

Touchpaper

THE WALTHAM ABBEY NEWSLETTER

December 1997



ISSUE 24

EDITORIAL

So you really do read Touchpaper! The response to my last editorial has been overwhelming. You obviously feel a continuing need to keep in touch and the suggestion that this newsletter may not continue has roused an unusual number of you to respond. I will return to this matter later on in this issue.

Included in this issue is a series of questions that we need answering to take note of your views on two issues. Please respond with any comments that you have.

Once again the year rolls round and it will soon be Christmas again. It just remains for me to send the traditional seasonal greetings to you all and thank you for your interest and support during the year, It makes the editing job all worth while.

To you All
A Very Happy Christmas
and may We

All Prosper in the coming New Year

Norman Paul
Editor

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TOUCH

On the Move and Other News...

Andy Carter has recently moved from Waltham Abbey to High Wycombe.

Gordon Bromberger has moved house to Sheffield and Brian Rider is leaving Waltham Abbey for a new house in Tyne & Wear.

Geoff Hooper has moved from his post as Vice President of the OB to become Head CM Pers 2 at Bath, but Geoff still retains his domestic base in the Abbey.

Susan Ball moved down from the Midlands to Tunbridge Wells - congratulations also due on the recent birth of a baby daughter.

We have been sent this picture from colleagues at the MOD in Bristol which was taken on the occasion of the visit to the new Abbey Wood site by HRH Prince Philip.



The balloon captions are the result of a local competition. John Wright is however no longer employed by the MOD because, we must hasten to add, he retired earlier this year.

'Elevation' of a colleague ...

As seen in the latest issue of 'Chemistry in Britain'

Tony Kinloch CChem, FRSC

formerly of the Adhesives and P2 Sections at Waltham Abbey 1972 - 84 has been elected as fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering

Tony is currently professor of adhesion at Imperial College

Congratulations Tony !



Ken Bascombe

We are glad to hear that Ken's health is not as bad as reported in the last issue. Perhaps Ken will remember the occasion on which this photograph was taken?



We recognise Ken and Bryan Howard but who is the gentleman in the middle?

Other Reunions

The following report was sent in by Bob and Margaret Brown:

In July and December each year Betty Matthews invites seven of her friends to lunch and spend the afternoon with her at her home in Waltham Abbey. Betty was Supt/Typists for most of the middle years of the life of ERDE. The ex-members of the Typing Pool are: Doreen Bamforth, Glenys Carpenter, Stella Parsons, Phil Pye, Sheila Senior, Beryl Surridge and Margaret Brown. This year was no exception and in July these friends had a most enjoyable time remembering the old days and catching up on all the news. We wish them all well for their forthcoming December meeting. Perhaps we can have an update in our next issue?

RECENT ADDITION TO THE REGISTER

We would like to welcome the following new readers to Touchpaper:

Derek Brewer Machine Shop 1961 - 1989
Currently at the Medical research Council National Institute in Mill Hill

Harry Little, now retired from Fort Halstead and still living in Waltham Abbey. I suspect that Harry didn't register whilst still working being content to read someone else's Touch paper!

Shirley Montgomery Transport 1972 - 90
I'm sure many of you will remember Shirley as the blonde one!

BYTES

Letters to the Editor:

Many Thanks Touchpaper. It was sad to read about Dick Watkins and Dave Bullock. I travelled to work with Dick when we both lived in Harlow in the '70's and, going back to ancient history, I was in digs with Dave when I started at Nancekuke - he followed me to WA in the late '50's. It comes as a bit of a shock when some of our contemporaries pass away.

To more cheerful things; all is well with us. Richard (No. 2 son) got married earlier this year to a midwife at the local hospital. You would all have appreciated the sight of me in top hat and tails! Michael (unmarried) is at Bristol and spends most of his time working for Aardmans - the Wallace & Gromit studio. Rachel, now 16, is going great guns, did well in her GCSEs (11 A grades, 9 of them A*) but her bedroom is still a tip!

Well being much older than our editor (*one month actually Ed.*) I'm thinking of my retirement date in terms of weeks (37). I expect he is still on months! Bernie Tucker is booked on the same retirement course as me.

Regards Dave Salter

TIES ...

When I first read of George Whitbread's suggestion for a WA tie I thought, 'What a good idea, I'll go for one of those', but then forgot all about it. Come the next Touchpaper and you reminded us. So I reran my reaction and then thought 'Hang on a minute, when did you last wear a tie?' I don't know about other retired folk but this one wears a tie about once a month at best then usually for a special occasion like a funeral, or a supper at the yacht club where other ties are *de rigueur*. So, although I'd probably buy one I think for my current lifestyle some other item would get used more. What about a sweatshirt? I could even wear that at the yacht club and, eventually, when it gets worn and grubby like all the rest, I could still wear it ..like I wear all the rest most of the time!

Cheers Steve Bell

Letter from the Editor:

TOUCHPAPER

I don't have room to print the large number of letters in response to editorial in the last issue regarding the future of Touchpaper. Suffice it to say that your support has been overwhelming and I have been giving the matter serious consideration. Some possibilities are being negotiated but at this stage I would like to assure you all that Touchpaper will continue, in one form or another, for some time to come. I will keep you informed as soon as I have definite information, meanwhile, thanks again for all your letters and comments of support.

TIES

A lot of letters also received in support of a WA Tie. I am investigating how to do this, meanwhile please see the survey article later in this issue.

Norman Paul

The Martian Chronicles - Part 2

As Bryan Howard stated in the last issue, I was one of the Martians living in the Waltham Common Lock House in the hard winter of 62/3 when all the water had to be carried half a mile, baths and showers being taken at work!. Dave Parker liked his comforts - he had a hot water bottle but, because the water pipe was frozen, he had to reheat the same water for 3 months! Just how extreme that winter was can be judged by the lunch time skating on the pond between H10 and the Library. Before the freeze much 'free' firewood floated right up to the lockhouse door, including railway sleepers, which we would saw up for the winter. Bryan mentioned our Calor gas lighting, we had town gas fittings and bought our mantles from the Gas Showrooms. Now Town Gas and Gas Showrooms are no more. When we bought a bed settee from someone in Lea Road we assembled a working party, borrowed a workman's barge, pulled it down the canal and returned with the settee. On another occasion a party carried a bed from Theobalds Station across the marsh in the dark. It must have been a strange site. The difficult bit was where the footpath crossed the railway at an unmanned crossing - Look both ways and get across the tracks as quickly as possible. In the summer months there were other pastimes. Bill Smith and I, as members of the Waltham Abbey Historical Society, were excavating the foundations of the east end of Harold's Church when we came across a skeleton, presumed to be a monk buried in the Abbey cloisters. When the excavation was complete the Vicar performed a re-burial service. This was arranged for a Saturday lunchtime and I remember we met the vicar, not in the church but, in the bar of the Welsh Harp! On hot summer days some of the visitors to the Cheshunt Marshes Park would take a dip in the canal to cool off. I was one of several from ERDE who were members of the Victoria Swimming Club whose 'pool' was a half mile stretch of the canal at the edge of S/Site.

Tony Barratt

Christmas Card to the Lockhouse 1962 from Will and Ken the Pint-Pot Men (alias Bill Smith & Ken Bascombe)

Twass Christmas Day in the Lockhouse, within those dismal halls
The lads sat playing Chopin while damp dripped down the walls
A bright idea struck Tony, 'Lets have a drink!' quoth he
Then put the kettle on the gas to make a cup of tea.
This so inflamed the others, who came of drinking stock
They took him by the left leg and threw him in the Lock.
'Help Help' wailed Cuddy Barratt, 'Twill be the death of me
If I get wet all over and miss my tea, by G..!'
'Ho, have I found thee cursing, may ye be food for pike'
Cried Bryan, 'In my years at sea I never heard the like'.
Said David 'Well, at any rate, the last of him we've heard
Let's post a notice on the board, hard drinking man preferred!'

Merry Christmas and all the best for '98 from
Tony and Beryl Barratt.

DEADLINE DATE FOR NEXT ISSUE:

mid - Feb '98

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

SITE NEWS

NORTH

Setting up of the Museum on North Site is still in the planning stages. A Board of Directors has now been appointed and we are glad to see that we, the ex-employees will have some representation in the form of Geoff Hooper. Geoff has already been on a weekend course to be educated as to the responsibilities of the trustees and has agreed to act as a conduit to us on progress. We look forward to hearing his updates as and when information is available.

You may also be aware that a number of artefacts were relocated to Fort Halstead on closure of Waltham Abbey North Site for safe keeping. The intention was that they be returned to the museum when appropriate. Some of the cannons and the sundial are still on display and reasonably well cared for but there are concerns for other items kept in a compound area. The principal items are; a number of shells, the old water tank with the Ordnance Board Coat of arms, the Iron Bridge and the Powder Barge. We have also identified an old small cannon that was commissioned especially for Waltham Abbey for proof firings. At this time the compound is being cleared and it is only through the sharp eyes and ears of Steve Hutchings that we are aware of this. Rest assured that these items have now been safeguarded, for the moment! Nevertheless, steps should be taken to bring them back home as soon as possible while there are still people at the Fort to keep an eye on them! As regards the Powder Barge, it is getting into a very parlous state and there is considerable concern over its condition.

SOUTH

Herewith a report by our regular reporter, Bryan Howard, who organised a visit to South Site on the morning of the Reunion:

About 20 people came for a 'stroll' round South Site on the morning of the Reunion day. As the area around Quinton Gate began to get cluttered with cars we decided to meet up in the car park next to the ex-PR G432 office block. Small groups then went off in different directions with a warning to beware of lorries on their way to RSAF through the intersite gate as part of the 'Fairview' building programme under way there. I've no idea where the other groups went, except that some managed to sample the coffee in 'Red's Diner'. Fortunately the Met. Police were not on site that day, firing paint balls although we did see lots of spent 9mm brass cases in some areas!

The ex-P1 group had a look round P704 labs and the Rolling House next door. Eventually I had a stroll with Dave Manners to see that the 10.5 inch cordite press was still in place - it should be interesting to see what any developers will do with that.

A few days before the visit I had a solo trip to M343 Ballistics area and noted a strong leathery smell emanating from M348. It would seem that the elephant hide floor there is well ventilated! The nearby 'Box and Tray' Store still contains items that might be of interest to the Gunpowder Museum - provided they could be rescued before the developers create a golf course in that area.

Dave and I went round the old Combustible Cartridge Case building, Charge Machining and so on to his old Fragment Attack facility on the other side of Centre Way. On the way back to the car park we didn't need to divert to the apple tree at the rear of P2 Hot & Cold Store as I knew that its crop had been 'scrumped' by the employees in the nearby industrial units.

My overall impression of South Site is that, although the buildings are naturally decaying after 8 years of neglect, there are still many small items that would be of potential interest to an historic collection BUT there is a need to collect, identify and store these items before the bulldozers move in. Has anyone got room for a 10.5 inch Cordite Press?

Finally, on behalf of all the visitors, our thanks to Ed Andrews and Lynne Lennard for welcoming us on the Site. Our best wishes go to them and Terry Stemman for the future.

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In Memoriam

Fred Carr

Derek Brewer has informed us of the death of his father-in-law, Fred Carr at Chase Farm Hospital on 13th September this year after a long fight against cancer.

Many of our readers will remember Fred with great affection from his long service in BWD.

Ron Lamb

News has reached of the recent death of Ron Lamb but we have no details. As many of you know Ron's health has always suffered from the days of his interment in a Japanese prisoner of war camp and over the last few years he had also suffered from progressive blindness. Nevertheless he was quite philosophical about it and always cheerful. He worked for many years in the Stationery Stores (or as the notice outside said Stationary Stores). Ron was always so obliging with a tremendous sense of humour. He always used to tell the story of one customer who came up and said "Do you keep stationery" to which Ron replied "No! We jig about a bit." Sadly missed.

I DON'T WHY I GOT THE BLAME !

Thinking of Ron Lamb reminds me of the incident in the Stationery Stores back in the early '80s when I was standing at the front of the racks asking Ron for a new kettle element. On opening the pack the washer rolled under the first rack and Ron leant the rack backwards so that I could retrieve it. Unfortunately the metal rack was backed by another which tipped forward shooting the contents (all neatly separated forms) into the next rack in line. It didn't stop there. The second rack and the one next to it also fell back pushing the 2 racks behind into the 3rd row which then pushed over the 3 racks in the 4th row and so on and so on, like a row of dominos. The noise was tremendous and there was nothing we could do to stop it. In all, some 40 racks ended up spread across the floor with the contents, some hundreds of items, completely mixed up. It took the staff a couple of weeks to get everything back in place and the racks were then securely bolted together - just in case I made a return visit. I submit, to this day, that this was entirely down to an unsafe design and in no way was I responsible. It didn't stop Ron telling everybody that it was ALL MY FAULT!

Norman Paul

On a Happier Note:

HAPPY CHRISTMAS DAI !

On behalf of you all may we wish Dai Matthias a very Happy Christmas!

His daughter Lynne tells us that her dad spent a week in hospital in a very critical state this autumn after he'd had a 'Flu Jab'. His condition was very serious and Lynne and her family went down to Wales to see him. Numerous test failed to diagnose (*daiagnose?*) the cause of the illness but the 'Flu Jab' was not ruled out.

Fortunately, Lynne reports that he is now recovered and, although still weak, is on the mend. By the time you read this Dai, we hope you're fit again and able to enjoy this coming Christmas.

REUNION 1997

Another very successful Reunion although numbers were considerably down from previous years. Yes, we admit it, perhaps holding it on a Monday wasn't a good idea but, as you know, we couldn't book the Town Hall on a Friday and a Monday was second choice.

Not to be caught out next year we went straight upstairs after the reunion to book a Friday next year. Unfortunately we were told that an indoor bowls club has first option every Friday for the foreseeable future and the Town Clerk wouldn't budge from that position. It's a great shame because Friday seems the best day for us and the Town Hall is very convenient. All is not lost however as we have negotiated, through the good offices of George Savil, a date for next year at the Royal British Legion Hall. It's a bit smaller but we believe big enough and the drinks are cheaper!

Make a note to put it in your new diaries wot you will be getting for Christmas - **Friday 9th October.**

Another disappointment this year was the catering. We thought we had found a good reliable caterer and certainly they provided a good service last year. We have to say that their service this year was far from satisfactory so different arrangements will have to be made next time. Our apologies to those of you disappointed with the buffet. Once again, with the switch to the British Legion Hall we have been offered the services of their 'in house' catering team and have been assured of a great improvement, This will probably work out cheaper, which coupled with the lower hall charge, will probably mean a reduction in cost - it certainly won't be increased over this year.



Having said all that it was still a success and those attending (Over 100) enjoyed the main purpose of the event which was to meet again their colleagues.

A popular feature this year was a showing of a recording of the recent BBC2 'One Foot in the Past' video.' The Town Hall stage was converted into Cinema 1 and this feature was well frequented throughout the afternoon.

REUNION GALLERY



SOME CAME TO TALK, SOME CAME TO DRINK AND
SOME CAME TO TALK AND DRINK

MISCELLANY

YES ! THAT PHOTOGRAPH IN THE LAST ISSUE REALLY WAS STEVE HUTCHINGS.

It was taken, probably illegally, by one of the BWD staff when Steve first started working at Waltham Abbey as an apprentice carpenter. The only difference now is that with the passing years he has grown a beard and doesn't work as hard - but then who does?

TWDS BTR SPLNG

The following article was sent in by one of our readers - I think it was Dennis Eldridge

The European Commission have just announced an agreement whereby English will be the official language of the EU, rather than German, which was the other contender. Her Majesty's Government conceded that English spelling has some room for improvement and has accepted a 5 year phased plan to produce "EuroEnglish."

In the 1st year, "s" will replace the short "c" and this will certainly make sivil servants jump with joy. The hard "c" will be dropped in favour of the letter "k" which should klear up konfursion and keyboards will have 1 less letter.

There will be growing publik enthusiasm in the sekond year when the troublesome "ph" will be replaced with "f". This will make words like 'fotograf" signifkantly shorter.

In the 3rd year publik akseptanze of the new spelling kan be expekted to reach the stage where more komplikated changes are possible. Governments will enkorage the removal of double letters which have always ben a deterrent to akurate speling. Also, al wil agre that the horrible mes of the silent "e"s in the language is disgraceful and they should be discarded.

By the 4th yer, peopl wil be reseptive to steps such as replasing "th" with "z" and "w" with "v".

During ze fifz yer, ze unesesary "o" kan be droptd from vords kontaining "ou" and similar changes vud of kors be aplid to ozer kombinations of leters.

After zis fifz yer, ve vil hav a reli sensibl riten styl. Zer vil be no mor trubls or difikulis and evrivun vil find it ezi to understand ech ozer ZE DREM VIL FINALI KUM TRU !!!

I hope this article is spelt correctly - I'm afraid my spell checker wasn't much use. Ed.

CHRISTMAS BRAIN TEASER

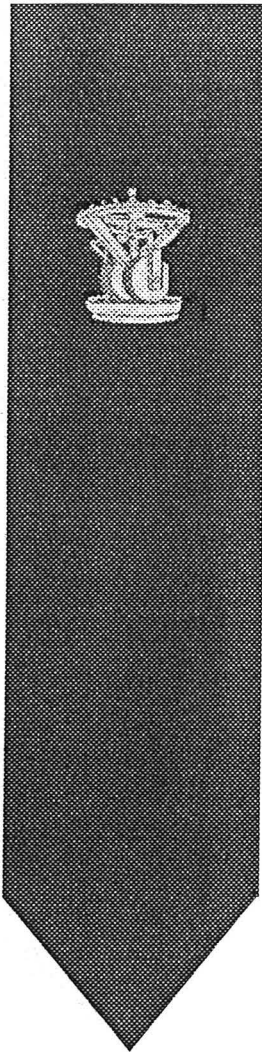
The following clues are made up from the first letters of the opening lines of Christmas Carols and other festive songs. Just to make it a little trickier the letters have been jumbled up. In order to confuse things further some cryptic clues may, or may not help (probably not !)

By way of example: NS (no singing please) = Silent Night

1. AM I A (no comments please)
 2. BMW IT (chance would be a fine thing)
 3. T SHAH (Eddie's brother ?)
 4. TO A WOK (if you're into Chinese)
 5. I DO CAW (everybody does, some of the time)
 6. HIT AT (go on, have a shot at this one)
 7. SW WTBFN (on guard)
 8. COAFY (Christmas Church Service)
 9. U MCC IT (hardly the time for cricket)
 10. K GLOW (gave someone a warm feeling)
-

QUESTIONNAIRE

PART ONE - TIES



It seems that the idea of a Tie is supported by many of you. The suggested design, on the left, was shown at the Reunion and met with great acclaim.

Does it also need any writing or dates, and if so, what and which?

How many do we need?

Once a firm price is given would you be willing to stump up the money and wait for your tie?

[Bear in mind that repeat orders can only be for a significant quantity]

Are there any other items bearing this logo that you would be prepared to order?

YOUR VIEWS AND ANY IDEAS FOR HOW WE COULD PROCEED WILL BE MOST WELCOME - AND NECESSARY!

Unfortunately we cannot print the design in colour here but the basic background is dark blue with the logo in gold/yellow.

PART TWO - FUTURE REUNIONS

From your many responses there is obviously continuing support for annual reunions but perhaps it is time to take stock and review the current arrangements.

Are you happy with the current format?

Would you prefer a more organised programme?

If so what?

Should we continue to supply a buffet ?

If site visits are possible would you be interested?

ONCE AGAIN, LET'S HAVE YOUR VIEWS AND COMMENTS



A FISCAL CALENDAR

January brings surcease
From the Christmas money feast

February is cold and drear
Will I make it through the year

All through **March** the cold winds blow
Bank account now starts to grow

Like **April** showers it's down the drain
Must insure the car again

May to June a sorry state
Gas, Electric Water Rate

July brings the warmer rain
Got to paint the house again


August holiday is axed
Can't afford to get car taxed

September's mellow leaves do fall
Blocked the sewer, drains and all

In **October**, more expense
Wind blows down the garden fence

Cold **November** can't do much
Damned old car needs damned new clutch

Come **December** much too late
for me to get finances straight
The year has been just one long pain
And now it's bloody Christmas again!



**WISHING YOU ALL A MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR IN 1998**