

Touchpaper

THE WALTHAM ABBEY NEWSLETTER

September 1995

ISSUE 15

EDITORIAL

This issue contains details of two important responses that are required from all those receiving Touchpaper.

Firstly there is a returnable booking form for the Reunion in October to which you should respond as soon as possible. I shall be away the last week in September and the second week in October so it is essential that numbers are finalised as soon as possible for the caterers and, perhaps more importantly, so that the Town Hall Bar knows how many staff are needed on the day!

Secondly I think it time that we updated our readership details. From the full list attached to this issue you will see that some information is missing. I really would like to fill in the missing bits.

Norman Paul
Editor

CONTENTS:

TOUCH BYTES
letters and reports

NORTH SITE UPDATE
developments

SOUTH SITE UPDATE
current position and report

ABBAY GARDENS
changes in administration

IN MEMORIAM

1995 REUNION
& RE-REGISTRATION

FORM
for returning

TOUCHPAPER PUBLICATION ADDRESS

Building All
DRA Fort Halstead
Sevenoaks
KENT
TN14 7BP

Phone: 01959 51 5632
Fax: 01959 51 6023

TOUCH

ERDE Horticultural Show

The reference in the last Touchpaper to the Horticultural Show held in the old Hoppit Hall and surrounding field brought back quite a memory to me.

The date of the Show was probably 24th August 1957 - I have one of the posters printed for the event. A lot of the various sections in the Establishment produced a very varied array of rides and sideshows in addition to the show of produce. We worked hard all Friday evening and Saturday morning setting up the fete, all afternoon running the stalls and generally helping out in various ways and finally clearing away at the finish.

At the end, Fred Tullett, the Show Secretary, offered to buy us a drink from the bar being set up for the evening dance. While we were having this in walked a man - whose name I cannot recall - who said "If you haven't got tickets for the dance, clear off!".

As you can imagine, we were all very annoyed after working so hard and, as a result, the following Monday we all resigned from the committee and helpers list and I believe that was the last fete that was ever held.

George Savill.

Another new signing ...

Connie and I spent a few days in N. Norfolk to celebrate our golden wedding anniversary and on the way back we called in on Donald Hodge.

He lived with his son (Dr Adrian Hodge) for a few weeks after Marjorie died but is now on his own in sheltered accommodation nearby.

At 92 he must be one of our oldest retired members. I gave him the last issue of Touchpaper which he thoroughly enjoyed and asks to be put on the register.

This note reminds me that it is now 58 years since I first went to the Waltham Abbey Gunpowder Factory from the RD at Woolwich - a quaint old place it was then !

Sincerely

Colin Lawson

Congratulations!

..to Eileen Henshaw who was recently awarded the Imperial Service Medal.

Eileen was a long standing employee at Waltham Abbey and, on closure in 1991, went up town and became PS to the Head of Finance and Secretariat at DGGWLS.



Eileen retired in July this year and was presented with the award for 25 years meritorious service by Dennis Maines in the presence of many of her friends and former colleagues.

Customer Care

...my telephone stopped working and was reported by my neighbour with the following result:-

Dear Customer

We have fully investigated the fault which was reported not necessarily by you, on 6th July and service should now be fully restored. We have tried to telephone you to confirm this, but without success. If you feel you still have a problem call us , free of charge, and we will arrange for further tests to be made.

It was finally mended 3 weeks later!

Greville Bagg

DEADLINE DATE FOR NEXT ISSUE:

Mid November

write

fax 01959 516023

or

phone 01959 515632

BYTES

Can anybody recognise any members of the Lab Staff of the RGPF in this old photograph?
It was taken on an outing to Southend in June 1937



Older members may be able to recognise some of them, such as :
P R Freeman, myself, S E Smith (later of AWRE Aldermaston), G Cooper, Alex Baynes (1st librarian for CRDD), Percy Smith, George Smith, Les Cole (with hair!) and Ted Hitch.
Dickie Doe.

E Branch Reunion No. 2

The second E Branch Reunion took place on the 9th of June at the Civil Service Club in Great Scotland Yard. Seventeen people were present; several had to withdraw at the last minute due to pressure of work - in addition to one for whom the attraction of rugby in South Africa proved too much!. Cyril Beck again acted as sponsor.

The Club organisation seems to have been reorganised since our last meeting and the results were highly favourable - instead of the meagre provision of food which all disappeared very quickly, there was a buffet to be proud of and even some left over! Alcoholic refreshment was also available.

Spurred on by the above there was no shortage of words to carry us through to 4 o'clock. Some new faces were to be seen, although 'new' hardly applied to Leslie Phillips who did not look a day older than when he left ERDE in 1977.

We are grateful to Jim Burgess for giving Jim Brent a helping hand. Jim's eyesight is failing but his memory certainly was not as he retailed stories about his early days in the RGPF.

Dickie Doe and Gordon Bromberger managed to attend this time, as did Kim Henshaw and Diane Howse. The stalwart supporters who have come to both reunions included; Tony Burton, Ray East, John Hicks, Eric Kendrew, Dave Manners, George Whitbread and Tony Whittaker - none of these looked a day older than at the first reunion!

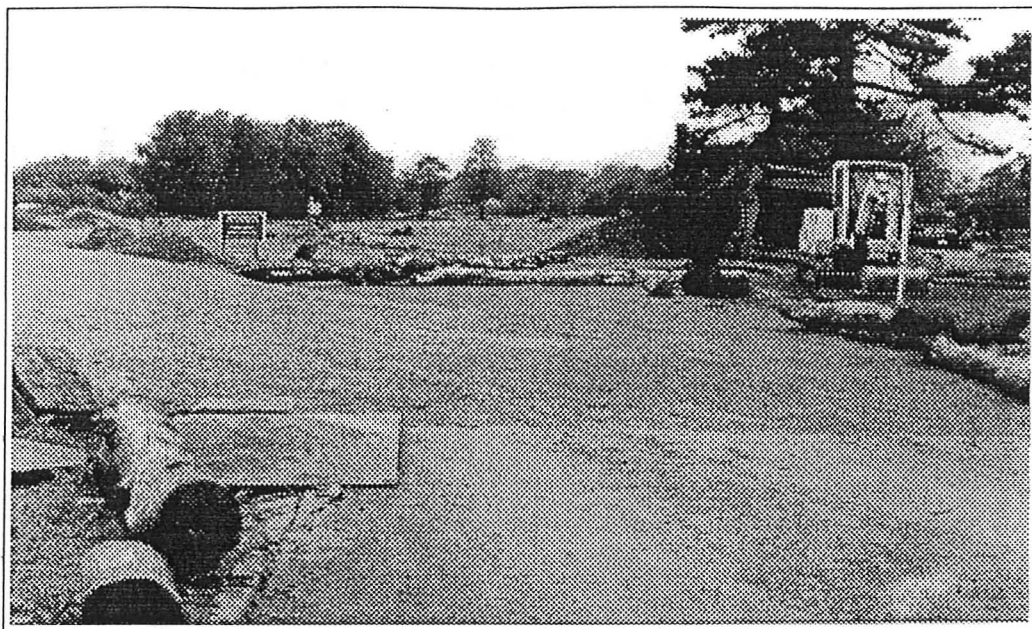
We confidently expect that another E Branch Reunion will take place in 1997 - at any rate, Cyril seems very keen to sponsor another one in two years time.

Meanwhile, most of us hope to attend the full Reunion in October this year.

Ken Bascombe

NORTH SITE UPDATE

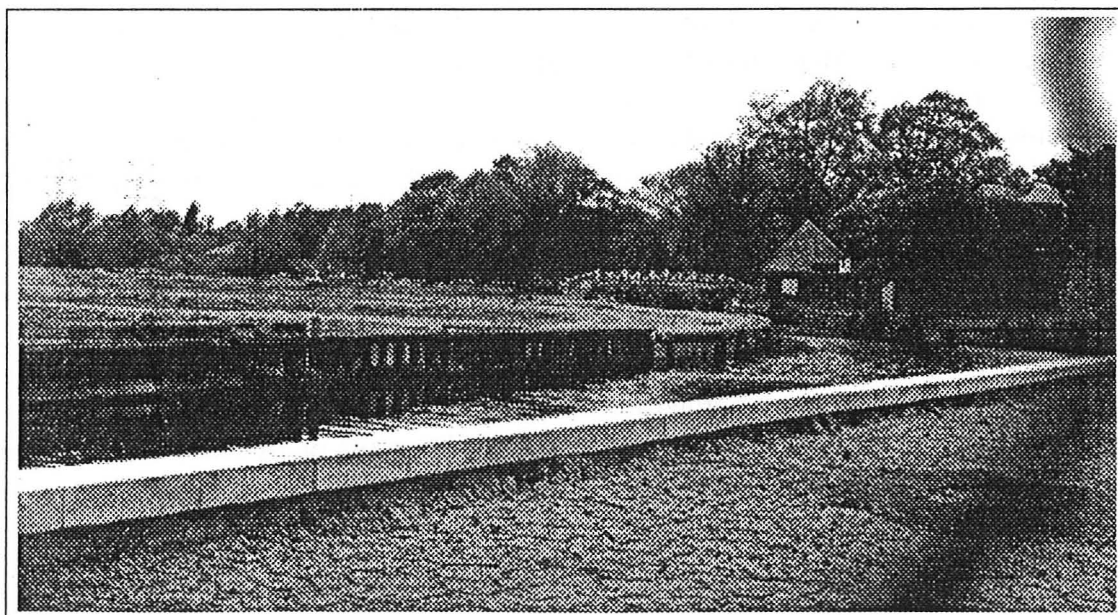
AUGUST '95



Wimpey's have been building on the Powdermill Lane Site (now called 'Kingsmead') for about two months now. The sales office was the first unit to be completed and provoked much speculation during construction since it resembled an isolated double garage surmounted by a small louvered roof appendage complete with weather vane!

Powdermill Lane has been dug up in preparation for landscaping and the Site entrance now leads to a track at the rear of the No.9 building. Installation of sewers to service the Wimpey site has been a wonder of hi-tech. Work is in progress in the middle of the big roundabout on the main road. A vertical borehole has been made with underground vertical boring towards the building site in one direction and a second bore south to connect into the main sewer. All this is taking place without any disruption to the traffic flow.

Decontamination of the North Site is now considered to be complete and the MOD Land Agent is due to relinquish control to the Board of Trustees in mid-September. Further progress towards the development of a museum site will commence towards the end of the year with money being provided by the MOD and a National Lottery Grant!



Pictures supplied by George Savill

SOUTH SITE UPDATE

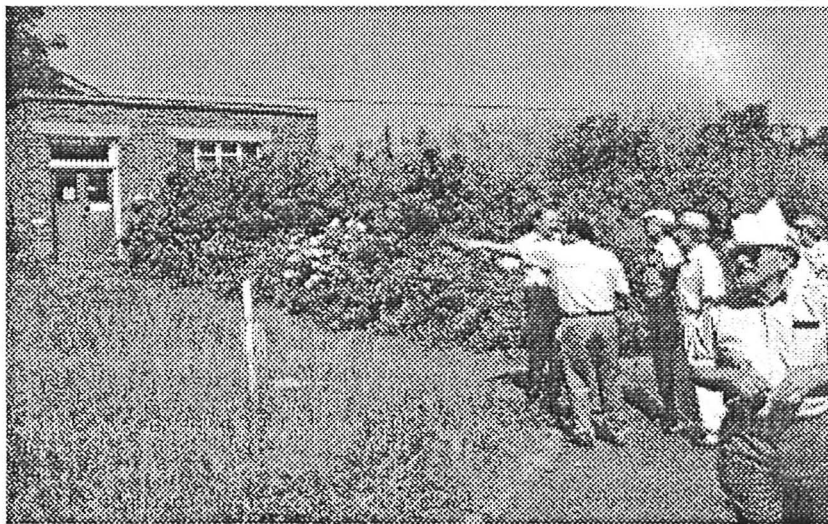
AUGUST '95

The latest set of Minutes of the Epping Forest District Council Development Committee (29/8/95) state that some members visited the South Site on 27th July to review the situation. It seems that a number of factors are slowing down the development of South Site.

The Developers would like to modify the Business Park to make a Warehousing and Distribution Centre but the EFDC are opposed to this as it would not create many new jobs. Again, the retention of buildings south of Black Ditch is proposed so that they could be converted for commercial use but EFDC would like to see a widening of the Green Belt (presumably by demolishing buildings south of Black Ditch!).

Burial of contaminated material on South Site has been complicated by the Developers now proposing a two stage plan for a golf course in which the contamination container will be built in the second phase.

Finally, the Secretary of State is reconsidering whether the M25 - Highbridge Street link should be the subject of a Public Enquiry (always a good ploy for slowing progress!).



The photograph above was taken by Ron Treadgold on the occasion of a visit to the South Site by members of the LSW in June this year, accompanied by a report from Bryan Howard:

"Whew!" It was hot when about 20 LSW members visited South Site on June 30th and an astonishing range of hats was to be seen, including one made from a newspaper by Gordon Bromberger.

On arrival at Quinton Gate we were directed to the ex-P2 car park but somehow managed to end up in the ex-P1 car park where Ron Treadgold took a photograph of the party; except for John and Enid Williams who had gone to remoter parts of ISRG looking for marsh orchids (Or so they said!).

Earlier in the year the site seemed to be covered in comfrey but there was a greater profusion of wild flowers and Freda was "in clover", or more precisely, viper's bugloss!

John Vernon spearheaded the group anxious to see the mushroom-growing industry in ISRG. Others had a tour of what used to be Fragment Attack. Where the rest went I have no idea, they were soon swallowed up in the undergrowth.

Steve Chaddock, who is responsible for archaeology on the North Site, accompanied us and Dickie Doe was able to give him a description of what processes were carried out in which building in the P2 Area immediately after World War II.

Eventually the heat caused us all to gravitate to Ernie Perry's old office in BWD - now called "Red's Cafe", where liquid refreshment was available. Dave and Anne Manners even had a meal there and voted it as better than the food at the Owl.

By midday we were all ready for somewhat more alcoholic refreshment and the roll call at the Owl reached a grand total of 23!

Bryan

P.S. It looks like being a good year for apples on the South Site!

WALTHAM ABBEY GARDENS

A special report by Ken Bascombe



As many of you may know the famous landmark of the Town has always been the Abbey Church and surroundings Abbey Gardens. In the past the state of the Gardens have alternated between neglect and repair passing through a number of management regimes. A new chapter has recently begun which, it is hoped, will assure the good maintenance of this area for the future.

On the 17th August a small handover ceremony took place to which I was invited. Knowing my interest in old buildings your editor (short of copy, or so he said!) has persuaded me to write something of the event.

Three buildings were of most concern - the Abbey Gatehouse, the Stoney (or Harold) Bridge and the Cloister Entry with the Chapter House. Since about 1930 these (except the old Chapter House where no standing masonry from that building was known at the time) have been given protection under the Ancient Monument Acts as they stood at the time. The Chapter House was added to the list about 12 years ago, following excavations by Adrian Havercroft, which showed important features below the soil. About 10 years ago another change took place when the buildings were vested in English Heritage and it is this that has brought about the current position.

In 1930 little notice would have been taken to the grant of protection; there was no recognised access to the Cloister Entry or Stoney Bridge, though there was a recognised path through the gatehouse, past what is now the Countryside Centre (previously the Abbey Farmhouse) to a gate on the Crooked Mile and another path (now in a tunnel under Abbey View) ran up the Cornmill Stream. The area was partly occupied by orchard (no doubt scrumping did take place there on occasions! [*Oh Yes! Ed.*]) with the rest of the farm area largely devoted to animals. The construction of the Abbey View Bypass, following the death of the farmer led, in the early '70s, to the purchase of the Abbey farm by the Lee valley Regional Park and the long-leasing by the Park of the Abbey Gardens. This speedily changed the picture - not always for the good when boys were often seen on the top of the Cloister Entry or using the Gateway as a miniature Matterhorn! On one occasion the gate of the Cloister Entry was broken and, although reported immediately, it was several weeks before it was mended; the operative English Heritage depot was at Cambridge.

The result of all this was negotiation between the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority and the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England, culminating in an agreement signed on 3rd April 1995. This gave the Park Authority day-by-day management responsibility including; site security, grounds maintenance and health and safety issues, along with visitor service requirements to supply education, interpretation and information on the historic features. This last is of considerable importance as at present there is no systematic interpretation of these properties. We look forward to the appearance of this; at the same time the Park Authority should be able to carry out any necessary repairs, thus minimising damage.

The official handover took place in the presence of 30 -40 people. Geoffrey Wilson, an English Heritage Commissioner, formally handed the official document to Jane Reeves, Vice Chairman of the Lee Valley Regional Park. Jeff West, Regional Director (East Anglia) for English Heritage, was also present. I used to know him fairly well and it was pleasant to meet him again. The proceedings were concluded by lunch in the Countryside Centre.

Ken Bascombe

In Memoriam



It is very sad to have to report the recent death of Tony Davis.

Tony was one of the stalwarts of ERDE and then PERME in it's heyday and did sterling work in many areas of materials chemistry.

In addition he was a keen golfer and was a local magistrate at Epping for 20 years.

Tony retired officially from Fort Halstead in February 1994 but continued to work at the Fort as a consultant for several months until his illness.

He will be sadly missed by all his friends and colleagues and we extend our sympathies to Monica and their sons, Paul and Alan.

A collection was made amongst colleagues at the Fort and if anyone wishes to add to this please contact Dave Tod (Bldg X50 at Fort Halstead)

John Kemp Memorial Collection

Our thanks to Jean Richards for acting as collecting agency. A total of £242 has been sent to the St. Joseph's Hospice, Hackney and a letter has been received from them thanking us for:

"such a generous donation which will be used for the care and comfort of the patients."

They are grateful that we have remembered John in this way.

Many thanks to all that contributed.

LATE NEWS JUST RECEIVED many thanks for the TOUCHPAPER and to Stan Wills for providing my address. I started work at Waltham Abbey in 1950 from the RSAF. When I first started I didn't think much of it after the 'Lock' - I felt as if I was in jail!, but the longer one was there the more it seemed to grow on you. I met some smashing people and enjoyed working there in the end.

I retired in 1979 and we moved to Newport Pagnell to be near the wives's sisters. It's been a good move: nice bungalow, good garden and nice friends. What else does one want - only good memories.

'Monty' Banks

1995 REUNION

ANNUAL WALTHAM ABBEY REUNION '95

The 1995 Reunion date is confirmed as Friday 20th October and will be held in the Waltham Abbey Town Hall from 12 noon until about 4pm. As usual the bar will be open during the afternoon and a buffet lunch will be provided.

We are using different caterers for the event and the bad news is that the cost of the buffet is significantly higher than last year. The good news is that there was sufficient funds from previous years to pay for the hall hire and that we are only asking for payment to cover the food cost. The price will therefore remain unchanged at £5 per head and should be booked now using the form printed on the back page of this issue.

Please note that the Reunion Booking Form is also combined with a RE-REGISTRATION Form which we would ask you all to complete and return.

SITE VISITS

Those of you who responded to the notice in our last issue and who have requested a site visit in the morning will be notified separately of the arrangements.