

Touchpaper

THE WALTHAM ABBEY NEWSLETTER

March 1997

ISSUE 21



EDITORIAL

Hope you like the redesigned front cover with the edge runner gunpowdermill logo.

I think it would be nice to have a tie based on this but would need to explore the number required and then work out some way to fund the initial purchase. It might be better to suggest this idea to the new museum authorities as a souvenir item. Let me know your views.

Of course we should not forget the ladies, most of whom do not wear ties! I would never dare to suggest a 'Powdermill Tea Towel' but perhaps a scarf or brooch might be acceptable?

Important news in this issue on the North Site Museum developments with a call for volunteers, both as trustees and as general associate helpers. Touchpaper readership is recognised as a most important vehicle in this and we are expecting a good response.

Norman Paul
Editor

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MISCELLANY

TOUCHPAPER PUBLICATION ADDRESS

Building All
DRA Fort Halstead
Sevenoaks
, KENT
TN14 7BP

Phone: 01959 51 5632
Fax: 01959 51 6023
e-mail: 100750.1577@compuserve.com

TOUCH

And another 'lost sheep returns to the fold

...following a Christmas meeting at The Bull in Otford I obtained a copy of your Touchpaper from John Scrivener which I found most interesting.

I actually worked at Waltham Abbey North Site from 1956 until 1969 when I then moved to Fort Halstead.

I am very interested in the North Site Development so do please put me on your Touchpaper mailing list.

Many Thanks

John Roberts

Communication hitch

We rely heavily on Bryan Howard to keep us up to date with snippets of news from around the Abbey but have to report that Bryan has not been well these past few weeks. We hear that he is back on his feet again and he had provided some items earlier in the year:

Jacqui Donahy (ex P1) lost her job in October so she decided to have a family and the baby is expected in May - *This is not an option open to all of us if we are made redundant!*

A number of people report that they find difficulty in making the reunion if it's held at half term and some of more elderly colleagues would prefer not to travel home in the dark.

The problem is, what ever date we choose will not be convenient for all, especially in the holiday months. The date normally chosen does coincide with the date in 1787 when the establishment was taken into government hands. We will however look at this in the future and try to reach a compromise.

Post Script to 1996 South Site Visit.....

Following the visit which a few local people made on the 1996 Reunion day we arranged a further visit to look at the artefacts that have been collected in P708 (P1 Store/Exhibition Building). 'We' ended up as Ron Treadgold, and myself as all other got caught up in domestic matters. There are a number of items connected with the production of NC powders and a number of earthenware cylinders with loose 'star' inserts which we assume were for use in an absorption tower as part of the nitric acid plant. There are the remains of a small cordite grinding machine which reminded Ron of the time that John Costen caught his thumb in one - his remarks at the time were not recorded. Strolling around other buildings we saw that the main body of the Tangye Press is still in P706, as are two small rope mantlets in the P1 Small Scale Mixing Bay. On a blackboard in the Solvent Incorporation House is the message 'Barbara Coe Wishes you a Happy Christmas' - thought you might like to know that!

Bryan Howard

A Thrill at 77...

Being the weakest player I was No. 2 on the sixth rink at a rival indoors bowls club in Bedford. It was a very competitive match and, because of 'killed ends' we had four extra ends to play.

The other 40 players had changed, bought their beers and were sitting around watching. There were also 20 people waiting to start a late evening game so we had a good audience. When it came to the last end we were told that, on aggregate, we were 2 down and needed 3 for an overall win.

The first 4 woods were indecisive and there were cries of "Come on Vic" but there was complete silence for the delivery and finally a crescendo of "yes, Yes, YES!"

The opponents wood was not a success so everyone was shouting "You can do it Vic" and when my wood trickled into the head "yes, Yes, YES!!!"

We now needed only one for (*the suspense is killing me . Ed*) an overall victory and this proved no problem for our other 2 players.

In the after dinner 'vote of thanks' against the usual vociferous banter, our captain thanked the youngest member for substituting at a late stage and 'Young Vic' for his contribution; to which someone added "If he stays with us for another 20 years he could become a good player!"

Those years I had spent in close association with the Establishment Sports and Social Club have not been wasted.

'Young' Vic Clifford

A Technical Breakthrough

You may have heard the recent news item on a new material produced by Courtaulds. This is based on a fibre (Amicor™) which keeps clothes fresh, containing a chemical which destroys odour-causing bacteria. An announcement was made by our ex-colleague, Dave Service, who worked in the Synthesis Section and is now Head of the research team at Courtaulds Fibres.

So, no more smelly socks then! Knowing Dave from his time at Waltham Abbey I know that this was a very personal goal as I distinctly remember the odour from his sports bag when he came back from a lunch-time Squash session!

Well done David.

DEADLINE DATE FOR NEXT ISSUE:

mid - May '97

write, fax (01959 516023) or phone (01959 515632)

BYTES

'Gudge' Corner

Sorry I couldn't make the Reunion, which I am pleased to hear was its usual success, but my mobility is cramped with arthritis in my legs. However I find plenty to do dealing with correspondence about my books.

I enclose a copy of my latest book (or booklet as it is A5 format) which I was pressed to write. It is MoD approved and entitled "Starting Work in 1929".

I have a few extra copies as the loan from the harlow Trust for the Furtherance of Education has been repaid. They are available, from me, to Touchpaper readers (address below) FREE - just send a s.a.e. (A5 size) with a 31p stamp.

As Editor I have received my free copy of this booklet and can recommend it most highly.

Continuing my tales of duty journeys in the US I recall two unusual encounters with US security guards which turned out to have quite satisfactory results when carrying out missions from ERDE.

The first was in Washington DC when I was attending meetings and my only free time was in the evenings when it was dark. I wanted to go up the Washington Monument but when I went along it was closed. Another visitor to the Monument , from the US, also wanted to go to the top. When he ascertained that I was English he started banging on the railings until the guard came up. After he had argued that I had come all the way from England to see the Monument from the top. Eventually the guard was persuaded to unlock the gate and let us both into the elevator with a taped commentary.

The second time was in St.Louis when I saw, in the distance, the big arch (the eighth wonder of the world!) about half completed. I decided to walk there and then took some photographs in black and white and colour of the stainless steel structure in the bright sunshine. I was just putting away my cameras when there was a violent screech of car tyres, a guard jumped out and levelled a rifle at me!

He shouted "This is Federal property - how did you break in here without going through the proper entrance?" I protested that no barrier fence had been broken and it eventually turned out that the idea of anyone actually walking to the site had never occurred to the authorities who assumed that everyone would come by car through the official entrance!

In due course, the guard and I were friends and I kept my camera and my photographs which were later shown in the UK in exhibitions and lectures.

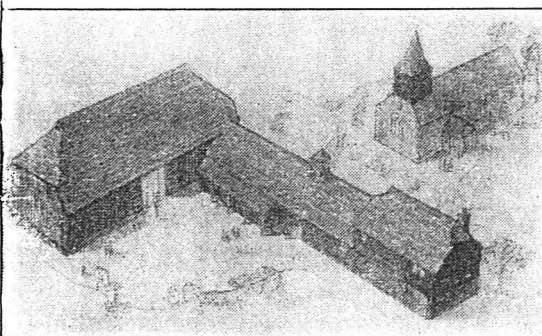
George (Gudge) Taylor

1 Rectory Field, Harlow, Essex, CM19 4HD



STARTING WORK IN 1929

George W C Taylor



A HARLOW STUDY AND
VISITORS CENTRE PUBLICATION

SPONSORED BY THE HARLOW TRUST
FOR THE FURTHERANCE OF EDUCATION



NORTH SITE MUSEUM NEWS

COULD YOU BE A TRUSTEE FOR THE NORTH SITE?

The North Site, Powdermill Lane, ERDE, PERME, RARDE or Royal Gunpowder Mills - call it what you will, none of us who are familiar with the site can be in any doubt about its importance as a heritage site and wildlife haven.

Many of you will be aware that the site recently attracted a £6.5 million cash injection from the National lottery to add to the £5.5 million grant from the MoD. With the help of this funding there are plans to develop the site as an industrial monument with an interpretation centre, exhibitions, visitor amenities and way-marked walks, opening it up to the public for the first time in over 300 years. Some of the money will go towards restoring the many old buildings, 21 of which are listed, including a grade I and 7 grade II structures. The plans aim to secure the economic future of the site whilst, at the same time, preserving its unique heritage, both man made and natural. The area includes some 34 hectares designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Since the closure of the site, a group of organisations including; Epping Forest District Council, Waltham Abbey Town Council, Lee Valley Regional Park, Essex County Council and others formed the Waltham Abbey Gunpowder Mills Trust Steering Committee to oversee the establishment of a development trust to take on the site from the MoD.

The Steering Committee is now seeking volunteers to form a panel of trustees who will oversee the implementation of the development scheme. The committee are seeking to appoint a panel with a broad range of expertise but would particularly welcome applications from ex-employees who would bring the benefits of their intimate knowledge of the site and who clearly have an interest in its future. You will need to devote a considerable amount of your time to this venture but it should be an interesting and rewarding experience it be closely involved with the future of the site.

Trustee place are limited but if you feel that you have special qualifications which would be of benefit to the trust, then please apply. For others who wish to be involved on a voluntary help side, the trust will be forming an Association of Friends where we are looking for a large number of people to assist in practical help and with the social history of the site.

Don Spinks
Chairman
Waltham Abbey Royal Gunpowder Mills Steering Committee

If you would like to apply to be a trustee you need to request an application form as soon as possible since the closing date for applications is 11th April.

If you are interested in joining the Association of Friends then please register your intention.

The address is: **Mike Lowe**
 Chairman Ironbridge Gorge Museum
 Bank House
 66 High Street
 Dawley
 Telford
 Shropshire
 TS34 3HD

Please enclose a self addressed envelope

SOUTH SITE

FUTURE TAKES SHAPE FOR THE FORMER ROYAL ORDNANCE SITE

Epping Forest District Council publish a newsletter entitled the 'Forester' and a recent issue included an excellent article on developments at the two former establishment sites. An update on the North Site development has been covered in this and previous issues. The authoritative position on the South Site below is taken from the Forester article:

"The former Royal Ordnance site has been the subject of much controversy since it became vacant in the late 1980's. Plans to redeploy the site for new uses have given rise to a great deal of concern amongst local residents. The main sources of concern are the contamination of the land by former uses and problems relating to access from the M25. Given these circumstances there might have been the temptation to simply make the site secure, leaving it derelict. The District Council however, believed that the site was too valuable as an area of open space to be left in this way (*A view no doubt shared by the site owners!!*).

There have been extensive discussions with the owners and prospective developers to see how the land could be used to benefit both them and the local community. These discussions have lasted for more than five years, have been enormously complicated and have involved numerous organisations and regulatory bodies.

A decision was finally made by the Council's Development Committee in October 1996, to approve in principle a scheme for the development of the site.

Proposals

The proposals agreed involve about one quarter of the site being redeveloped for employment and housing and the remainder being transferred to the Lee Valley Park Authority or used as a pay and play golf course. Business development would take place adjacent to the

M25 with residential development to include affordable housing. A new access road through the site from Junction 26 of the M25 to Highbridge Street has already been agreed in principle which will act as a Waltham Abbey southern by pass.

Decontamination

Of course, none of this can go ahead until the problem of contamination is resolved so procedures to make the site safe have also been agreed. The land must undergo a process of decontamination before any development can take place. All contaminated soil is to be moved from the areas to be redeveloped and replaced by clean soil. Contaminated soil will be diluted and placed in an underground sealed pit. Elsewhere on the site, where is to be no development, contaminants will be left in place but covered with clean topsoil. No contaminated waste is to be brought onto the site from elsewhere. Expert advice has been sought to ensure that these measures are adequate to ensure the safety of the site and they are satisfied in principle that there is no reason to resist these proposals. Further assurances have also been sought from the Environment Agency and Essex County Council which have statutory responsibilities for waste management and disposal.

A Positive Future

At this stage, approval is in principle only. There is still some way to go before planning permission can be given for detailed plans. Although there is much to do prospects for the site are now very positive.

Although redevelopment will have considerable impact on the local area, particularly during construction, the end result should bring benefits in the form of amenities and possible employment for local residents and facilities for businesses.

In Memoriam

Robert (Bob) William Rainbird 1921 - 1996

Recent issues of Touchpaper have contained amusing articles by Bob Rainbird; on the Marathon grates in Monkswood Avenue, the grotty public slipper baths in wartime Sevenoaks and his early experiences of lodging. Sadly there will be no more such articles as our colleague Bob died in December.

Bob came from Bury St. Edmunds and never quite lost his gentle Suffolk accent. During the war he worked for the Ministry of Supply at Aberporth and Fort Halstead. After the war he worked at Ediswan and then moved to Gestetners - a good move, for there he met his wife Jessie. Bob decided to return to the Ministry and was recruited for Waltham Abbey but the labs were not quite ready so he spent half of each week at Woolwich. Fancy having to remember each morning where you are working today and where had he left his slide rule!

Bob was a good husband to Jessie and a good father to their son John, who sadly, developed MS just as Bob retired in 1981.

I worked with Bob for 12 years and learned a lot from him. He was a great example of the old fashioned experimentalist. If we had an idea that needed new equipment to test it we didn't have to wait for the Drawing Office to design and Workshops to make it - Bob had long since made up a working device while we still remembered what the idea was! Sometimes it used a genuine cocoa tin (except when I wanted to demonstrate the rheological concept of a Maxwell body - then he used a Maxwell House coffee tin).

Bob was always loyal and conscientious (at times too conscientious- he did worry a lot at times). He also had a lively, but never ever malicious, sense of humour and a great sense of fairness. We send our sympathies to Jessie and John.

John Vernon

Roy Fisher

As we go to press we have heard from his daughter Susan that Roy died on February 18th at Pinford End Nursing Home aged 73.

Up until his retirement Roy was Chief Engineer at the Establishment and was well respected and always remembered as a very fair person with an engaging sense of humour. I personally remember him telling me that "If he came round a corner and saw one of his men leaning on a shovel he would say Good Morning and pass on. He explained this by saying that would give the man the benefit of the doubt and assume he had been grafting away and just stopped for a breather. Of course, he said, if I came back half an hour later and still found him leaning on his shovel I'd probably 'give him hell' or at least ask some very pertinent questions".

His funeral takes place in West Suffolk Crematorium on Monday 17th March. Family flowers only but if colleagues and friends wish to they can send a donation to the Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund, c/o I. Fulcher, 80 Whitting Street, Bury St. Edmunds.

Norman Paul

Edna Donaldson

Edna Donaldson whom many of you will remember as a Messenger and known to her friends as 'little Ed' died on 16th December last after a very short illness. She leaves a husband, Jamie aged 88, who has asked me to inform her ex-colleagues.

Pauline Callaghan

MISCELLANY

ANSWERS TO CHRISTMAS QUIZ

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 1. Prince Albert | 2. Norway |
| 3. The USA | 4. The officers serve the ratings |
| 5. December 6th | 6. January 6th |
| 7. Christmas Eve | 8. Fifty (Lords, Ladies, Maids, Drummers, Pipers) |
| 9. Twenty Three | 10. Blazer |
| 11. Irving Berlin | 12. <i>Sorry! I've forgotten the answer to this one.</i> |

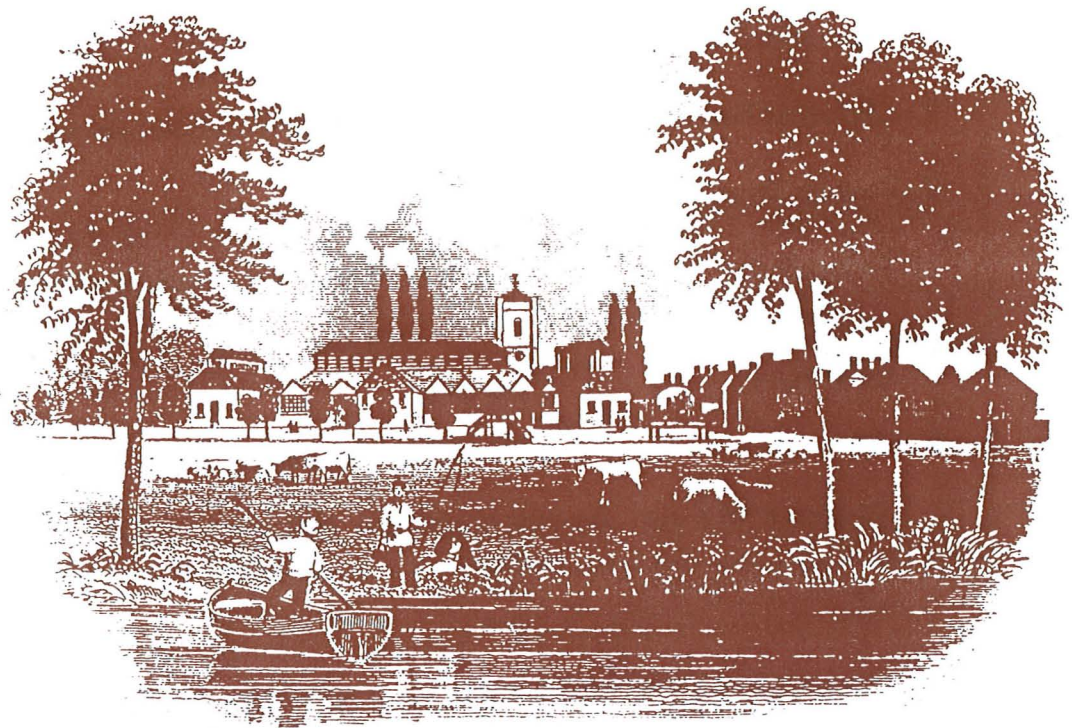
Extras:

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. All of them ! | 2. Seventy |
| 3. Both | 4. Two apples is what <u>you</u> have |

PLEASE SEE DEC 96, ISSUE 20 FOR THE QUESTIONS

YOU'VE PROBABLY SEEN THIS BEFORE BUT PROBABLY LOST YOURS
SO HERE'S ANOTHER CHANCE TO OWN 'A ROUND TUIT'





Rock & Co. London No. 3736

Powder Mills Waltham Abbey

14 Feb. 1861