

# Touchpaper

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## THE WALTHAM ABBEY NEWSLETTER

June 1998

ISSUE 26



### EDITORIAL

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This will be the last Touchpaper in the current format and under the ad hoc arrangements. The issue in September will be the first newsletter of the Friends Association.

This will require you to formally register as a member of the Association and pay an annual subscription. A registration form for this purpose is enclosed with this issue. I hope that you will support the new arrangement and that we can continue to keep in touch.

For those who wish to contact me please note that I retire on July 30th and that any correspondence etc. after that date should be to my home address.

This issue also contains details of the Reunion in October for which I hope to be able to include a site visit.

Norman Paul  
Editor

TOUCH BYTES  
readers News and Views

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developments

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### PLEASE NOTE: NEW TOUCHPAPER PUBLICATION ADDRESS

24 Anglesey Close  
Bishop's Stortford  
HERTS  
CM23 4PE

Phone: 01279 465568  
Fax: as above BUT not yet installed  
e-mail: npaul24@aol.com

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# TOUCH BYTES

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*With the impending changes to Touchpaper I hope to continue this section on news of past colleagues under the new heading of "Colleagues Corner".*

*Having said that there has been very little news in this quarter with just one article received. Are you all leading very quiet and uneventful lives or are you all too busy to put pen to paper?*

## **Another Fine Mess .....**

Bryan Howard's story of the 'rocket motor' at Farnborough reminded me of another, and rather different, 'rocket motor' incident, this time at RAE Aberporth.

Sea Dart had started acceptance trials, but at the first guided firing, guidance had been lost immediately on launch and the self-destruct button had had to be pressed. Investigation had found that the launch blast had displaced a waveguide component in the radar module. Modifications were made, but the failure led to demands for further testing to prove the redesign. Faced with the costs of an unknown number of further firings, the project team approached ERDE 'E' Branch asking if we could produce an explosive simulant which might be used to test the radar's blast resistance without resort to live firings (we had previously produced a very successful simulant for Bloodhound Mk2 after it too had blasted its launch control post and gone AWOL).

So opportunity was taken at the next ballistic firing (radar switched on but inoperative) to record the Sea Dart launch blast and we set about the job of designing the simulant charge. The waveform was very different to that from Bloodhound, and it became clear that a propellant device would be required rather than the detonating cord devices we had used before. P2 Branch came up with a device comprising two 'J' rounds screwed end to end (naturally dubbed a 'JJ' round). It was designed to be stood vertically, nozzle upwards and prevented from moving by being clamped in an angle-iron framework. A couple of these were tested at ERDE and shown to generate the desired noise spectrum. Thus prepared we returned to Aberporth and eventually set up the 'JJ' for the first trial firing.

The Sea Dart platform on the cliffs at Aberporth comprised a reinforced concrete deck on which the launcher and the radar module were mounted, and below the deck was a control room housing the radar control equipment (mimicking the proposed shipboard installation). Rather to our surprise, a group of smartly uniformed mid-ranking Naval officers turned up for the trial and were duly installed in this control room. The steel door to the control room was closed, the launch platform cleared and the countdown proceeded (under the control of an RAE Range Controller in a separate cabin above and behind the platform, where he had a good view of the proceedings). At the end of the countdown, instead of the expected smooth roar, there was a loud explosion, followed by the controller's voice booming out over the Tannoy - "It's taken off! - the bloody thing's taken off!" We came out from our shelter on the platform to see that indeed there was no sign of our JJ round. We found the remains of it later - down on the foreshore, but while we were still recovering from the shock the steel door to the control room opened and out spilled a group of very disconcerted Naval officers, covered in paint flakes and spalled concrete dust! None of them was injured and they all took it in the finest traditions of the service. But the sight none of us who witnessed it will ever forget was the sight of the same group arriving next morning for the second trial, resplendent again in immaculate uniforms - except for their caps, which they had all forsaken in favour of smart, new, white, construction workers' hard hats!

Jim Hawkins

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**Maisie Corthine** - We have heard from Sylvia Krelle that Maisie died recently and that Bill is in a nursing home. No other details are to hand at this time.

Incidentally, Sylvia has moved from Clacton back to Waltham Abbey.

We have also heard that Pat and George Fuller have moved from Cheshunt to Sudbury in Suffolk.

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**DEADLINE DATE FOR NEXT ISSUE:**

**14th August '98**

**PLEASE NOTE NEW CONTACT ADDRESS ON FRONT COVER**

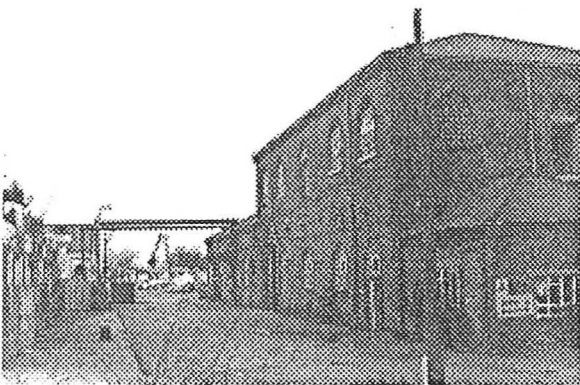
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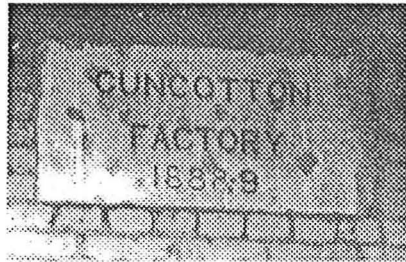
## SOUTH SITE DEVELOPMENT

The final go-ahead for a £40m development of the South Site has been given with permission for 325 homes and around 750,000 sq ft office, warehouse and industrial space. There will be a new link road to the site from J26 of the M25. The rest of the site will be passed to the Lee Valley Regional Park for development as a country park and conservation area.

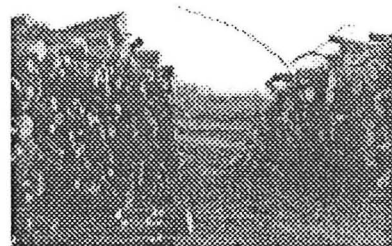
The majority of buildings on South Site have now been cleared by the demolition contractors as the 'before and after' pictures here show. Most of you will recognise the old Stores Building which was part of the original guncotton factory.



One feature of this building was the unique metal frame windows and one of these has been saved for posterity, as has the stone plaque that was situated on the east end of the building.



Here is an unique view from Black Ditch, looking north towards the M25. Previously the trees were in the way; where have they all gone? see picture on right!



*Thanks to Ron Treadgold for the loan of photographs*

# HISTORICAL ARTEFACTS

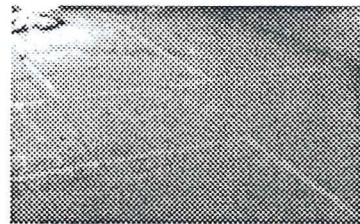
A number of members have been busy identifying and preserving many artefacts on the South Site for transfer to the museum and as the picture of two of our most intrepid explorers (Denis Mansell and Bryan Howard) shows.



## GLEANINGS FROM SOUTH SITE:

Some 500 items of historical interest have been collected, catalogued, decontaminated, photographed, fitted with a RO tag and boxed ready for shipment to North Site. One of the oldest item is the cast iron plate inscribed 'WH Allen 1892' just beaten by the "Guncotton Factory 1888-89" plaque from the wall of the old stores. Perhaps the biggest surprises relate to the old railway. Terry Stemman presented us with a framed map of the South Site system. The railway controller's office was also uncovered on top of a mound near P710 magazine - it had been hidden for years by bushes!

It's all been a race against time and we have lost a few things where buildings were trashed before they could be recovered. We almost lost the elephant hide floor from M348 magazine, wood was piled in ready for 'thermal remediation'. Removing about 2 square metres, prising out large copper tacks and cutting the stitching was hot work!



Elephant Hide Floor M 348 Magazine

Then a small section of track was reported opposite the boiler house. Further excavation revealed a complete set of points. The biggest surprise came when the asphalt floor of N562 was removed to reveal a rail track buried in the concrete floor of the tea room.

Large items such as the Roundhouses, the RDX building and the Box and Tray Store have already been taken to North Site by Bob Bray. Bob is under contract to the museum and with his help and enthusiasm we have managed to collect all of the heavier items.

Finally, a word of thanks to all RO staff on South Site who have helped to collect an interesting array of artefacts. Howard Prosser from RO Chorley has been a vital energiser. Thanks especially to the team of retired geriatric helpers including; George Savill, Ron Treadgold, Denis Mansell and Dave Stanners (ex-MOD Lands).

Bryan Howard

*We record our sincere thanks to Bryan and all those involved*



## MEMORIAL SERVICE

In the last Touchpaper there was an article entitled "At Last - Remembered!" The article related the tale of two explosions that occurred at Waltham Abbey North site during the last world war. Many years ago my father told me that one of our relatives had been killed in an explosion at the Abbey during the war, although after all these years I could not remember his name or how he was related. After reading the article I looked through the list of casualties and found a John Nathaniel Parks of Charlton Road Edmonton listed. Although initially I could not see the connection, the name rang a bell and the area he lived in was correct, in that my father's family have lived in the Edmonton area for many years. The name was familiar because my father was interested in genealogy and over a number of years had compiled a comprehensive family tree. During his researches the name John Nathaniel had cropped up regularly. That evening I dug out the family tree, traced it through and found John Parkes listed as the son of my grand mother's sister i.e. a cousin to my father. Although the link to our side of the family is rather tenuous, in those days families lived much closer together and my father knew him well and had seen him shortly before the accident. I phoned around some relatives to see if any one was still in contact with the Parkes but was disappointed to find that contact had been lost during the Fifties when they moved from the area.

The article said that six of the workers had been buried to two unmarked graves in Waltham Abbey New Cemetery. However it has been proposed that the graves should be marked and arrangements have been made for two head stones to be erected. A dedication service will take place on 20 April, to commemorate the 58th anniversary of the second explosion and the author of the article, Bryn Elliott, has asked for any family members or friends to come along. I have been in touch with Bryn and told him that three other relatives and myself will attend.

Bob Cook.

The remains of six factory workers at the Waltham Abbey Gunpowder Mills who were killed in explosions in 1940 have finally been given marked graves. At that time, due to the pressures of war their remains were buried in a casket but no headstone was erected to mark the place. As they were civilian workers they were not recognised by the War Graves Commission and earlier attempts by relatives to have the graves marked met with no success. Now, 58 years on, their resting place is now marked.

A special memorial service took place on Monday 20th April in the Abbey Church followed by a ceremony at the Sewardstone Road Cemetery during which the new headstones were blessed by Canon The Rev. Patrick Hobson.

The service was attended by the men's relatives with representatives from the Ministry of Defence, the Waltham Abbey Royal Gunpowder Mills and town and district councils. Tributes were also paid to two other blast victims, Norman Monk and Leslie Raby, whose graves in the cemetery were already marked.

Thanks are due to local historian, Bryn Elliott, whose article in the magazine 'After the Battle' gave the initial impetus in the campaign and to the magazine itself which offered to pay for the headstones.



# MISCELLANY

Here are the answers to the 'Survivors' Quiz in our last issue.

		£	s	d	Why ?
1	A STONE	14	0	0	1 stone = 14 lbs
2	AN OLD BICYCLE			11/4	Penny Farthing
3	MAN'S NAME		1	0	bob (shilling)
4	SINGING VOICE	10	0	0	tenor (tenner)
5	KIND OF PET PIG	1	1	0	guinea
6	LEATHER WORKER			6	tanner
7	PART OF MONKEY'S LEG			1/2	Ape Knee
8	SUN, MOON, PLUTO			3/4	Three Far Things
9	ROYAL HEADDRESS		5	0	crown
10	50% OF PANTIES		10	0	Half a Nicker
11	HIT REPEATEDLY	1	0	0	pound
12	UNWELL SEA CREATURE	6	0	0	sick squid
TOTAL =		32	17	8 1/2	

Some of you found one or two clues to be a little difficult but many of you managed to get them all right - including some of our much younger readers!

## SILLY BITS FROM THE INTERNET:

*In case you wonder what vitally important messages flash along the super electronic information highway, here is a typical sample:*

"Did you hear about the Buddhist who refused his dentist's Novocaine injection?"  
 "He wanted to transcend dental medication."

A group of chess enthusiasts were standing in the hotel lobby discussing their recent tournament win when the hotel manager told them push off. When asked why he said "I can't stand chess nuts boasting in an open foyer"

Two atoms bump into one another. One says "Are you all right?" "No, I've lost an electron" "Are you sure?" "Yes! I'm positive!"

A three legged dog goes into a saloon bar in the old West, He sidles up to the bar and announces "I'm looking fo the man who shot my paw."

*There's more, much more, but I can't go on - they get worse and worse! Ed.*



# 1998 REUNION

This year the Reunion will be held in the;  
**Royal British Legion Hall (off Sewardstone Street)**  
**on Friday 9th October starting at 12.00**

**Cost: £6 per head** (including a buffet)

A bar will be available for those unable to drink tea or coffee.

## SITE VISIT

We are trying to arrange a visit to the North Site and further details of this will be sent to all those interested.

## AGM MEETING

Either in conjunction with a site visit or at the reunion we will be holding a short meeting as an inaugural AGM of the Friends Association to adopt a constitution and to elect officers and an executive committee.

Full details will be sent to all those registered for the new Friends Association.

PLEASE BOOK FOR THE REUNION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE GIVING:

Your Name (s) and contact telephone number

Please send your remittance to:

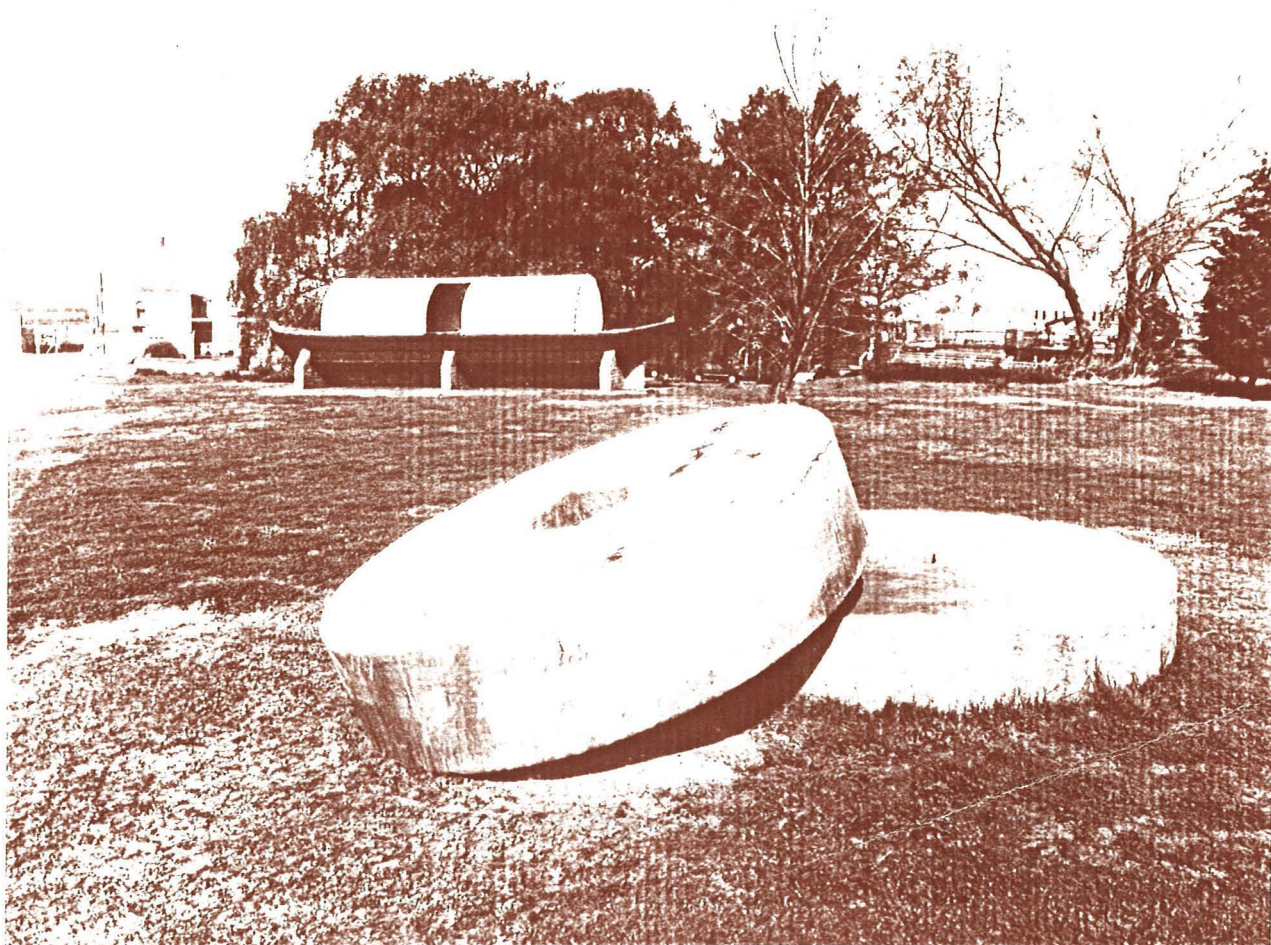
N Paul  
24 Anglesey Close  
Bishop's Stortford  
Herts  
CM23 4PE

Cheques should be made payable to:

Waltham Abbey Royal Gunpowder Mills  
Friends Association

**NOTE: YOU CAN SEND A SINGLE COMBINED PAYMENT FOR BOTH THE REUNION AND FOR YOUR FRIENDS ASSOCIATION SUBSCRIPTION**

**SEE ACCOMPANYING REGISTRATION FORM**



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