady and went to live along the main A5 road near Fishguard with the intention of starting a B&B place.

Best Wishes to you all,
Sid Pegrum.

..... Dr Llewellyn and I would like to join Touchpaper. As you can see from the headed paper we are still working together after 18 years [now at PBI Waltham Abbey].

Best Wishes,
Sheila Kilbey

**Sad news of Reg Collins
who died in December.**

**He was a stalwart of the
Library and I know all
staff will be saddened by
his going.**

THE LONDON GROUP

Those working in London continue to meet quarterly [March, June, Sept and Dec] at the Chandos Pub just off Trafalgar Square (upstairs, Opera Room). The last lunchtime meeting, brought forward to the beginning of December so as not to impinge on Xmas jollities, saw a dozen people drag themselves away from partying, to quench their thirst with a glass, or more, or of ale.

At the beginning there were whispers - "Who's that", "Don't recognize the face ...", seems familiar but ...", "A new member?" Actually, none of the above but Paul Collins joining us for the day from Burghfield. Well how many of you would have recognized him without a beard?

It was good to welcome Roy Stenson back as a retired member of the gathering. Let's hope he can continue to find time in his busy retirement schedule in future.

Readers may wish to note that Roy France is now working in London but we have yet to see him at the Chandos.

Next meeting will be on Friday 18th March from about 12.30pm.

Diane Howse.

(071 218 6934)

PS to Dave Lee - Next time the drinks are on you!

PLEASE SEND YOUR SNIPPETS OF NEWS AND GOSSIP TO THE EDITOR FOR INCLUSION IN THE NEXT ISSUE.

NORTH SITE DEVELOPMENT UP-DATE

REPORT ON THE SURVEY OF NORTH SITE BY THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON HISTORICAL MONUMENTS

You no doubt remember that Friday afternoon was the traditional time for lectures in the Library. The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments [England] kept to this tradition on Jan 21st when Paul Everson and Wayne Cocroft reported on their archaeological survey of North Site.

Following an excellent buffet lunch provided by Royal Ordnance, some 82 invited guests assembled in a calor-gas heated lecture theatre to hear the results of the survey carried out from Jan to Mar 1993.

Paul Everson, as head of the Keele office of RCHM[E], described the scope of the survey in terms of mapping the most significant buildings on the site in conjunction with about 290 photographs; including some aerial shots.

From this survey English Heritage were able to designate listed buildings for presentation. The conclusion was that the site was 'unique and historically even more important than the Faversham Gunpowder Mill site'.

Wayne Cocroft then described, in some detail, the history of gunpowder manufacture, from the early beginnings to the phasing out in the late 19th century and the introduction of guncotton and cordite manufacture; ending with the closure of the factory in 1945. The later history included references to South Site but which was not included in the survey.

The list of buildings of interest seems endless and includes the old part of the library which was used to refine sulphur. The range of buildings facing the Queen's Mead, with their central towers, housed steam-driven mills built in the mid 19th century. In the woods opposite the burning ground lie the remains of a unique press house with water wheel and press.

The Newton's Pool building was originally a gunpowder granulating house and examples of 'gloom' stoves and steam heated stoves have been noted and logged. Transport of explosives by water and tramway form another important aspect of the history of the site.

One interesting aspect of the survey was the change of use of buildings over a period of time. For instance, a building erected in the gunpowder era might be converted for guncotton production and end up as a proof testing site. If you are interested in getting a copy of the survey report, write to:

The Royal Commission of Historical Monuments of England
Darwin Building, Keele University Science Park,
University of Keele, Newcastle under Lyme, STAFFS ST5 5SP

[The price is likely to be about £15]

The above is from an original report by Ken Bascombe, condensed by Bryan Howard

Our thanks to Ken and Bryan for keeping us in the picture.

Further up-dates will be prepared as matters progress.

BYTES

Congratulations to Anthony Arber who has yet another addition to his family, a baby girl who arrived just before Christmas.

I believe he is contemplating 'the snip'.

Tony Davis has reached that certain age when life takes on a new meaning and the real hard work begins. You would have thought that, what with his golf, JP duties and all those domestic jobs waiting to be done that his life would be full. No way! After a month long lecture tour of Malaysia Tony will be returning to the Fort part time.

Maybe it's the thought of all those jobs around the house.

Tony had a good send off on the 17th February which we all enjoyed.

A belated item that was omitted from the last issue - Geoff Hooper has escaped from the DRA and is now at the Ordnance Board in Empress State Building - and he used to moan about the journey from Waltham Abbey to the Fort!

Glad to hear that Malcolm McLaren is 'back to strength' after being laid up for a couple of months with severe back trouble. It seems he rather overdid the gardening and leaf raking in late autumn.

No 'formal' report from the East of the Summer Wine but we understand they continue to get good attendances at their monthly meetings in 'The Owl'.

A notable recent recruit is John Vernon

News from RO Bridgewater via Mark Phillips:

Q. Why did they give Gordon Orr the task of amending the "Precautions to be Observed Before Activities Commence" standard operating procedures?

A. Susan and Gordon's third child is expected imminently!

Also, an observation from Bridgewater which could equally apply elsewhere - "When Central Stores are 'open', it's shut up and there's no one there.

When they're shut, there's always someone there to tell you when they're open!

Your Editor would like to thank all those who sent 'best wishes' during his recent short stay in hospital. Removal of the offending gall bladder and two rather large and horrible looking gallstones was achieved through the new 'keyhole surgery' technique, without complication and thanks to the ever wonderful, but struggling, NHS.

**DEADLINE DATE FOR THE
NEXT ISSUE OF TOUCHPAPER**

Tuesday 17th May

REMINISCENCES

A comment by John Hicks in his interesting "First Day" article (Touchpaper no.8) has prompted me to follow up his with this wider aspect of the Waltham Abbey/Woolwich connection:

Gudge Taylor.

In 1924 AD the history teacher of Form 2, Miss 'Granny' Graden (wrong side of 40!) started us on history charts and soon reached 1066 and the Battle of Hastings beloved of tapestry designers and juvenile graphic artists. She added that we should visit Waltham Abbey for Harold's sake. So, one morning I set out from the "Abbey Arms" to the "George" at Wanstead, via the the No.40 bus and a 1/2d brown ticket, from where I started to walk. By the afternoon I reached Sun Street only to find that the Abbey was locked and a notice stated "On payment of 6d to the verger visitors can enter". This was an impossible sum for me being equivalent to 3 weeks pocket money, so I had no alternative but to start walking back. After a mile it started to rain, but I flagged a sand lorry and got a welcome lift well on the way to Wanstead. Not a very encouraging first pilgrimage to Waltham Abbey!

Some 40 years later I was a guest at a function of the Waltham Abbey Red Cross and told my story which was greeted by the expected incredulity. But Canon Cleall, a previous vicar, also a guest, confirmed that the church was kept locked when he arrived in the 1920's and he made it from a museum into a church.

In 1930 I found that the Woolwich branch of the IPCS also represented a small group from Waltham Abbey headed by George Smith. I got to know George quite well and my wife and I recall eating icecream in his shop at the corner of Farm Hill Road. Our first wedding present, a coffee pot, which we still have, came from Waltham Abbey as a kind gift from George.

In the early days transport from Woolwich to RGPF was by slow stopping steam train from London or Stratford to 'Waltham Cross for Waltham Abbey'. After one late arrival at Waltham Abbey a Dr Forster asked "I've been pondering - Who was Ponder and how did he meet his End?" On another occasion when his colleagues were critical of his new hat, he lowered the window and threw the offending headgear over the marshes! I recall that travelling this route on a Saturday we were entertained by a black faced minstrel with banjo who changed his audience, and collecting hat, at each station.

During the War I came to Waltham Abbey to try out, on a production scale, my new high nitrogen process for nitrocellulose from wood which had performed well up to the semi-technical scale at Woolwich. The nitration overheated and caught fire which was a good start to my first days work at Waltham Abbey! After this I was put in charge of initiators!

John Hicks refers to the horror of being sent to work at Woolwich (TP 8). This was only equalled by many staff following the planned move from Woolwich to Waltham Abbey when the 'Chemical Research and Development Establishment' was set up - soon changed to ERDE; a protracted move dependent on facilities etc. My good friend and colleague, Tommy Thomas predicted that 'There will be a man on the moon before I get to Waltham Abbey'. How right he was - he retired whilst still at Woolwich!

One day in 1951 I came home to Otford and said to my wife 'The move is on, either Waltham Abbey or Australia' she replied 'Don't tell me it's Waltham Abbey!' We were mainly concerned about the schooling prospects for our two small daughters - the solemn warnings of Dr "Nutt" Slack will be remembered by some. For the record our girls had a very happy and successful time at Quaker Lane, thanks especially to Miss Appleton and Mr Harris.

My Woolwich connection continued right up my retirement in 1974, spending up to two days a week there. I still remember two problems:

1. Receiving a very large gas bill and we had no gas laid on! 'Bobby' Brewin said "Don't worry, the bill is based on floor space occupied not on gas usage."
2. The Waltham Abbey transport office required a file reference to carry 'in-section' stores to Woolwich. I got over that by quoting the only number I ever remembered - my Co-op number!

FURTHER NORTH SITE NEWS

February 1994

You will recall the familiar sight, as you entered Powdermill Lane, of the Tennis Courts, well kept grass and ornamental shrubs. Well, they've all gone!

The only building left standing are Number Nine, the Police Lodge and the old Social Club. The row housing the Director's office and administration have vanished!

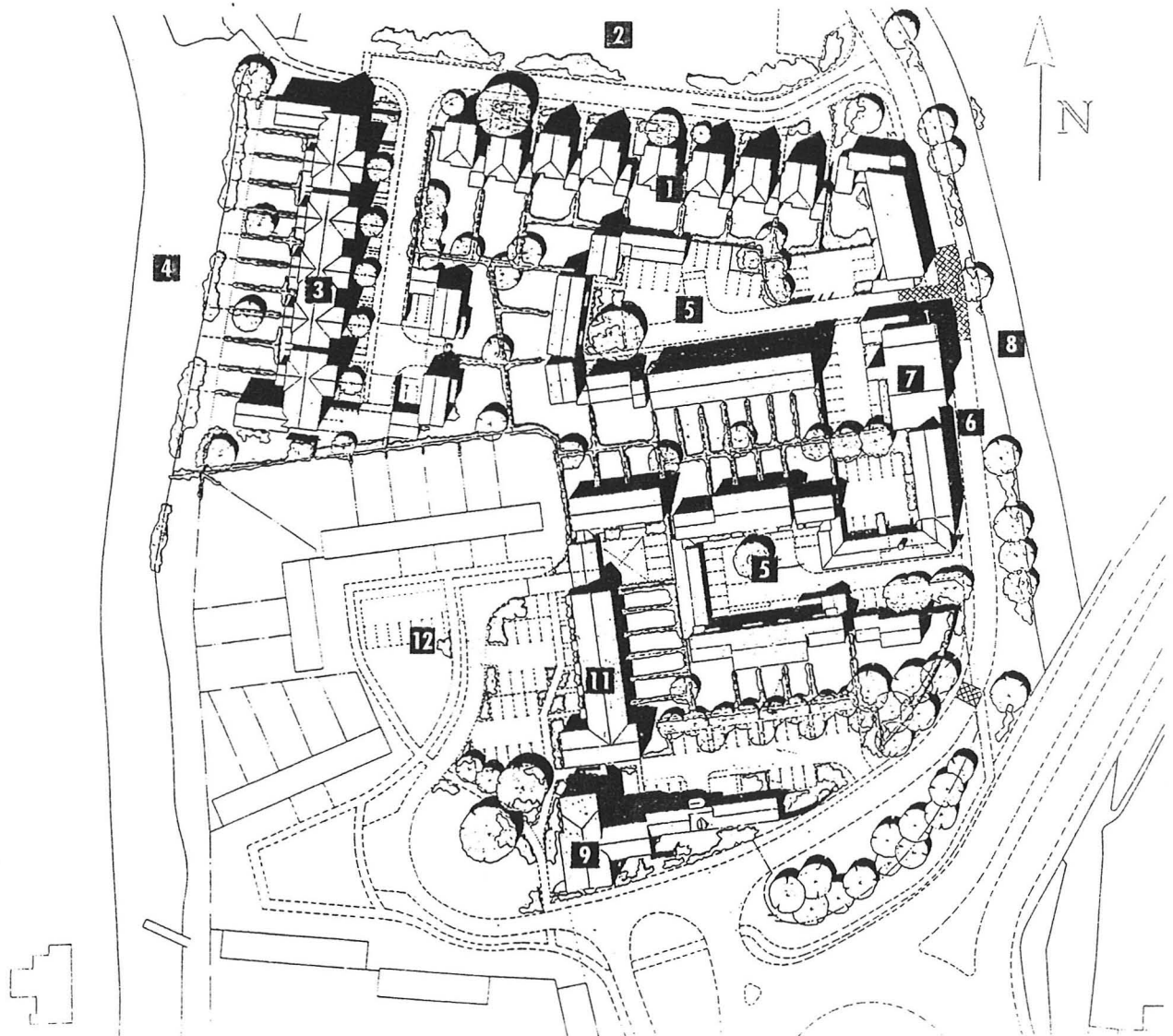
From Flagstaff Road to Walton Gardens, the whole area presents a bizarre sight as it has been dug out to a depth of some 5 feet leaving a clay base. Across this area, where the various drawing offices, admin offices and tennis courts used to be, are a number of rain-filled channels. Around the edges of this sunken area there are large patches of white, looking like chalk or lime, but which is a sealant to stabilise the sides. An almost continuous flow of lorries can be seen, taking soil to and from the site as part of the decontamination work.

On Hoppit Island, H10 still stands and the magazines H7 and H8, but everything else has gone. The most recent 'levelling' was the old North Site Proof Stand(H12), that generated a nice big heap of concrete rocks and you can now have an uninterrupted view of No. 9 from the west of the Flood Relief Channel!

Bryan Howard

The reason for all this activity can be found in the latest CIVIX brochure entitled "Powdermill Lane Housing" from which the layout below is taken:

FOR SALE 5.1 ACRES FREEHOLD LAND



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

If you refer back to the last Touchpaper you will remember that we introduced a new feature suggested by Ike Eickhoff.

Ike started it off by suggesting a few names from the past and if you look back to the 'Touch Byte' pages you will see that Sid Pegrum gave us some news on both Brian Sharp and Dick Cobbin.

I am pleased to report that we are in touch with Ron Smith who is now on our Touchpaper register.

Of the others on the list:

George Baillie

Albert Barnett

Iris Rowlands

Ron Jones

Hans Ziebland

Brian Robinson

Dave Swadling

.....we have yet to hear of.

The Editor would like to add another name to the list and that is:

Ike Eickhoff

Haven't heard anything from you Ike for ages - that's most unusual!

Still, we'll press on with this feature for a couple of issues and hope for further responses.

QUESTIONS UNANSWERED

Prompted by Chris Evans article I pose the following queries. Now own up if you can, or dare!

WHO:

1. Put stuck chess men on the top of an ex-Director's bubble car?
2. Chocked up a Mini Minor and wrapped it in toilet paper in the Main Lab car park?
3. Woke up Waltham Abbey in the middle of the night with the "Big Bang"?
4. Stuck John Vernon's Section's milk bottles to the verandah floor?
5. Gave John Golden the wrong IR spectrum by mistake? - he spent two days trying to decipher it - it was his final reaction in a chain of six!
6. Was always leaving his factory bike outside the betting shop in Sun Street at lunch time, forgetting to ride it back?
7. Felled a tree across the Locker Magazines on North Site?
8. Locked me in the Main Lab grinding room at lunch time, twice in one week?

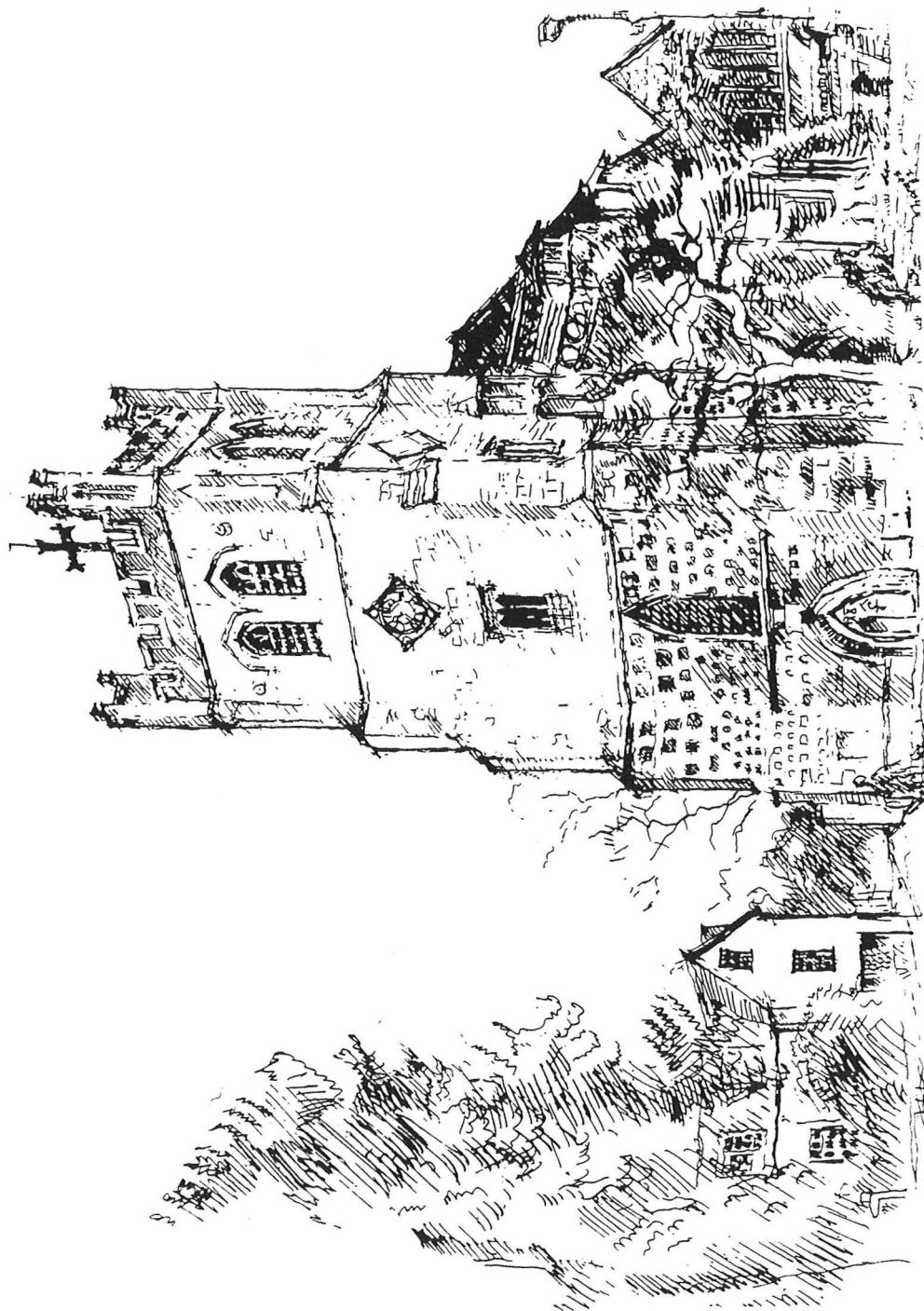
No doubt there were many more but, as Chris says, "Skylarking was not allowed!"
Geoff Howell.

AND NOW FURTHER UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

There were no replies to Bryan Howard's Christmas Quiz Questions but here are the answers:

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|--|
| 1. P743 | 8. Bassett-Lowre | 15. 1867 |
| 2. Queen's Mead | 9. Number Nine | 16. Near London Zoo |
| 3. Elephant hide floor | 10. Process & ? | 17. "Rockets Red Glare"
(Congreve Rocket) |
| 4. H67 Hoppit Island | 11. Cordite Reeling | |
| 5. Siemens | 12. A tot of rum | 18. 1951 - 52 |
| 6. Flowering Cherry tree | 13. Next to S/S Stores | 19. 15 mph |
| 7. near H12 (Hoppit Island) | 14. 1961 | |

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW THE QUESTIONS REFER TO
TOUCHPAPER ISSUE 8 DECEMBER 93



TOUCH PAPER REGISTER

A full list will be printed in the September 94 issue.
Meanwhile here are the latest additions and amendments

<u>name</u>	<u>currently at</u>	<u>WA dates</u>	<u>WA section 's</u>
Frank Broadbear	Woodford Bridge	1976 - 89	Design Office
Cecil Cullingford	Harpenden	1977 - 89	Glassblowing
Tom George	Frinton [rtd]	1954 - 88	Services s/s
Sheila Kilbey	PBI Waltham Abbey	1976 - 89	Surgery
Dr John Llewelyn	PBI Waltham Abbey	1960 - 88	estab. doctor
Charles Meek	Wimborne DORSET	1952 - 77	ISRG
John Moore	Upshire [rtd]	1977 - 89	Stores/ISRG
Sid Pegrum	Waltham Cross	1954 - 91	Garage/ISRG
Sue Salisbury (Balham)	RO Summerfield	1985 - 89	P2
Nigel Salisbury	RO Summerfield	1986 - 89	MDP
Richard Stevens	Fort Halstead	1978 - 89	P1/Haz Assess

PLEASE NOTIFY THE EDITOR OF ANY CHANGES OR OMISSIONS