

# Touchpaper

## THE WALTHAM ABBEY NEWSLETTER

June 1997

ISSUE 22



### EDITORIAL

### CONTENTS:

I asked, in the last issue, for your views on the production of a special tie for ex-members of the Waltham abbey Establishments and have been completely underwhelmed by the response. Does this mean that nobody is interested or just that you are all too busy to think about it. I might just float the idea again at the next reunion with some suggested designs and an idea of cost. In the meantime if anyone has an interest and would like to submit a design I will be overwhelmed.

As to the Reunion, please see the last page for details. please read carefully as there is one very important change to the usual arrangement.

We have no further news on either the North or South Site but expect to be able to give you some definite progress in the September issue.

Don't forget, copy for the next issue should be received by about the middle of August.

Norman Paul  
Editor

TOUCH BYTES  
letters, reports  
and articles

OBITUARIES

NORTH SITE SUNDIAL

MISCELLANY

1997 REUNION

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# TOUCH

## New Recruits .....

Having joined the register fairly recently could I please ask if a local friend's name can be added also. I have been giving her my copy of Touchpaper to read but, as she was born in Waltham Abbey and worked at ERDE for 10 years I feel she qualifies in her own right. She has strong roots in WA, her father, grandfather and an uncle all worked at the RGPF. Her married name is Dyas but some of you may remember her as Kathleen Knight who was secretary to Dr Johnson at Government House, Highbridge Street from 1945 to 1955.

I was very sorry to read of the death of Roy Fisher; he was in the Drawing Office when I was at ERDE and I knew him well.

Doreen Wykes

*Kathleen is certainly well qualified and has been added to the Register. Ed.*

Following a Christmas meeting at The Bull in Otford I had a copy of Touchpaper from John Scrivener. Actually, I was at Waltham Abbey North Site from 1956 to 1969 when I moved to Fort Halstead. I am very interested in the North Site Development so do please put me on the Touchpaper Register.

John Roberts

## .....and at the speed of light:

George Savill wrote to me recently and enclosed a copy of Touchpaper - about which I hadn't heard. I'd very much like to be included in the distribution. I worked in E Branch (1960-80) and P1 (1980-82). Jim Hawkins (jhawkins@mail.enterprise.net)

My brother-in-law, who still works in MoD, has just sent me a copy of Touchpaper as he knew I used to work at ERDE. It was the March '97 issue - what a lot of memories it brought flooding back! I worked at ERDE from 1952 to 1970, first on North Site and then in ISRG on the South Site. My first bosses were E G Lewis and Bob Rainbird. It was particularly sad to read that Bob had recently died. I thought John Vernon's tribute was very good and gave a perfect snapshot of Bob as I knew him - a really sincere and excellent chap.

The real purpose of this e-mail is to ask to go on the Register. Finally, I see you have Reunions - Both of us would love to come along to the next and renew some old acquaintances.

David & Anne Steel  
(DASteel@aol.com)

## It'll Be All Right on the Night !

In the last edition it was announced that Jacqui Donaghy had been made redundant and had decided on a mid-career move to motherhood. Well here's another example of a career change that might appeal to the musically gifted - Conducting (and we don't mean punching tickets on buses).

Recently Janet Evans took on the role of co-ordinating the Saffron Walden Choir, soloists and orchestra in Rossini's "Petite Messe Solonelle", to great acclaim. Nerves of steel were required to harness these forces who only met on the day of the performance.

Janet met all problems with great calm. For example, the tenor had flown in from Frankfurt thinking he was going to sing Rossini's "Stabat Mater". Fortunately he had sung "Petite Messe Solonelle" about 5 years ago so he was given a score to 'brush up' on his part.

Janet read the riot act to the orchestra and told them not to play too loudly so that the choir could be heard. By the start of the performance Janet was still calm but Chris Evans, sitting in the audience, was a nervous wreck as he pondered on what could go wrong. However, it all went well, much to Chris's relief and the applause was loud and long. It has been suggested that the next move will be to conduct Britten's War Requiem but we don't think that Chris could stand the strain.

Bryan Howard

(our roving music correspondent)

Shocked to hear that Mark Phillips suffered a severe stroke a few weeks ago. Latest news however is that he is recovering well.

Further updates on his progress or any messages you may wish to send can be done through Andy Wilson, now at RO Bridgwater.

DEADLINE DATE FOR NEXT ISSUE:

mid - August '97

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

# BYTES

## LAST OF THE SUMMER WINE:

*Our usual reporter, Bryan Howard, hasn't been too well earlier in the year and Ron Treadgold kindly had his arm twisted to write up some notes for us.*

DECEMBER - I have no details of this meeting since I didn't attend. The several steeply inclined approach roads were reported to be ice-bound. Not that I wasn't meaning to go but the dear old 'Morris' looked so cosy in her garage I didn't have the heart to take her out!

JANUARY - Weather much improved. I was first on the scene as was well on with cider and sandwich before the first arrival - a new member to the group - Graham Taut, contemporary with me at RGPF ca. 1940. Eventually about a dozen turned up, along with apologies for absence from Malcolm McLaren (pulled leg muscle), Bryan Howard (flu and dentist) and Gordon Bromberger whose lame excuse was something about "playing golf in Spain". The usual convivial time was enjoyed and we departed midst greetings for the forthcoming year.

Ron Treadgold      LOSW Reporter (temp)



## FACES FROM THE PAST

Peter Stone, now Safety Officer at Fort Halstead, has provided the photograph above which was taken on the South Site on the occasion of Freddie (the Fox) Speller's retirement.

From the left; Peter Bourn, Joe Chance, Alan Heath, Freddie, Steve Colgate and Charlie Stacey.

LAST OF THE SUMMER WINE-PART 2 *We are glad to report that Bryan is now fit (well, fairly fit) and well again.....*

MARCH - Ron Treadgold persuaded us all to meet on Friday 28th, even though it was Good Friday. A total of 9 members eventually made it to The Owl but we were rather squashed as the pub was really crowded as early as 12.15. It just goes to show how many people are still at work on normal Fridays. We normally take over a corner and spread ourselves out but on this occasion it was like sardines! We were so pleased to see Geoff Williams who had battled his way through holiday traffic to be with us. After the sad death of Margaret (*see obituary later*) he's been overwhelmed by the kindness from the Isleham villagers and wondering what to do with all of the cakes he's received.

APRIL- Number increased to 10 with apologies from the Colleys' who were busy shopping (Pam) or decorating (Geoff). Jock McDougall was attending a wedding (not his own!) as an excuse to avoid the AGM of the Lea View Flats where he was hot favourite for election as Treasurer.

It was good to see Gordon Bromberger back driving his car after his heart attack just 3 weeks earlier. During his time 'confined to quarters' he'd been turning out some cupboards and came across some notes from 1915-16 of articles in the Weekly Telegraph (*reproduced here on the Miscellany page*).

Our best wishes go to Roy Stenson who has moved to Purley-on-Thames. I'm not sure how long it would take from there to The Owl via the M25 traffic jam but we will be very pleased to see him if he can make it.

Bryan Howard



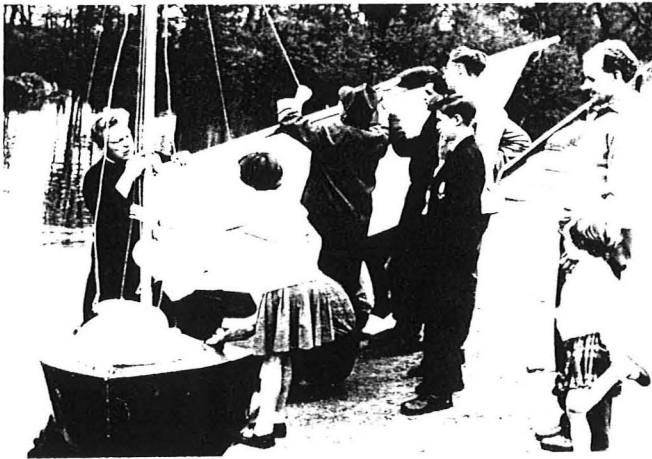
# ..A BYTE MORE

## Down to the Lea in ships .....

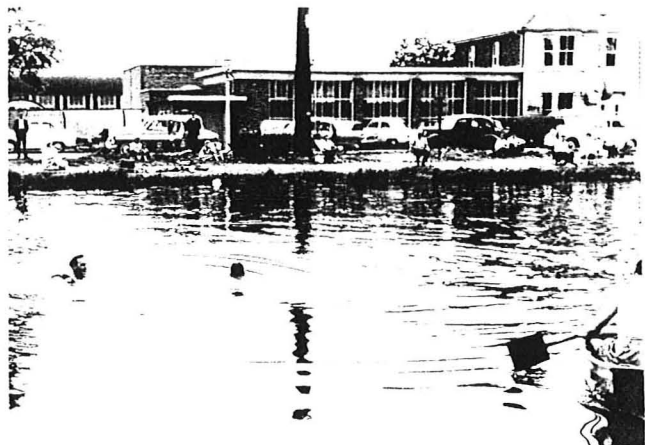
Among the requests for a copy of my '1929' booklet (as advertised in the last issue) was one from Bob Simkins, now in Devon. Hearing from Bob reminded me of the glorious days of the ERDE Sailing Club when we built "Heron" sailing dinghies on the site of the North Site surgery and launched them on local waters. We had practice sailing and a children's regatta in Lea Road and I enclose a few photographs to illustrate these early beginnings in 1961.

The guiding lights were Bob (commodore) Simkins, Eric Speller, Jack Mead and ICP Smith. It all started with a notice put up in the Powdermill Lane office approach asking for someone who would like to go sailing with the CSSA for a week.

There was an enthusiastic response and, forthwith, an inaugural meeting was called by the Social & Sports Club to appoint an ERDE Sailing Club Committee to be affiliated to the CSSA. It duly became identified with Fishers green Sailing Club where we all worked with the incentive of much larger waters. One of the photographs is that of Eric Speller sailing in his 'Enterprise' as an ERDE activity in a



Happy Days!  
George (Gudge) Taylor



## In Memoriam

### May Margaret Williams

1913 - 1997

Margaret died suddenly of a severe heart attack at her home in Isleham on 18th February aged 84. She was known internationally for her distinguished work in the field of occupational health nursing, in particular by promoting and undertaking research and by her writing,

Born, May M Durrant in London, in the course of a long and active life she worked at an airport, a publisher's, a jewellers and ran her own secretarial agency; but essentially hers was an industrial nursing career linked with journalism and research. She trained at Kings (1939-43) then turned to industrial nursing in wartime London, improvising treatment centres in bombed factories and air-raid shelters, short of equipment and with no nurses. After the war she trained in occupational health nursing, qualifying as a tutor; worked for some years for Milton Antiseptics on 'irrigation envelopes' for severe burns, wrote numerous articles for the nursing journals

and became a Nursing officer in the St. John Ambulance. She was deeply involved in the 1951 Festival of Britain, the East Coast Floods and the Coronation. Somehow she also managed to find time to participate in the work of the International Commission for Occupational Health, giving many papers at conferences, lecturing to (among others) the House of Lords and, at the same time to care for her invalid parents.

During 1955-8, as Senior Sister at the Government Explosives Research & Development Establishment at Waltham Abbey she extended the nurses role to include routine workplace visiting to see the hazards and to devise ways to minimise their effects. Her study of 'dressing techniques' was published by the Royal College of Nursing. She became Editor of the Journal of Occupational Health and for 8 years 'spread the gospel' of healthy working and good nursing practices in industry generally. In 1979 she was awarded an M.Phil degree by London University for her work at the TUC Institute of occupational Health on the health care of workers in the NHS and industry.

Margaret married Richard (Geoff) Williams in 1956 and when he retired they moved to Isleham where she became an East Cambs councillor and a member of the Regional Health Authority. But, eventually, poor health and increasing frailty supervened and her later years were enjoyed through handicrafts, tapestry, quilting, fowers, starting the Isleham Society, reading whodunnits and editing peoples memoirs. In addition to all her professional work and qualifications she was a lovely women who radiated sunshine and cheerfulness, always ready to help anyone if she could by practical measures and sound advice and encouragement.

The funeral service was held at Isleham on 25th February.



### Harry Wilson

We are saddened to hear of the death of Harry Wilson. Harry started at Waltham Abbey in 1961, working first in ISRG and then in the General Chemistry Group on North Site as a Temperature Recorder. This latter job meant that we didn't see Harry every day as the TRs gave us 24 hour cover on experiments and trials requiring shift work. Harry worked as a part of this team giving essential service when we were tucked up in our beds. He will always be remembered as a cheerful and most helpful colleague. Harry and Doreen retired when the North Site finally closed in 1961.

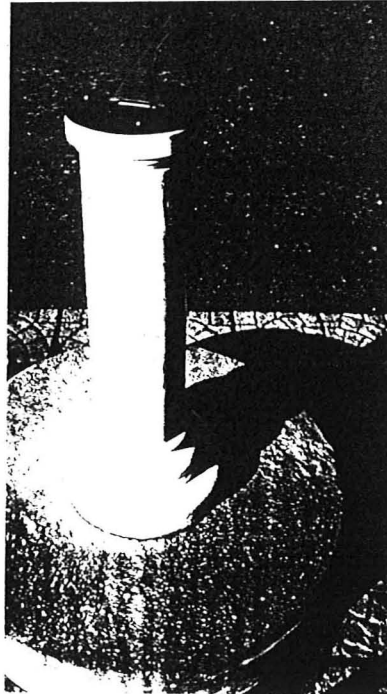
We send our sincerest condolences to Doreen.

# THE NORTH SITE SUNDIAL

With the closure of Waltham Abbey a number of North Site artefacts were relocated at Fort Halstead for safe keeping with the intention that they be returned to their rightful place if, and when, the proposed museum development nears completion. One of the historical objects relocated is a sundial dating back to about 1750 which currently sits outside one of the main buildings at the Fort. We have had a recent enquiry regarding this sundial from a member of the British Sundial Society. They are very interested in this particular sundial and have carried out some research on its origins, aided by information provided by Malcolm McLaren.

Much of the original inscription is sadly become illegible through the ravages of time but the makers name 'Scott' is still partially visible and the date, thought to be 1750. It was probably installed by the Walton family who owned the Mills prior to its nationalisation in 1787.

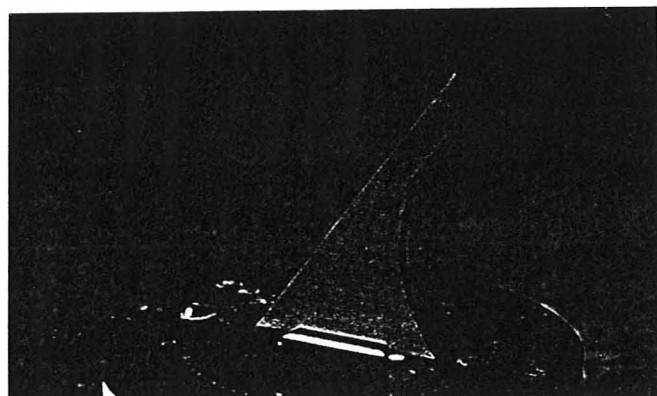
Research by Doug Bateman and Jill Wilson of the BSS has identified 3 possible makers; R Scott who was known to have been working in London in 1739 apprenticed originally as an instrument maker, a Benjamin Scott of 1730 and a Brian Scott (18th century). It is the considered opinion of the BSS that it is more likely that



the inscription originally read B Scott rather than R Scott. More research is needed to be definitive.

The sundial has been mounted on a stone pillar resting on a small millstone from a powder mill. The angle of the 'gnomon' is about  $51.5^\circ$  which is very close for the latitude of Waltham Abbey which is  $51.7^\circ$ . The experts also tell us that it has been wrongly orientated as is about 2.5 hours in error! It has been pointed out that it was probably mounted for ascetic reasons rather than accuracy.

It is to be hoped that this sundial will join the other artefacts stored at the Fort and be brought back to the Abbey when suitable storage can be made available on the North Site. This would include the Powder Barge, the Iron Bridge, various assorted cannon and the Powder Truck. Hopefully there will not be resistance from the current keepers to their re-relocation.



Our thanks to Malcolm McLaren for historical information and to Doug Bateman and Jill Wilson of the British Sundial Society for research.

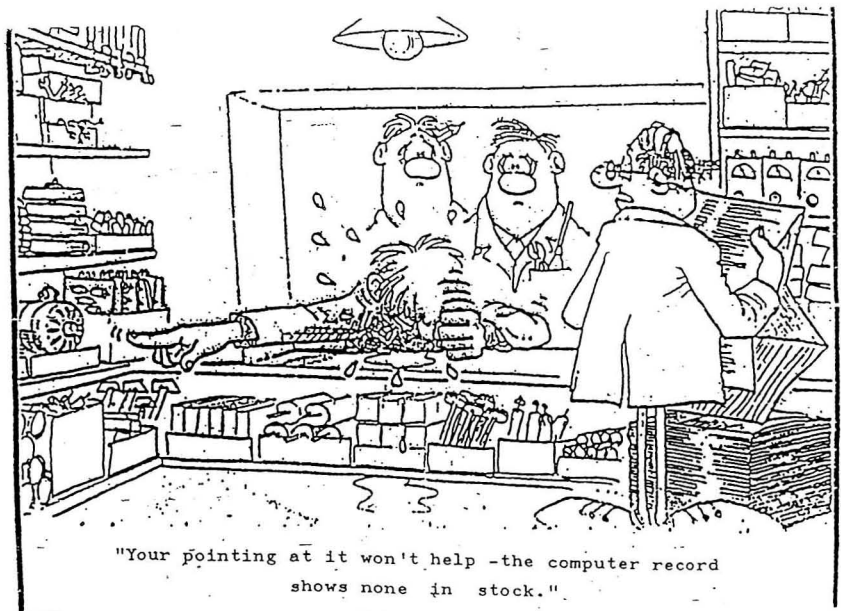
# MISCELLANY

## A LIST OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLES FROM THE WEEKLY TELEGRAPH 1915-17

- 1915 Jan 1 Serious floods, many workshops of RGPF under several feet  
Jan 19 Nobel's pay system severely criticised  
Apr 2 RGPF worker charged with theft  
Apr 16 New dwellings for Nobel workers in Sewardstone Road  
Apr 23 Soldiers entertained at Nobels  
Apr 30 The King and Lord Kitchener visit Waltham Abbey Mills  
May 7 Account of King's visit to RGPF  
May 14 Government stores, the case for Waltham Abbey  
Jun 18 Mrs Churchill visits Nobel Factory at Farm Hill  
Aug 27 RGPF employees Union. Cubicle huts for munition workers  
Sep 17 Government workers, rise of wages granted.  
Dec 3 Charles Adams accidentally knocked down by motor car driven by Col. Fisher, Supt. RGPF  
Dec 10 Darkened streets tragedy. Mrs Young, wife of RGPF worker went to factory to hand in medical certificate for husband - fell in river in dark and drowned.  
Dec 24 The Liquor Order; Waltham Abbey munitions workers protest  
1916 Jan 7 Govt. worker tragic death-Samuel Berry of RGPF blown in to River Lea  
May 5 Women in Royal Factories. Some 4000 women to be taken on at RSAF, RGPF munition factories  
Jun 16 Sir Frederick Nathan, formerly Supt, visits RGPF  
Sep 22 Child labour in Nobels Factory  
1917 Jan 12 Roads in bad shape due to heavy traffic and weather. Ministry of Munitions should provide Council with labour and grant railway facilities to bring in necessary material  
Feb 22 Nobels Fire Brigade Dinner  
Feb 23 Chewing Cordite! Acetone and cordite being chewed in factory  
Mar 30 Danger to RGPF. Live match found in fibre bale sent from Edmonton factory

It would be fascinating to follow up some of these stories. Presumably the original papers are all archived somewhere.

DOES THIS REMIND  
ANYONE OF SOME  
OF THE STOREMEN  
AT WALTHAM ABBEY?





# MISCELLANY TOO

## SCIENCE CORNER - NEW ELEMENT DISCOVERED

The heaviest element known to science was recently discovered by workers at Turgid University. This dense element, tentatively named 'ADMINISTRATIUM', has no protons or electrons and therefore has an atomic number of zero. It does however have 1 neutron, 125 assistant neutrons, 75 vice neutrons and 111 assistant vice neutrons giving it an atomic number of 312. The 312 particles are held together in the nucleus by a force that involves the continuous exchange of meson-like particles called morons. Since it has no electrons, Administratium is inert. However, it can be detected chemically since it impedes every reaction it comes into contact with. According to the discoverers a minute amount caused one reaction to take over 4 days for completion whereas it would normally occur in less than 1 second.

Administratium has a half life of about 2 years at which time it doesn't decay but instead, undergoes a reorganisation in which assistant neutrons, vice neutrons and assistant vice neutrons exchange places. Initial studies also indicate that the mass actually increases after each reorganisation.

research at other laboratories indicates that Administratium occurs naturally in the atmosphere but tends to condense and concentrate at certain points, such as Government Agencies, Contract Laboratories and Universities. It can usually be found in the newest and best appointed buildings.

Scientists are warned that it is known to be toxic at even the smallest level, destroying any productive reactions where it is allowed to accumulate. Attempts to determine control mechanisms and prevent irreversible damage have so far failed.

## LITERATURE - NEW WORDS FOR MODERN ENGLISH SPEAKERS

**CARPERPETUATION**- When vacuuming, the act of running over a piece of string at least a dozen times before picking it up, examining it, then putting it back down to give the vacuum cleaner one more chance.

**DISCONFECT** - Sterilising the piece of food or sweet you have dropped by blowing on it and somehow assuming this will remove all germs.

**ELBONICS** - The act by which 2 people wrestle for an armrest in a theatre, train or plane.

**ELECELLERATION**- The mistaken belief that continued pressing of the buttons will make an elevator arrive faster. Also applied to pedestrian crossing controls.

**LACTOMANGULATION**- Manhandling the 'open here' spout on a milk carton so badly that you have to resort to scissors on the other side.

**PHONESIA**- The affliction of dialing a phone number and instantly forgetting who you were calling.

**TELECRASTINATION**- The practice of always letting the phone ring at least six times before picking it up, even when it is only 6 inches away.

AND NO DOUBT THERE ARE MANY MORE



# 1997 REUNION

There is one important change to the arrangements for the Reunion this year. We have been unable to book the Town Hall for a Friday and have therefore had to book a Monday. We hope this will not inconvenience you all too much.

The date is:

**Monday 10th October,  
from 12 noon until 4pm  
buffet lunch at about 1pm.**

Unfortunately there can be no site visits this year but we are very hopeful that arrangements can be made for 1998. A further up-date on the Museum development will be reported in our next issue (September) and we hope to have a guest speaker on the subject at the Reunion.

Arrangements for the Reunion are as before and we ask you to book as soon as possible so that caterer's deposit and balance of hall hire can be paid on time. The reunions are, as you are probably aware, run on a tight budget with no financial backing. We try to keep costs to a minimum and hope to preserve a small balance to fund the next year's event. After paying the hall deposit this year we have to await your booking fees to pay this year's balance of hall hire and caterer's deposit.

**The cost this year will be £7 per head.**

Please book as early as possible (preferably NOW!) using the slip below.

If you would prefer to keep your copy of Touchpaper intact, either photocopy the form or just send the details on a piece of paper. Let's hope the turnout remains as high as usual.

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## 1997 WALTHAM ABBEY REUNION

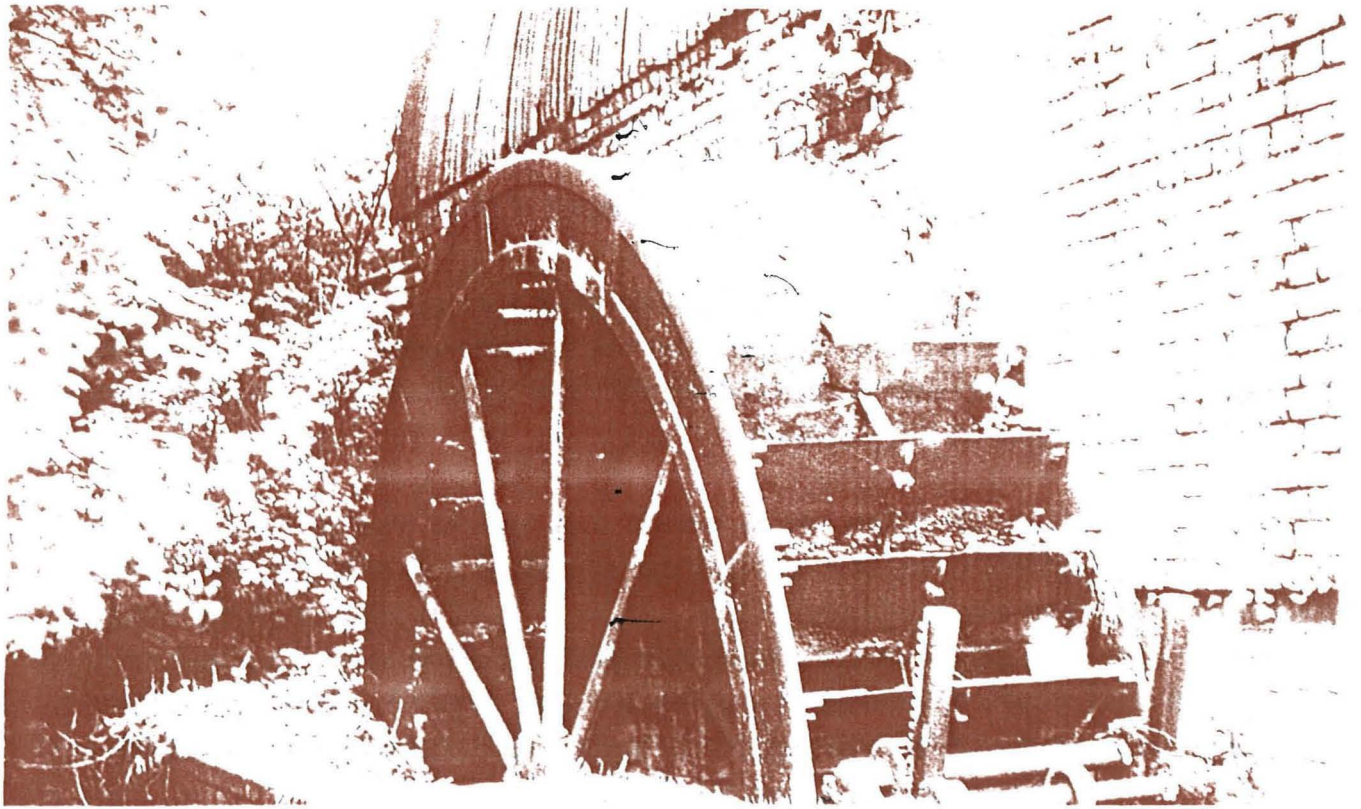
Name(s) .....

I/We will/will not be coming to the Reunion this year

Cheque enclosed for £ .....

Please make cheques payable to N Paul and send to:

Norman Paul  
Building A11  
DERA Fort Halstead  
Sevenoaks, KENT  
TN14 7BP



*Water wheel for the Gunpowder Press House.*