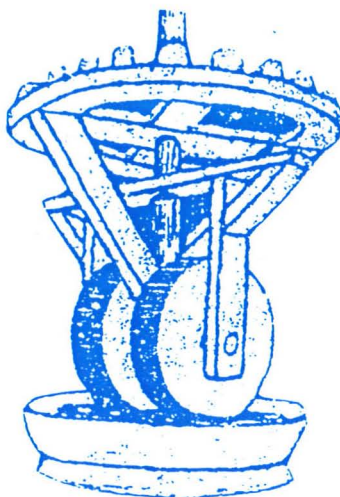


# Touchpaper

## THE WALTHAM ABBEY NEWSLETTER

September 1997

ISSUE 23



### EDITORIAL

With less than a year to my retirement I had hoped to give up travelling abroad on business. It really isn't that much fun! I thought I had got away with it until I was detailed to go to a NATO Workshop in Kiev postponed from last year. Not my idea of an exciting place, especially when I found that it takes place the week before the Reunion. It's fly out on the Tuesday and back on the Friday so any last minute bookings will have to be made before then. We can accommodate a few turning up on the door but please, not too many.

With my impending retirement I have also been concerned with the future of Touchpaper. I would like to continue to be involved but with the logistics and cost of doing it from home I am coming to the conclusion that it is probably not a viable option. I think this is something we should all consider over the next six months or so. Do we want to continue, and if so how. Your views and suggestions please.

Norman Paul  
Editor

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# TOUCH

## WHEN MARTIANS WORKED AT ERDE !

We'd been in 'digs' together for about a year when Dave Parker and I decided to move into an independent accommodation. As impoverished SOs we couldn't afford anything too expensive but on our walk to work, from Cheshunt via Windmill Lane and the canal towpath (*couldn't afford bus fare either! Ed.*), we had noticed that the Waltham Common Lock house was boarded up to stop vandals smashing the windows.

Clearly the place needed to be inhabited so we contacted the local British Waterways Office at Enfield Lock and negotiated a 7 year lease at a rent of 30 shillings (£1-50) per week plus a water rate of 10 shillings (50p) per quarter! Since it was a 3 bedroom house we needed a third partner and it wasn't too difficult to recruit Tony Barratt as he'd had enough of 'digs' as well.

The 3 of us moved in November 1962, just in time to experience the coldest winter in living memory. The water supply was via an unlagged pipe which crossed the canal in an exposed position. It froze at Christmas while we were all away and thawed out on the 25th March 1963. That was when we realised why the water rate was only 50p per quarter!

Fortunately we were not the only ones without water and the Cheshunt local council delivered water to the Jolly Bargeman pub and we collected our water from there in a container strapped to Dave Parker's golf trolley. Although we didn't have water that winter at least we were OK for heat and light as we had a calor gas cooker, calor gas lighting and Tilley Lamp in addition to the coal fired oven range.

One of our early acquisitions was a piano which was installed in the room closest to the lock and this was referred to as the "Music Room". In keeping with this title the living room became the "Banqueting Hall". Then there was the South, West and North bedrooms. Tony used to complain about the cold in the North room and we didn't believe him until we saw the thickness of ice on the inside of his window panes.

During that first cold winter we often walked to work on the surface of the frozen canal and were always made doubly welcome in the pub in Windmill Lane as we arrived with the bright oil lamp that put the pub's candles to shame.

Our oven range was a great comfort and the source of one amusing incident. We decided that some of our firewood was a bit damp so it was put in the oven to dry out. It was left there too long and, on opening the door, it spontaneously ignited giving a cloud of smoke and a supply of charcoal sticks. On another occasion Bill Smith, a frequent visitor, opted to stay the night in a sleeping bag next to the oven. He tied a long piece of

string to the Calor gas light chain so that he could put out the light after he was in his sleeping bag. Unfortunately this system, although successful in putting out the light, also managed to bring the glass globe crashing down, leaving Bill in the dark but covered in shards of hot glass!

Many tales are told of various lockhouse parties but I can remember one when we all worked a barge, belonging to British Waterways, through the lock. How nobody fell in I'll never know. Those halcyon days came to an end in the middle of 1965 when Dave Parker left to return to Wales, Tony Barratt married Beryl and I went to America for a year.

So, what does all this have to do with Martians? Well, one wag suggested that anyone who lived out in the middle of a marsh must be a Martian!

Bryan Howard

## FIT TO BE TIED !!

I am surprised that no one has responded with any suggestions for a tie design. I would like to propose a sketch of a powder mill, possibly as the example on the Touchpaper cover in yellow or orange on a plain green or blue tie with possibly some mutually agreed dates.

A similar idea was used for the 200th anniversary tie using millstones as a part of the '200'. I am sure that Malcolm McLaren could help with dates as I remember he providing me with a copy of a document dating back to the first Elizabeth. He gave this to me when I was at the Home Office so that I might impress an American who I worked with at the UN Group on Explosives. Alas, I no longer have it.

George Whitbread

*I think that George's idea is perfect and coincides with my own thoughts on the matter. The problem is that we are the only two have indicated interest. The cost of having ties made drops dramatically as the number ordered increases. I don't believe that George and I can afford a tie unless a large number of others are interested. [The minimum order is 100 at a probable cost of £5-6 each. At about 200 the cost drops to around £4.]*

*If anyone is interested please contact me and I can make enquiries with the makers.*

Norman Paul

DEADLINE DATE FOR NEXT ISSUE:

mid - Nov '97

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

# BYTES

## IT'S GOOD TO TALK READ...

Just a note of thanks for keeping Touchpaper going. It's good to keep up with the news of former colleagues, even though, sadly, it is sometimes an obituary.

I shall not be able to attend the reunion again. Since 1994 that week in October is booked for my attendance at the NATO Groups of Experts on Warning and Detection Systems used for civil protection. That sounds really grand doesn't it? What's he doing there if it's for experts I hear you cry. Well it is a long sorry so I won't bore you with it. Suffice to say that it entails dragging myself to various locations in Europe - this year the venue is Budapest - for gruelling visits and having to fit in some work as well!

At the end of this month (June) I shall attend the meeting in Brussels for the first time in my new role as Chairman of the Group. No! Don't laugh, they all wanted me to take the job, but I suspect that I might have been a bit slow in taking a step back when they asked for volunteers.

Finally, please find attached a quotation from an IPMS report I saw recently. It was by a group of management consultants commissioned by the IPMS for a review of a proposed merger with the MSF. I'm sure that those of us in public service are all suffering from constant change - initiatives, reviews, changing the culture, empowerment etc, etc. Don't quote me but I sometimes feel like the little boy in the story of the Emperor's New Clothes!

Ray East

"According to one management guru, we live in a period of such profound and rapid change that if you are not totally confused for most of the time, you are simply not up with the times!"

## Change of Name, Change of Place

Some amendments to the records. I am currently on the books as Deirdre Hallam at RO Glascoed.

I am actually now Deidre Cornish and transferred to RO Bridgwater in 1996 to become Product Manager, Explosives. I married Mark in October 1996. He still works at Glascoed; still, absence makes the conversation better at weekends! I haven't missed out on Touchpaper however as good old Ron Hollands dutifully passes on my copies. He'll be relieved to know I've finally brought you up to date.

Deidre Cornish

## Ken Bascombe

Some of you may be aware that Ken is no longer living in Waltham Abbey, having moved to a nursing home in Dorset in July. This was brought on by the onset of Alzheimer's disease. Pam Garrod (a long time friend and ex-WA) agreed to look after Ken but it soon became obvious that he required 24 hr care. In view of Ken's almost total memory loss she was granted 'power of attorney' and arranged a nursing home close to her. Although Ken can no longer read he enjoys receiving letters which Pam reads to him and it would be a great boost to him to hear from ex-WA'ites wherever they may be. Unfortunately, he cannot reply. His address is:

Dr K Bascombe  
c/o Longbridge Deverill House  
Longbridge Deverill  
DORSET

If you wish to see photos of Ken in his new surroundings or find out more, pop into Uptons Shoe Shop in the Waltham Abbey Market Square where the owner (who is dealing with Ken's affairs in WA) will be more than willing to give you the latest information.

Tony Kosecki

*Many thanks for the information Tony and are sincere thanks to Pam for all her efforts in helping our well respected colleague. Ed.*

## A Little Bit of Local History

I was interested in the article under 'Miscellany' in the last Touchpaper regarding the old Weekly Telegraph headlines from 1915 - 1917. I have one dated 30th Nov 1917 that records the story of my uncle. This is a report of the recommendation of the Military Medal for bravery of Private A J Savill of the 19th Pioneers Battalion of the Welsh Regiment. Second Lt. A P Bray was wounded and brought home to a hospital in Manchester. From there he sent to Private Savill a silver watch inscribed;

Presented to  
Private A J Savill  
19th Pioneers' Battalion, Welsh Regiment  
By Second Lieut. A P Bray  
For assisting him when wounded on the  
3rd September, 1917, during intense local shell fire.

Uncle Alf was well known on South Site as for many years he was "In Charge" of the canteen and at the end of each break would ring a hand bell to clear everyone out. He was very proud of his bell but I'm sure there are many stories of how his 'customers' used to, much to his annoyance, 'borrow' his bell.

George Savill



# SITE NEWS

## NORTH



As you are aware the North Site Museum will be run by a board of trustees and a call for candidates was printed in our last issue. The board is to be made up of representatives of various local councils and other bodies with the balance from the general public. The interviewing process is, I believe, now complete but we have no information as to who has been appointed and what bodies they represent. As editor I did apply and volunteer my services but was not appointed.

Did anyone else apply and does anyone know who was successful? There seems to be complete silence on the matter. I am particularly interested because of the number of Waltham Abbey artefacts now in store at Fort Halstead and I am concerned that these are properly accounted for and not lost.

The first phase of the project is due to open some time next year and we welcome any information that our readership can supply.

A recent BBC2 programme. One Foot in the Past, was filmed on the North Site showing many of the old buildings and describing processes for nitroglycerine and nitrocellulose. If you missed it and are attending the Reunion you will have the opportunity to see a recording.

## SOUTH

Despite many concerns at the redevelopment of the South Site and the problem of toxic waste that have been reported here over the past year the go-ahead has been given. A housing development and Business Park has been given the green light and any toxic material found will be kept on site. An estimated 450,000 cubic metre of waste from all over the site will be transferred on to two plots intended for a golf course. One waste burial site will be a 3 metre deep clay-capped containment area near Sewardstone Road and the other a 1.4 metre deep clay-capped landfill site. Surplus soil from the construction of a link road to the M25 will also be deposited on the fill as cover. Waste disposal and restoration is expected to take up to 18 months. The decision was taken by Essex County Council despite strong opposition from the local council. Local councils will be monitoring the deposits very closely for some time to come.

Probably your last chance to see the site before redevelopment will be on the morning of the Reunion this year. See under REUNION 97 for further details.

## In Memoriam

### Dick Watkins

We are very sorry to have to report the news that Dick passed away at the end of July following a massive heart attack. The funeral took place on 1st August.

He was such a hale and hearty chap, always active and the news came as a big shock.

Dick joined Waltham Abbey in the glassblowing section 1956, retiring in 1984. He gave sterling support to the scientific sections and was considered one of the finest technical glass blowers in the country. There are still many examples of his skill in use at various laboratories at Fort Halstead. He was always helpful and committed to giving the best service possible; never complaining when we broke something, as we often did.

Dick was also very active in the early days being a leading light in a local badminton club which regularly challenged the Establishment Social Club - and usually beat them.

We extend our sincere sympathy and best wishes to his wife and son.

### Sid Hewitson

Sid died at home suddenly on 23rd June. He joined in 1964 and worked in the Engineering Group until retiring in 1992..

The funeral was held at High Beach Church on July 1st and was attended by some of his ex-colleagues from the RO site at Waltham Abbey where Sid worked after closure of the establishment.

### Dave Bullock

We have been advised that Dave Bullock died in June but we have no details.

### Mike Harper

News has also reached us that Mike Harper has died. Many of you will remember Mike who was the resident computer expert at Waltham Abbey. He left to live in France and was much involved with his wife's fathers vineyard, being somewhat of an expert on wine and wine drinking.

## MISCELLANY

# WANTED

## INFORMATION

### WHO IS THIS BOY?



NOW BELIEVED TO HAVE GROWN UP  
(PHYSICALLY THAT IS )

**NO REWARD OFFERED**

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### SPELING MAID EASY

In answer to all those readers who take great delight in telling me of spelling mistakes in Touchpaper I offer this little poem:

Eye have a spelling chequer  
Witch came with my PC  
And plainly marques four my revue  
Mistakes I mite knot sea  
I've run this poem threw it  
I'm shore your pleased two no  
It's letter perfect in it's weigh  
MY CHEQUER TOLLED ME SEW!

Sew Their! Ed.

# 1997 REUNION

Just to remind you all that the Reunion will take place on  
MONDAY 13th October  
in the Waltham Abbey Town Hall  
starting at 12.00

As I said in the last issue, it has not been possible to book a Friday and the Monday seems a reasonable compromise as it still attaches to a weekend. I hope this has not put too many people off but it is apparent that numbers are likely to be down this year.

I know many of you leave it late to book, being unsure of other commitments but numbers so far are well down compared with the same time last year. Please, if you are attending, book as soon as possible as catering arrangements have to be made.

The cost is £7 per head which includes a buffet lunch and remittances should be sent to:

Norman Paul  
Bldg A11  
DERA Fort Halstead  
Sevenoaks  
KENT  
TN14 7BP

## ONE FOOT IN THE PAST

We were contacted by BBC2 in July concerning an item for the above programme and a number of our more senior members were contacted to aid in the making of the programme which was shown on Wednesday 20th August at 8.00pm. If you missed it there will be an opportunity to see a recording of this at the Reunion.

## VISIT TO SOUTH SITE

There will be an opportunity for you to take a walk around South Site on the morning of the Reunion. All ex-employees and their wives will be welcome. Meet at Quinton Gate at 10am. This may be your last chance to see South Site before it is handed over for redevelopment. Contact Bryan Howard on 01992 760912



