

Touchpaper

SEPTEMBER 94

ISSUE 11

EDITORIAL

A very big thankyou to all who have sent in contributions. I've had so much this time that it's going to be difficult to get it all in and a number of 'space fillers' I had been saving will have to wait for another issue.

As you know we only print the full register of Touchpaper names at this time each year. Because of the size this has been printed as a separate booklet that you can keep for reference. We will continue to keep you updated with any changes in the winter, spring and summer issues.

This issue also gives details of the annual re-union in October. If you are coming to the re-union, please try and book for this as soon as possible.

Hoping to see many of you there,

Norman Paul

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SCIENTISTS COOKBOOK

THE 1994 RE-UNION

TOUCHPAPER PUBLICATION ADDRESS

Building All
DRA Fort Halstead
Sevenoaks
KENT
TN14 7BP

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you can: write
phone: 0959 515632
or fax: 0959 516023

TOUCH

...Cliff Blunt sent me a copy of Touchpaper and I would like to be on the mailing list. I wasn't able to say good-bye to all my old friends when I left as I ended up in hospital but I would like to thank them for their kindness. I have actually been paid! for some of my paintings so I'm well ahead of Van Gogh at this stage. All I have to do now is go mad and cut off an ear!
Best Wishes



Dick Evans

.....
..Thankyou very much for sending Touchpaper, I found it very interesting and look forward to future ones. You will be sorry to hear that Ray Jones, who worked in Stationery Stores from 1972-77, passed away on 13th July, sadly missed by us all.
Vera Jones.

ANNOUNCEMENT

50 not out

Congratulations to George McFarlane who reached the big 50 on 28th July.

Just a note to thank you for sending issues of TP and to ask for future issues to be sent to my home, now that I have retired. I've really appreciated keeping in touch (it was very lonely stuck out on the East Coast) and I hope to continue by joining the LSW group. I had a lovely end to my career with a lunchtime party in the Polhill Arms with a number of my Fort Halstead colleagues on June 10th.

Regards

Dave Manners

..please add my name to the list. I am now retired after five years with the National Rivers Authority. Hope you are all keeping well, Terry Rider (BWD Plumber).

.....
..I think TP is the only item that comes through my letter box that gets read from cover to cover. I have now reached the ripe old age of 73 and will have 'enjoyed' ten years of retirement. You may remember Aubrey Thomas. I worked with him in Heat Transfer in the 60's under Hans Ziebland. One needed a sense of humour to survive, and with Derek Needham, we had many a laugh - usually at 'you know who's expense'. Smokey Thomas now lives at Bare in Lancs but he had some business in London and we arranged a couple of hours together. I told him about TP and he asks for his name to be added. I also met Bob Rainbird in Sun Street recently and that's another for your list.

Kindest Regards

Ron Smith

.....
Thanks very much for TP. It was good of Ron Smith to pass my name on, it was a chance meeting in Sun Street. It's my own fault for not keeping in touch but the news that my son had got multiple sclerosis, just after I retired, knocked me for six and life has become a succession of priorities I'm afraid. I've filled in the registration form as best I can but:

a) The memory is fading

b) It's bloody hot!

c) I'm just getting over the hayfever and asthma season and still half asleep from antihistamines. Dr Llewellyn said, in 1960, I'd grow out of it at 50 years old (I'm now 73!!). Incidentally, I worked at Fort Halstead during the last war from 1943-45. From the 'tower' on the main lab (which we called the Odeon) we could actually look down on Spitfire and Tempest fighters chasing 'doodlebugs' across the Weald of Kent.

Yours Sincerely

Bob Rainbird.

Bob also sent a photo of the much changed Monkswood Estate with the comment that "some of the new porches have already fallen off!". Ed

BRISTOL BRANCH OF WA SOCIETY

I must report that I am very disappointed with the turnout of this particular branch. For the last 15 months it has constituted two old faithfuls - Ian Weston and me! So, come on you lot, shake off this lethargy and join us in the Parkway Tavern most weeks on a Thursday lunchtime - or Wednesday or Friday. Better yet, check with one of us for details first!

Ike

WALTHAM ABBEY NEWS

UPDATE BY SITE MANAGER
ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES GROUP OF ROYAL ORDNANCE

The land fronting Walton Gardens is now prepared and awaiting disposal for Residential development. Commencement of this development is imminent.

Work on the land adjacent to Highbridge Street is well underway in preparation for future re-development and a current proposal for residential development is in the planning stage.

Other areas of the site: Work is well underway with clearance of deposited debris in progress at various points on the site.

GUNPOWDER BARGES

A survey has been carried out by Adam Ford, Site Archaeologist, on the remains of a number of powder barges on the North Site. Nine have so far been identified although many of them are little more than partially buried and decayed timbers. A strategy for the preservation of as many as possible has been proposed.

A tenth barge, partially restored by apprentices in the mid 1960's was, until recently, on loan to the DRA at Fort Halstead. It has now been transferred back to the Abbey for relocation as a prime museum piece. This will be fully restored and may eventually be displayed as a floating exhibit.

This represents the only news to hand at this date.
We hope to keep you informed as events progress.

BYTES

It was sad to read Ken Bascombe's notice regarding Reg Westlake. Ken refers to the 'famous Rotter Machine' on line from Harry Rumbold. It has always been a real man's piece of scientific equipment which achieved national and international prestige. I recall discussing it with Harry in L149 in the early 1950's and he was surprised and pleased to hear that I had not only heard of the legendary Dr Rotter, but had worked for him and knew him quite well. It also happened that, from that first day when I started working on explosives in 1929, that I shared a lunch table with "Bill" R A Walker, a great practitioner of the Impact machine from its virtual inception. Ancient history now, but we can only reflect on the devotion of the Walker, Rumbold and Westlake fraternity and on the need for long term practical continuity and experienced interpretation.

Gudge Taylor

I was surprised and delighted to receive a copy of the June 94 Touchpaper and it was very kind of Ron Smith to give my address. My wife, Brenda, and I retired up here 3 years ago and, while very contented, there is virtually no contact with ex-colleagues. This is rectified by Touchpaper - many thanks! You may be interested to learn that I was stationed at Fort Halstead in 1942. I was one of the small party which first occupied one of the buildings - known as the 'Odeon'. All the other buildings were brand new and empty; there were only us and the WDC guards. Originally I had started service in the Pembrokeshire village of Boncath where we had a small laboratory in a stable block but in 1942 we were sent up to the hitherto deserted Fort and became HQ branch SR12. There were no support facilities (*Still aren't! Ed.*) and had serious problems with pay, amongst other things. We were eventually taken over with the rest of the Fort by the design department, CEAD. I got a transfer back to PDE, finished the war there and left in 1946 for a couple of years in industry before re-entering the Civil service under Reconstruction in 1948. It was a long time ago but I thought that someone might find it interesting. Aubrey Thomas [a.k.a. "Smoky"]

We are sorry to report the death of Betty Chance on 16th June at Princess Alexandra Hospital in Harlow. Although her illness was diagnosed in Dec 93 and she was undergoing radiotherapy, she persisted in working for the Malaysian Rubber Company, where she had been working since the Waltham Abbey closure, till the middle of May when she was unable to continue. Betty was taken back home to Wales and was buried after a chapel service on 24th June.

LAST OF THE SUMMER WINE:

JUNE Ten attendees this time. We all sat outside, the sun was warm but with a cool breeze. We were very pleased to see Dickie Doe again. It turns out that on the last 2 LSW dates he had been away and not off sick as we had thought. Conversation was general and included talk of Dr Hodge who is now living just outside Norwich. Diane Howse was not at her best having undergone some rather brutal sounding dentistry that morning. Apologies were recorded from the Colleys, who were in Northumberland (and who thought that the meeting was a week later) and from Bryan Howard whose exhaust was exhausted!

Ken Bascombe

JULY A near record 16 turned up! including 'first timers'; Beryl Bromberger and Dave Manners.

* Ron Treadgold showed a few of Freda's watercolours of N Site (one dated 1995!)

* Arthur Stokoe is thought to be recovering from his operation so he was excused absence.

* Dave Manners has managed to survive his first 7 weeks of retirement.

* Beryl Bromberger feels she can no longer support Gordon in the manner to which he has become accustomed, so she has also retired and hopes to become a regular - she does cause confusion because she drinks tea and everybody else has coffee before being thrown out of the Owl at closing time.

Bryan Howard

Ivor Quickenden

Ivor, one of the longest serving Waltham Abbey stalwarts, died on 3rd August. He joined Waltham Abbey at the age of 14 as a 'Work Takers Lad' before his apprenticeship as a sheet metal worker. This was at Enfield Lock where he made many lifelong friends, later serving as an officer in the Enfield Lock Ex Apprentices Association. He was called up for army service in 1945 in the Royal Signals and served in many places including occupied Germany. He was demobbed in 1953 and resumed his career at Waltham Abbey, joining ISRG after a time with the lead burners and chemical plumbers. Ivor continued with ISRG until closure in 1992. That his efforts were appreciated was clearly demonstrated by a BEM in 1988 and the ISM in 1991. Those who knew him remember him in two ways; his vast store of anecdotes and an equally vast collection of corny jokes.

He will be sadly missed by his wife, Audrey, sons Derek and Trevor and by his many friends.

MY FIRST DAY AT WALTHAM

I remained at school for as long as possible, mainly because the circle of friends that I was part of seemed to be unique and therefore to be selfishly enjoyed to the utmost.

The next chapter in my life started on 31st July 1967. I was now to begin actually working with adults of varying ages and not cocooned by people of my own age (give or take a year).

I reported in as instructed, earlier than the appointed time, to the Personnel Department, Ministry of Supply (I think), [*Actually I think it was Ministry of Aviation. Ed.*] Explosives Research and Development Establishment, who thrust form after form at me to sign.

After about an hour and a half of this, and two cups of tea, I was informed that transportation was waiting to deliver me to my place of work on the South Site. The section was SCE, Superintendency of Chemical Engineers, and little did I suspect what den of vipers lay in wait for me! Talk about the proverbial lamb to the slaughter.

Transport dropped me outside building G432 and there waiting to meet me stood this tall, handsome man. "Hello, my name is Colin Bailey and I'm pleased to meet you" he said. "Good morning sir" I replied. Colin then told me that the section operated very much on a first name basis, however indoctrination of eight years at Latymer School took a while to shake off.

I was escorted to Colin's office, offered a cup of real coffee and generally welcomed to the section. Thus began my love affair with the Establishment at Waltham Abbey, which is still a part of me and will remain, no doubt, for the rest of my life.

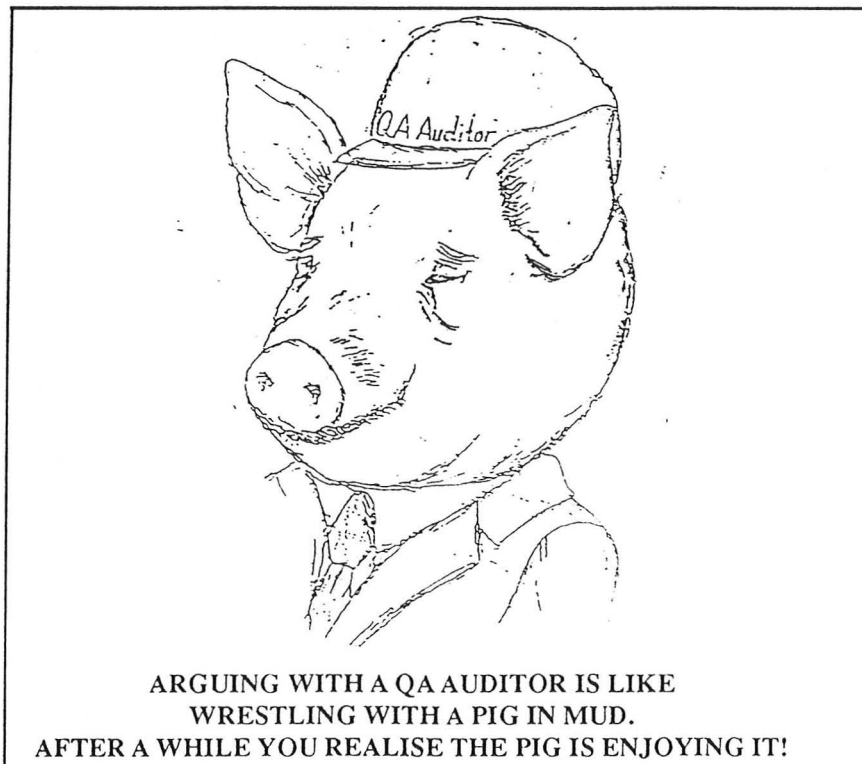
The roll call of the section at this time included the following: W G Ross, Doc Pryde, Ron Ayerst, Roy Fisher, Colin Bailey, Mark Phillips, Johnny Kemp, Greville Bagg, Michael Ernest Newcombe Evans, John England, Geoff Williams, Mike Dupree and Rod Leaper, to name but a few.

In conclusion, I would have been quite happy to make my retirement speech at the Abbey, but I remain eternally grateful to all the friends that I made there. It proved to be an extremely rewarding episode in my life.

Ike Eickhof

Thanks Ike for your 'recollection'

and thanks also for the drawing/cartoon/self-portrait:



WATER MILLS and WATER COLOURS

During the site visit at the 1993 Re-union Civix gave a presentation on the old RGPF and future plans. I later spoke to David Stanners of Defence Lands Services 3 and stressed the urgency of recording the recollections of the dwindling number of elderly ex-employees. He expressed great interest and I made a start on the project. A few months ago I spoke to him again and offered the services of a water colour artist friend, Freda Titfield, who would love to sit among the midges and nettles sketching some old relics. Once again, rapture from Dave, followed by cool interest from Freda on being told she had been volunteered! Nevertheless, plans were made for a series of visits to North Site. Our first visit was in June where, at the main gate, manned by Jimmy James, Ron Mason and Bob Strickland we were subjected to the usual spate of rustic humour, followed by the issue of passes and hard hats. We then met Adam Ford, the site archaeologist who gave us a tour of the area in his Range Rover, during which Freda noted down some likely aspects. A week later, with full kit; folding chairs, easel, jars of water, brushes, midge repellent etc. we set about the project. [The limit of my artistic potential was a camera!]



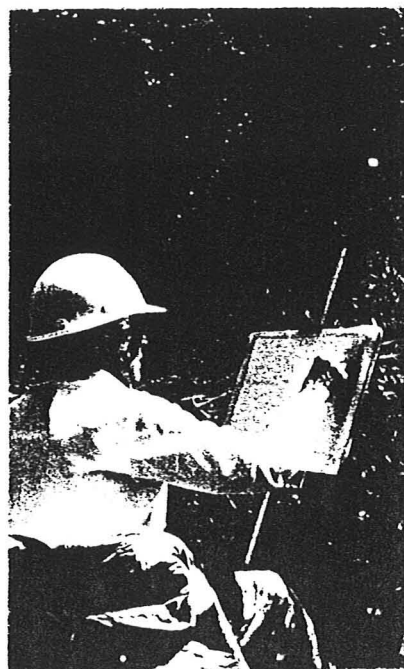
From the briefings given by RO staff it was obvious that they were very concerned that we stayed within narrow defined areas - "in case of an incident". What incident, we wondered, could befall two old fell walkers? One felt that 'old' was their main concern - "anything could happen to those two old codgers wandering loose on our site!"

We were given a short talk about site hazards and safety rules. Albeit with some misgivings, they directed us to a part of the site offering artistic appeal (the beloved water wheel) assuring us we would not be confronted by a rogue dumper truck. I feel we must have misread the map as a sweeper machine passed within a couple of feet of the now nervous artist - already struggling with hard hat and eye-level 'Keep Off' fencing.



However the prototype water colour sketch was completed that day and we left with high hopes for the future. The routine we finally adopted was that I would provide transport to the subject, get Freda settled in, ensuring her chair wasn't sinking in the ooze and then, armed with RCMHE survey map I would sally forth to reconnoitre a likely site for the next painting. Thus we continued, on an intermittent routine for the next two months, dependent on the vagaries of the weather, site accessibility and other commitments, during which Freda produced fifteen pieces. These were subsequently mounted and exhibited at the English Heritage Seminar on August 6th. Considerable interest was aroused among the delegates and the Curator of EFD Museum has asked Freda to produce further work for her folio in time for a museum exhibition later this year. We also hope to present the work at the next Re-union in October.

Ron Treadgold.



AROUND THE WORLD IN 93

with John Williams
PART II

THE LAND OF OZ

We liked Sydney very much. Like all true 'grockles' we visited the Opera House, the Harbour Bridge, the Blue Mountains, took a harbour trip and wandered around the shops. We also rang at 3 towers. In the Blue Mountains we visited a wildlife park to get some idea of how different their wild animal life is from ours. What bothered us was that, after the recent fires the animals are no longer there. From Sydney we took a coach to Canberra, Beechworth and, finally, Melbourne. In Canberra we paid our respects at the National War Memorial and had a trip round the new parliament building which is built on top of an hill. They dug out the centre of the hill, built the structure then put the hill back round it so from inside there isn't any view. Our trip continued on to Beechworth through the Snowy Mountains and were shown some large reservoirs much bigger than Sydney harbour! After Beechworth we passed through Ned Kelly country and visited his mother's cottage. It now seems that Ned was hard done by as he wasn't a local and that anything anti establishment done was put down to him. His armour didn't save him as they shot his legs out from under him. We felt that Melbourne wasn't as good as Sydney but still very pleasant. We rang 3 more towers there and visited some friends where we saw our only wild koala. The hotel there was probably the best we stayed in and we were very pleased to be visited by a cousin and his wife.

ON TO PERTH

We flew to Perth where we were met by another cousin at the airport. After a drive in a yellow peril minivan for about 100 kilometers we arrived at Northam and here we were to learn a bit more about how the Australians live. The weather has a lot to do with it and we don't realise the effect of the lack of rain and constant sun. It takes a while to acclimatise and we were only there for a week. We visited Wave Rock; wind carved granite, 20 metres high and looks like a frozen wave. Barbies are a favourite here and many places have gas units. You just take your own food and some 20 cent coins. We left Perth at 5am on our next leg, plane to ...

ALICE SPRINGS

It isn't supposed to rain in Alice but we arrived in pouring rain! An annual regatta is held in the River Todd but there is rarely any water in it and the boats are carried by the crew with their feet sticking out the bottom. This year the event was cancelled because there was water in it! From Alice we were taken by coach to Uluru (the aboriginal name for Ayres Rock) which is very spectacular. The area here is called the Red Centre and everything is in shades of red and orange, even the trees and bushes, although there is a lot of grey on the eucalyptus trees. After Alice Springs we flew to Cairns which was quite different from anything we had seen so far. It was much fresher and although hot the breezes off the

sea made it a lot more comfortable. Here, like all trippers, we took a boat out to the Great Barrier Reef, something we had been looking forward to and we were not disappointed. The views we got from the semi-submersible were very impressive. We had about 3 hours out on the reef and then back to Cairns. The next day we went on a safari by 4WD minibus and saw a variety of creatures including; flying foxes, ring tailed lemurs, wallabies, possums and a poisonous toad (we didn't test the latter, just took the guide at his word). We also saw a large number of birds that we wouldn't have recognised including; many sorts of parrot and cockatoos, egrets, kites, ibises and many many more. We even saw duck billed platypuses (or platypi) swimming in the river. Earlier in the day we were shown termite nests up to 8 feet tall. We were to see much taller ones in the Kakadu National Park in Darwin but, at the time, we were most impressed. The next day was taken up with more sight-seeing in Cairns, the antics of the spoonbills and pelicans on the shore were most amusing.

DARWIN

Darwin was hot and more humid than we expected and rather uncomfortable for us northern hemisphere types. We were up early on the second day to catch our coach to Kakadua National Park. We visited several sites where rock art was to be seen but to our untutored eyes it appeared as a jumble of colour with no obvious detail until our guide pointed out what we should be looking at. He also interpreted what was meant to be drawings. We next had a flight in a 5 seater Cessna over Crocodile Dundee country! and the next day we were taken to Yellow Water Billabong for a trip on the water to see the crocs. We also saw lizards up to 3 feet long, Brolga cranes, Jabiru cranes, cormorants, sea eagles, magpie geese, egrets and many others that we can no longer remember the names of. Another trip was to Katharine Gorge to see a freshwater area. There were supposed to be some freshwater crocs there but they must have been out because we didn't see any! On the return journey we stopped for a swim at a waterhole at Edith Falls. This was a much larger lake than any other we had seen so far - or were to see. Back to Darwin for a much needed nights sleep. Next day a leisurely stroll around Darwin. It had to be gentle as it was very hot. As this was our last night in Australia we decided to go for a really good slap up meal at a good restaurant that had been recommended to us. What we were not told was that it did not open until quite late and was miles from anywhere. So, we walked back to town and found another place for a very nice fish meal. We just had time for another stroll in the morning before we said farewell to Oz and started off for our next port of call - Bali.

NEXT ISSUE - PART THREE

THE FINAL LEG AND HOME

DEER EDITOR

Another 'deer' story that, for me, nearly had an unfortunate ending,
George Saville.

"I was called out one wet Sunday morning by the police. A stag had been found by Fred Hastings whilst on patrol with his guard dog at the rear of M343 on South Site. The stag had one back leg entangled in some wire and when I got there the area was in a mess, fur and blood everywhere as the animal struggled to escape. Fred's plan was to throw the stag over, tie its legs together and wait for the RSPCA to treat it. Now that part was easy. I twisted its antlers over and Fred pulled its front legs from under it until it toppled over. Fred's next instruction was for me to sit on its neck and he would tie the front legs together. The stag had another plan! He gave one big lurch and I went flying. Rather unfortunately, one of its antlers caught in my trouser fly and away went two buttons, plus most of my raincoat buttons and the point just grazed my chin. At this juncture the air turned blue. We again threw the animal over but tied its antlers down to an iron post and then tied the front legs together. Soon after the RSPCA arrived, tranquilised it, washed its many cuts and grazes and dressed its legs with iodine soaked bandages, then gave it another injection to counter the tranquiliser. With the famous words "When we undo the ropes, Run!" we proceeded to free the beast which staggered up (*Staggered?*), turned to chase us but instead reeled drunkenly off into the woods. The strange thing was that no one ever saw or found any trace of it after that.

The final insult was when Fred submitted his report the next day which was presented to the Director. He got a rocket for releasing the stag back into the establishment instead of showing it the gate and releasing it outside!

NOT A LOT LOT OF PEOPLE KNOW THAT ...

1. The Waltham Abbey Powder Mills are referred to in H G Wells' "The War of the Worlds" "...rumours of Martians at Epping and news of the destruction of the Waltham Abbey Powder Mills in a vain attempt to blow up one of the invaders."
2. Sir Stafford Cripps, Chancellor of the Exchequer 1947 -50 renowned for his austerity Budgets, was employed at the RGPF during the first World War. He had lodgings at Cheshunt and carried his lunch to work on his bicycle handlebars.
3. Lt Gen Sir Collingwood Dickson, Superintendent RGPF 1852-54 was awarded the VC for valour in the Redan during the Crimean War and, on a return visit after the war was pulled ceremonially in a carriage from Waltham Cross Station to Powdermill Lane by men from the factory.
4. In 1796, George Hicks, a millman at RGPF, was sentenced to be 'transported, for seven years for the theft of some saltpetre.
5. A request was made to the Master General of Ordnance in 1793 for protection of the crews of the RGPF powder barges to prevent their seizure by the Press Gang on the River Thames.
6. An article in the Gentleman's Magazine, October 1821, records the successful use of the Congreve Rocket in whaling. One whale was 100 feet in length, a species reported to be 'seldom attacked by the ordinary means'.

Alternatively, perhaps, not a lot of people want to know that!!!

Malcolm McLaren

THE 1994 RE-UNION

Friday 21st October
at the
Waltham Abbey Town Hall

12.00 - 1600

Once again your chance to meet again with old friends and colleagues. The venue is the same, as is the price! Despite an increase in the cost of hiring the Town Hall we are keeping the cost the same as last year at £5 per head, including buffet refreshments. We have managed to keep the price down through a surplus of about £100 from last year.

It will not be possible to arrange site visits this year and, in any case, there is little to see at this time. Perhaps in future years, when the site becomes more developed with museum facilities, this can be done.

This brings us to an important point on which we require your guidance. Do members still wish for a re-union each year or would perhaps a biennial event be preferred? To this end a questionnaire is attached to this years' booking form for your views.

While there remains sufficient support we will continue to hold an annual event but if the numbers start to dwindle it may not become economic. Give us your opinion.

NOW, MOST IMPORTANT - BOOKING

This will be the only notification of the re-union and if you wish to attend please return the attached form, with your remittance as soon as possible. One reason for this is that the balance of the Town Hall hire has to be paid some weeks before the event and the reserve float isn't enough to cover it.

Hope to see lots and lots of you on the 21st!

RETIREMENT STORIES

The one I remember was the retirement of Dr C H Johnson, Chief Superintendent in the 1950's who seemed a very austere and remote figure to us. It was announced that he would give a farewell talk on "the history of ERDE." His secretary, worried that none would turn up, rang around to ask us to attend, so dutifully, we did.

His talk began "Well I expect you know all about the history of this place and don't want to hear it again so instead, I'll talk about claret." He then gave a remarkable talk about the different chateaux and vintages, produced a lot of bottles, including some rare and expensive wines and opened them all. After that I always made a point of attending retirements of senior people - but, alas, the idea didn't seem to catch on!

John C Vernon

SCIENTISTS COOKBOOK

Not just 'another recipe' Read it through carefully!

BOILED FRUIT CAKE

INGREDIENTS:

1 bottle whiskey
1 cup butter
1 cup water
50g walnuts
1 teaspoon salt
1 cup sugar (granulated)
4 large eggs
1 cup mixed fruit
1 tablespoon brown sugar
1 teaspoon baking soda
some lemon juice

APPARATUS:

small saucepan
electric mixer
shot glass
large mixing bowl
hotplate
oven

PROCEDURE:

Place dried fruit, water and half cup granulated sugar in small saucepan. Boil for 15 minutes. Pour whiskey into shot glass, sample to check quality. Get large mixing bowl. Check whiskey again - pour 1 level cup and drink. Repeat previous step. Turn on electric mixer and beat in a large fluffy bowl. Add 1 spoonful baking soda, half cup of sugar and beat again. Resample whiskey to make sure it hasn't gone off. Turn off mixer, break two eggs, add to bowl. Sample whiskey to check consistency. Next sift two cups of salt or something, who cares what? Check whiskey! Now sift the lemon juice and strain your nuts. Add 1 tablespoon brown sugar, or whatever colour you can find. Mix well. Grease the oven, turn pan cake to 350 degrees. Don't forget to beat off the timer. Pour mix into cake pan and over bench. Throw bowl out of window. Stagger to laundry, put cake in oven set to hot. Continue sampling whiskey until bottle exhausted. Bo to ged!

LATE NEWS

Recently; a son, ANDREW, to Hilary and Ron Craik and a brother for Scott.
Congratulations !

On a sadder note we have just heard of the death of Joycie Wood on 16th August.
'Always cheerful, never a grumble, sadly missed'