

# Touchpaper

## THE WALTHAM ABBEY NEWSLETTER

March 1998

ISSUE 25



### EDITORIAL

I wished you all a Happy New Year in the last issue and hope that, so far, this wish is being fulfilled for you.

This is by way of being the penultimate issue of Touchpaper in this format, the ultimate coming in June.

Fear not, however, they will not be the last! I have been appointed as the Chairman of the Friends Association of the Waltham Abbey Royal Gunpowder Mills Company and we intend to continue this Newsletter on a more secure basis as the official Newsletter of the Association.

Further details can be found in this issue.

It is most probable that the content will evolve, especially as I hope to increase the circulation to a much wider audience. In particular we will have direct information on the progress of the North Site development.

Norman Paul  
Editor

### CONTENTS:

TOUCH BYTES  
readers News and Views

WARGM North Site

SOUTH SITE  
developments

FRIENDS ASSOCIATION

AT LAST - REMEMBERED!

GUNPOWDER HISTORY  
notice of seminar

1998 REUNION

MISCELLANY

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#### CURRENT 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

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# TOUCH

## Dear Readers,

I was not a long serving denizen of Waltham Abbey, spending barely two years there, although I had a longer association than that through my years at Westcott. Since I don't live in the area I don't have many contacts with the old place, but recently I have been involved in working in Holland 4 days a week, flying out of Stansted first flight Monday morning and flashing past South Site on the M25 at about 5.15 in the morning. I always give the old place a mental wave. My time there was short but enjoyable. If you ever get around to producing a tie, I will have one - unlike Steve Bell I still do have to wear a tie in my travels around the world.

In terms of making a museum of it all I have to report that the Irish have beaten us to it. This summer my son and I made a visit to the Emerald Isle and, on our way back to Cork Airport with a couple of hours to kill, came across a sign saying "Royal Gunpowder Factory" at a place called Ballincollig, so we paid a visit. Not such a long history as Waltham Abbey, it finally gave up at the turn of the century and is now, like almost everything in Ireland, being resurrected as a tourist attraction. They do it very well, with a film about the history of the place and then eloquent guides but due reference was made to the elder establishment at Waltham Abbey.

Best Wishes

Bob Parkinson

## News from Ken Bascombe

A Happy New Year to you all! Christmas started well with a candlelit supper in a small 16th century cottage on the Longleat Estate with Pam Garrod and some friends.



**KEN AND FRIENDS:**

*Pam Garrod, and Colin Pearson (Upton's Shoe Shop Market Square). Photo taken by Marion Pearson.*

**DON'T THEY ALL LOOK WELL!**

Christmas Day was spent in the vicarage with good food and lots of presents from the tree.

Small wonder then that the latest check-up has seen a gain in weight of one stone! The comprehensive testing of the local ales and cream teas may also have had something to do with it. One tip to those of you who feel you want to slim is to try eating your ice cream sundae with a fork! It takes so long that you're almost up to the next meal before you finish. Thanks for all the Christmas cards,

Best Wishes to you all from Ken.

## The Demon Carter ..

I enjoyed the latest Touchpaper greatly and the Reunion. Regarding the buffet - what bloody buffet? It had all gone by the time I stopped drinking and nattering (*and drinking*) in the bar! I like the idea of a tie. Other items of interest might be some logo pins, especially in view of the fact that our ladies tend not to wear ties very much! I did suggest monogrammed suspender belts but they didn't seem too impressed. Also, I thought, coasters, tankards, ashtrays and paperweights (I still have the tankard from Wasag Nitrochemie when Frank Baker and I were presented with one each after we literally drank the Bavarians under the table).

*There was another suggestion from Roy but not wishing to upset those of a more sensitive nature I have edited it out!*  
**Ed.**

Future Reunions - I liked the informal format and think the buffet is a good idea (even if I missed out this year). I am certainly interested in site visits. For me, and probably others, I wonder whether a deal could be made with a local hotel for those who would like to stay overnight (curses on my brother for moving out of WA).

Best Wishes

Roy Carter (roy@recarter.demon.co.uk)

*We have no room to print all the letters responding to the questionnaire but thank you all for the comments. You appear to overwhelmingly in favour of continuing the Reunions with the present format and we really must make a start on producing ties, and possibly other items.* Norman Paul

## CHANGE OF ADDRESS

For some time now my Touchpaper has arrived at Waltham Abbey South Site and I have enjoyed reading it. Unfortunately as you know the site is soon to be turned over to developers and I will return to, and be based full time at, RO Westcott - whose own future is in some doubt!

I have enjoyed my stay at Waltham and have grown, like you all, very attached to the place. To help me remember my good times at WA please send my Touchpaper to my home address in Aylesbury. You can put me down for a tie as well.

Many Thanks

Ed Andrews (Site Manager RO WA until Feb 98)

*We have been advised that Les Phillips has also moved house - but only from one part of Sheffield to another. Presumably from the posh part to the posher part!*

**I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO REMIND YOU, IF YOU DO MOVE PLEASE LET ME KNOW SO THAT YOUR TOUCHPAPER IS SENT TO YOUR NEW ADDRESS.** Editor



## NOW IT CAN BE TOLD. Part2:

### THE FARNBOROUGH ROCKET MOTOR

It all started when Steve Bell decided to fire a rocket motor at the Farnborough Air Show! We all turned a whiter shade of pale. There was no need to consult the Safety Officer, It just wasn't on but, how could we appear to fire a motor?

Geoff Stocks and Bill Smith had an idea of fitting a micromotor with a compressed air supply and used talc to simulate the exhaust plume. Talc was soon abandoned in favour of compressed carbon dioxide which gave a realistic exhaust, especially after someone (I forget who) suggested fitting a light bulb inside the motor.

Denis Mansell provided a cabinet with a firing circuit and safety plug and, with the aid of a transient recorder, a simulated pressure-time curve was plotted out on graph paper.

At the show it fooled even the experts who knew it couldn't be a real motor but couldn't work out how it was done. It was a great success with the children too who kept Eric Baker busy on the last day of the show getting through several cylinders of gas and a few pads of graph paper.

Imagine our surprise when Ron Treadgold, Denis Mansell and I spotted the cabinet recently in P708 still with its 3 inch motor looking as good as the day that Norman Foster made it. If it can be made to work again it would be an ideal acquisition for the gunpowder museum. Apologies to anyone involved who I haven't mentioned but it was a really good team effort involving very many people.

Bryan Howard

### IN MEMORIAM

We have been advised of the following losses:

Stanley Bennett

Stan passed away on November 20th last year.

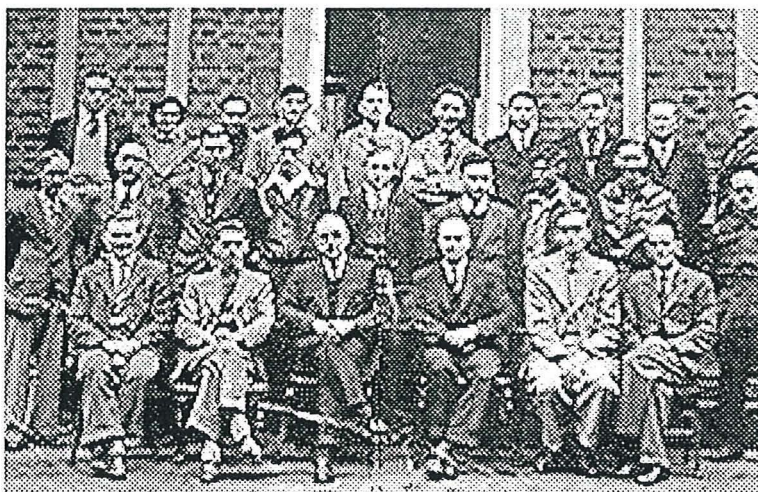
Dai Matthias

We are sorry to hear that our report on Dai's health in the last issue was premature. Dai passed away shortly after Christmas.

Ted Hitch

Ted died in November last year at the grand age of 94, being one of our oldest members. He had been housebound for some time but always took a keen interest in Touchpaper and the developments going on at Waltham Abbey

*We were advised of the death of Ted Hitch by his daughter-in-law who has kindly sent us some interesting documents and photographs that Ted had collected. The photo below was taken outside the RGPF Main Lab in 1943.*



### NOTE:

AS WE WENT TO PRINT AN ITEM ON TED WAS RECEIVED AND THIS CAN BE FOUND LATER IN THIS ISSUE UNDER 'STOP PRESS'

Ron Treadgold Mrs Taylor ? Allen Jack Hilling Jack Seaward Cyril Povey Phil Lodge George Sewell Harry Jakes Paul Neville

Norman Kember Norman Blay John Costen George Whitbread Les Cole Larry Larner Jim Jeacocke Harry Burr Cyril Barnett

Percy Smith ? Cleary Alec Baines Percy Knapman ? Haigh Ted Hitch

*(Sorry if the definition is poor but this was a much creased photocopy. It has been electronically enhanced as much as possible and we hope at least most individuals can recognise themselves)*

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# WALTHAM ABBEY ROYAL GUNPOWDER MILLS 'NORTH SITE'

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At long last the National Lottery grant has now been received and the development is swinging into high gear. As Chairman of the proposed Friends Association I am now on the board of the Operating Charitable Company and attended my first meeting on 21st February. I found the way in down Powdermill Lane without any problem but the journey from there up to the Library was challenging. When I worked on the North Site it was always difficult to keep down to the speed limit but there were no such problems that day it being a rough track winding past the old boiler house, over the Bailey Bridge to park in a rough area where the telephone exchange used to be. The meeting was held in the main Library Building which, surprisingly, seems to be in a fair condition.

The main board meeting was preceded by an Extra-ordinary General Meeting to consider a proposal that the name be changed to 'The Waltham Abbey Royal Gunpowder Mills Company Limited'. This was agreed and I shall henceforth refer to the company as the WARGM.

Although things have appeared, from the outside, to have stagnated while awaiting the Lottery grant it soon became clear to me that an enormous amount of work has been going on in preparation for the actual transfer of funds. A number of subcommittees have been very

active in preparing plans and defining responsibilities. The subcommittees are: Revenue, Site Management, Curatorial, Education and Community Group (under which the Friends Association will operate).

These are non-executive committees, reporting to an Executive Board. An important first step will be the appointment of a Chief Executive to manage the day to day business of the Company; adverts have been placed in the national press and a process of selection is in progress.

In addition to the Operating Company there is a trust company (WATCO) who oversee development of the site. This body comprises representatives of the Operating Company and other external experts nominated by national bodies. WATCO is not to be involved in the day to day management of the site, rather their role is to provide care to the monument and the SSSIs in the long term. This function is supported by their having an endowment that, in normal circumstances, should be sufficient to maintain and preserve the site (albeit at a minimal level) independently of any operational activity. They are also obliged to ensure that the activities of the Operating Company do not conflict with this duty of care to the site.

I will continue to keep you all fully informed of developments.

Norman Paul

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For your information the composition of the two companies are:

## WARGM

Mr Peter Adams	Mr M J Lowe (sec)
Mr J H Bowles	Mrs Ann Miller
Prof. Alan Crocker	Mr N C Paul
Mr J C R Earle	Mr Don Spinks (Chair)
Mr K L Eden	Mr J W C Tear
Mrs Karen Eyre	Mr M Ward
Dr G Hooper	Mr I Abbey
Ms P Jones	Mr R Denham
Mr T Knapp	Mr P Pennell
Mr T Limna	Mr R Wallace

## WATCO

Dr B Buchanan
Mr T Knapp
Mr T Limna (Chair)
Mr M J Lowe (sec)
Mr S Norris
Mr D Spinks
Cllr. R Wallace



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# WALTHAM ABBEY ROYAL GUNPOWDER MILLS FRIENDS ASSOCIATION

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## 'THE WAY AHEAD'

A proposal has been put to the WARGM Operating Company for the formation of an Association of Friends which will give certain benefits to its members although it is envisaged that an annual subscription will be necessary. Full agreement has yet to be negotiated but the salient points are:

### Aims

To bring together people sharing a common interest in the Waltham Abbey Royal Gunpowder Mills. Such interest may include historical, archaeological, social and technical matters associated with the site.

To promote the development of the site and, where possible, to render assistance in the development and running of the WARGM.

### Eligibility

Any person having a special interest in the WARGM and/or an interest in the history of explosives production may join the Association.

### Finance

The Association should be run on a self supporting basis but may require the financial backing of the Operating Company as a contingency measure.

An initial annual subscription of £7 per head is recommended.

Consideration should be given to a joint/family subscription of £10 and a reduced subscription for senior citizens.

### Organisation

No formal committee is envisaged but such officers may be appointed, by the Chairman, as may be deemed necessary. The Chairman shall report directly to the Operating Company and shall be responsible to the Company for the running of the Association.

### Special Events

A self financing annual reunion of members will be held and the possibility of special day visits to the WARGM site should be explored.

### Working Parties

From time to time the services of Association Members may be available to assist in the work of the WARGM.

### Other Benefits to Association Members

The Operating Company may wish to consider a reduced entrance fee to the WARGM for Association Members.

### Newsletter

Touchpaper shall become the official newsletter of the Association and will continue to be published quarterly and circulated to all members of the Association. An A5 printed format is recommended and the cost of this should be met through the annual subscription. The *ad hoc* organisation currently registered for Touchpaper, consisting mainly of ex-employees of the RGPF and Waltham Abbey Research Establishments. This body of people will form the initial core of the Association.

~~~~~  
If a satisfactory agreement can be reached this will put the current Touchpaper and its membership on a more secure basis for the longer term future. This is especially encouraging in view of my forthcoming retirement when access to the 'current system' will no longer be available. A further issue in the current style will be produced in June, after which I hope to be able to start publishing in the new format, starting from September.

I hope that you will all join the new 'Association' of which further details will be given in the next issue.

Norman Paul

Chairman: FriendsAssociation

# SOUTH SITE NEWS

A number of members have responded to a call by Geoff Hooper to assist with the identification and cataloguing of artefacts on the South Site which are to be transferred to the North Site for inclusion in the Gunpowder museum. These include Denis Mansell, Ron Treadgold and the indefatigable Bryan Howard who has submitted the following article:

## LOOK OUT! THERE'S AN 'OAKWOOD' ABOUT !

Yes, the Oakwood lorries continue to thunder their way through South Site on their way to RSAF via Quinton Gate. Speed ramps have been installed next to the Dutch Barn and X-Ray facility in P1 and a further set of three along the stretch of road from the P2 Office Block to the hairpin bend in Centre Way.

Then there's 'Button', the demolition contractor smashing in the roofs of buildings ready for 'Thermal Remediation' (burning!). The Dutch Barn was ripped up and cast to one side as a tangled mess of steelwork (Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction have got nothing on these boys). It lends a whole new meaning to the word 'button-holing'.

As buildings get smashed another firm are committed to felling every tree on site. Large trunks of felled beech, alder etc. can be seen in front of P704, M343 and next to the Lower Island Way gate. Large mounds of chippings from the branch gobbler are piled up near the motorway on the waste ground beside the boiler house. Brushwood which is not suitable for mulching is being burned on the ground at the back of P1 Small Scale so that there is a continual rain of fine ash which has been seen as far away as Quinton Gate on occasion.

Dodging in between the Oakwood lorries, the tree fellers and the concrete gobblers is the bat man, Bob Stebbings, who was featured on Radio 4. I'm surprised that any bats are left; they won't get a wink of sleep with all the noise. In addition to all this there are about 60 small firms still trading and their vans speed around the roads like there's no tomorrow (which for them there isn't!).

We've found it a stimulating experience collecting artefacts for the Gunpowder museum under these conditions. As we wander about the site we ask ourselves, is a burnt-out PSO now a thermally remediated grade 6?

Bryan Howard

St. Valentine's Day (massacre!)

*OUR SINCERE THANKS TO BRYAN FOR ALL THE WORK HE IS DOING ON OUR BEHALF*

## VOLUNTEERS WANTED

With the clearance taking place on south site it is imperative that the artefacts identified be moved to a place of safety and this is a cry for volunteers to assist. Unfortunately this work cannot be done at weekends since RO insist that their representative be on site which means only during the week.

Bryan has been asked to act as coordinator for working parties, which will be needed very soon.

Volunteer workers will also be needed on the North Site and we hope to build a register of all those willing to help. Once again, Bryan has agreed to act as a focus and coordinator for working groups but we desperately need volunteers.

If you are willing and able to help in any way please let me know soon as possible. I will need to know what days of the week (including Saturdays and Sundays) you may be available and contact telephone number(s).

You can write, phone or fax the information to me in the usual way.

Norman Paul

## 1998 REUNION

Advance notice is hereby given of this year's Reunion.

It will be held on Friday 9th October

at the

Royal British Legion Hall

Sewardstone Street

Waltham Abbey

SEE NEXT (JUNE) ISSUE FOR BOOKING DETAILS

### notice of forthcoming seminar

## GUNPOWDER TECHNOLOGY

### The Manufacture of Gunpowder Chemical Explosives at Waltham Abbey

This seminar, organised by the Newcomen Society, will take place at the North Site on Saturday 25th April from 09.30 to 16.00 and will include a tour of the site.

#### PROGRAMME

- 10.00 Brenda Buchanan - "Waltham Abbey Gunpowder Mills before Crown Control in 1787.  
11.00 Wayne Cocroft - "Waltham Abbey Royal Gunpowder Factory, 1787 - 1991;  
the Principal Technological Developments"  
12.15 Lunch  
13.00 Site Tour, guided by Wayne Cocroft (Field Officer of the Royal Commission on National  
Monuments in England) and Steven Chaddock (resident archaeologist and museums expert).  
15.00 General Discussion  
16.00 Depart

We are not sure whether this seminar is restricted to members of the Newcomen Society but if you wish for further details and booking contact: The Newcomen Society, Science Museum, London SW7 2DD

The cost is £12, including refreshments and numbers are limited.

It is hoped that this visit by the Newcomen Society will be the first of many such seminars at the site and helping to fulfil a key role of the WARGM as an educational centre.

STOP PRESS! (this page re-printed)

#### Ted Hitch

Ted who had lived in Lincolnshire for much of his retirement since 1967 died on Nov. 4th last year. He started work at RGPF in 1923 and was lab foreman over a number of us lab assistants who continued at the site until recent years. During the war Ted was often hard pressed trying to control a bunch of ill disciplined teenage/early 20's lads. The formation of a dad's army contingent was a cue for light humour. Ted reached the rank of captain, perhaps he just couldn't see himself as a 'Major Hitch!' After a spell at Bishopton he came back to Waltham where he worked until his retirement.  
Ron Treadgold.



## AT LAST - REMEMBERED!

*The following article was submitted by Bryn Elliott, a local historian, and relates to two explosions at the RGPF during the Second World War. The full article which appeared in the 'Battle Magazine' has been made available by the author and we hope to reproduce it in a future issue.*

Reference: After the Battle Magazine No.93 p34 Royal Gun-Powder Mills Museum Trust

In 1996 I had the privilege to write an article for After the Battle magazine which related the tale surrounding the deaths of a number of civilian workers at the Royal Gun-Powder Factory, Waltham Abbey in 1940. These deaths were the result of two separate explosions occurring in the explosives manufacturing sections on January 18 and April 20, 1940. Other workers received high awards for their valour in saving further loss of life on both occasions.

As result of these incidents the remains of six men [Albert Lawrence, Charles Purkis, John Parkes, Frederick Keene, David Lewis and Thomas Galvin] were consigned to two adjoining graves in Waltham Abbey New Cemetery, Sewardstone Road. Due to the pressures of war neither grave was marked at the time and remained largely forgotten until the magazine article was prepared. In 1996 there was an attempt to trace relatives of the six dead men without success. The dead were from the local area, Enfield, Edmonton, Waltham and Walthamstow. Four others that died lie in marked graves.

In co-operation with the Ministry of Defence and the Royal Powder Mills proposes that the graves will be marked with the appropriate headstones. The stones are already prepared and it is likely that a dedication ceremony will take place in April - the 58th Anniversary of the second explosion.

This event is primarily to put right an omission brought about by the pressures of war, but it will also inevitably publicise the Royal Gunpowder Mills museum project. It is hoped that relatives of the six, and any others who knew them in life will be present at this ceremony.

### EXPLOSION 1

Albert George Lawrence, of Albury Road, Enfield Wash, a married man with four children. His wife was a local with family [Collins] living in Lancaster Road.

Charles Frederick Purkis, of Forest View Road, Walthamstow, a married man with one child..

John Nathaniel Parkes, of Charlton Road, Edmonton, a married man with one [four] child[ren].

These three were buried in a single coffin 7th March 1940.

Elsewhere - in marked graves:-

Albert Kelman, of Brecon Road, Ponders End, a married man with three children was buried at Enfield Highway Cemetery. Wife was Doris.

John Edgar Robinson, of Bowood Road, Green Street, Enfield Highway, a married man, wife Rose, three children. He was buried in his family grave at Abney Park Cemetery, Stoke Newington

### EXPLOSION 2

Francis Frederick Keene, of 223 Galliard Road, Edmonton, married to Kathleen Jesse Keene.

David James Lewis, of 51 Park Street, Clydach Vale, Rhonda, single.

Thomas Galvin, of 52 Kynaston Road, Enfield, married to Maude Ethel Kate.

On 10th June 1940, these three were buried in a single casket in Waltham Abbey New Cemetery, Sewardstone Road.

Elsewhere - in marked graves:-

Norman Henry "Harry" Monk, of 9 New Road Estate, Waltham Abbey, single. Buried Waltham Abbey New Cemetery, Sewardstone Road.

Leslie Leonard Raby, of Waltham Cross. He was buried close to Harry Monk in the New Cemetery, Sewardstone Road. There is a stone and relatives are traced.

Bryn Elliott Waltham Abbey February 1998

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*Subsequent to receiving this article we have now been informed that this event will take place on April 20th. A dedication service will be held at the Waltham Abbey Church at 3pm, followed by a ceremony at the Sewardstone Road Cemetery attended by friends and relatives.*

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# MISCELLANY

## THE SURVIVORS!

We were born before television, before penicillin, polio shots, frozen food, photocopiers, plastic, contact lenses, videos, frisbees, credit cards, split atoms, laser beams and ball point pens, dishwashers, conditioners, drip dry clothes ... and before men walked on the moon. We got married first and then lived together (How Quaint!) We thought 'Fast Food' was what you ate during Lent and a 'Big Mac' was an outsize raincoat. We existed before house husband, computer dating, dual careers and when a 'meaningful relationship' meant getting along with cousins and 'sheltered accommodation' was where you waited for the bus (remember buses?)

We were before day care centres, group homes and disposable nappies. We never heard of FM radio, tape decks, electric typewriters, artificial hearts, word processors, yoghurt and young men wearing earrings. For us 'time-sharing' meant togetherness, a 'chip' was a piece of wood or potato, 'hardware' meant nuts and bolts and 'software' wasn't a word.

Before 1940 'Made in Japan' meant junk, the term 'making out' referred to how well you did in your exams. 'A Stud' was something that fastened a collar to a shirt and 'going all the way' meant staying on the bus to the depot. In our day cigarette smoking was fashionable, grass was mown, coke was kept in the coal house, a joint was a piece of meat you had on Sundays and pot was something you cooked in. Rock music was a grandmother's lullaby, a gay person was the life and soul of the party while aids just meant beauty treatment or help for someone in trouble.

We, who were born before 1940, must be a hardy bunch when you think of the ways in which the world has changed and the adjustments we have had to make. No wonder we are sometimes confused and there is a generation gap - BUT - WE HAVE SURVIVED !!

Now a simple test for all readers who remember pounds shillings and pence; you younger persons can have a go as well but you will be at a disadvantage.

|         |                      | £  | s  | d     | Why ? |
|---------|----------------------|----|----|-------|-------|
| 1       | A STONE              |    |    |       |       |
| 2       | AN OLD BICYCLE       |    |    |       |       |
| 3       | MAN'S NAME           |    |    |       |       |
| 4       | SINGING VOICE        |    |    |       |       |
| 5       | KIND OF PET PIG      |    |    |       |       |
| 6       | LEATHER WORKER       |    |    |       |       |
| 7       | PART OF MONKEY'S LEG |    |    |       |       |
| 8       | SUN, MOON, PLUTO     |    |    |       |       |
| 9       | ROYAL HEADDRESS      |    |    |       |       |
| 10      | 50% OF PANTIES       |    |    |       |       |
| 11      | HIT REPEATEDLY       |    |    |       |       |
| 12      | UNWELL SEA CREATURE  |    |    |       |       |
| TOTAL = |                      | 32 | 17 | 8 1/2 |       |

ANSWERS IN THE NEXT ISSUE

PROPOSED LOGO FOR THE WARGM

