

'TOUCHPAPER' ©

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# Touchpaper

The Newsletter of the  
WALTHAM ABBEY ROYAL GUNPOWDER MILLS  
FRIENDS ASSOCIATION



December  
1998

## OFFICERS OF THE FRIENDS ASSOCIATION

### Chairman:

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

tel: 01279 465568

### Secretary:

Richard Penfold  
10 Thaxted Way  
Waltham Abbey  
Essex EN9 1LQ

tel: 01992 712623

### Treasurer:

Jim Burgess  
11 Quendon Drive  
Waltham Abbey  
Essex EN9 1LG

tel: 01992 713079

ALL ENQUIRIES RELATED TO THIS NEWSLETTER  
SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO :

**Norman Paul**  
**Touchpaper Editor**

24 Anglesey Close  
Bishop's Stortford  
Herts CM23 4PE

tel/fax: 01279 465568  
e-mail: NPAUL24@aol.com

NOTE: Deadline date for submissions for  
the next issue is 13th February 1999



## EDITORIAL



In this pre- Christmas issue I have tried to include an element of festive fun in the form of some easy puzzles and the odd cartoon as well as the on-going news and special articles.

On the subject of articles I have been pleased to receive input from the readership and hope that this continues in the coming year. So! New Year Resolution number one is - Input for Touchpaper. It doesn't have to be a lengthy erudite article or a very clever puzzle. Just a few lines or observations telling us what you think or want- just so we know you are still out there. We might even be persuaded to give a small prize for the best article or letter although that seems a desperate measure.

My thanks to all those who have assisted in the formation of the Friends Association which I hope will become the mainstay of voluntary effort and a valuable resource to the project, both in its development and ultimate running.

*Wishing you all a very Happy Christmas  
and looking forward to a fruitful New Year.*

Norman Paul Editor



## FRIENDS ASSOCIATION WORKING PARTIES

As we near the end of 1998 I felt it would be worthwhile reviewing what has been achieved so far and what remains to be done on preserving and recording the large number of recovered artefacts.

A total of 528 items of historic interest were recovered from the South Site together with a further 93 originating from Powfoot and Chorley and stored on the Site for 'safe keeping'. Each item was logged, tagged, photographed and taken to Building P708 (before it was demolished) ready for shipping to North Site. All items were decontaminated, either by rigorous washing and inspection or by 'Thermal Remediation'. (We just loved that expression).

The working party consisted of Ron Treadgold, George Savill, Denis Mansell and yours truly. We were much energised and aided by Howard Prosser from RO Chorley who spent, on average, two days each a week on site for about five months.

Our thanks go to him and the rest of the Royal Ordnance staff on South Site; including Alan Heath and Terry Stemman. They discovered all sorts of unusual objects of which we were unaware. Lynne Lennard of RO also helped by slaving away on a hot computer to produce lists of all the items saved.

While we provided the manpower the WARGM Company gave us good moral support in the shape of Geoff Hooper who arranged the moving of large items by Bob Bray, under contract. Bob's men also carefully disassembled two Nitrocellulose Wash Houses, the RDX Building and M349 (the old 'Box and Tray Store'). These buildings are now on North Site in the old Boiler House awaiting re-assembly on a suitable site.

The smaller artefacts now reside in what was the Building Works Stores and the first task was to separate items from the two Sites. Outside, on the hard standing where the Carpenter's Shop used to be, are some larger objects, some of which need to be put under cover before the snows arrive!

Further work parties have since been organised for the next major task of cataloguing and preserving the artefacts from the North Site which, although not as urgent as saving South Site artefacts, barely ahead of the demolition developers, remains a mammoth task.

Bryan Howard Friends Work Party Organiser

[2]



## ARTEFACT IDENTIFICATION or EDUCATING ARCHAEO.....

During the decontamination of the North Site literally thousands of artefacts were recovered and are currently stored, in boxes, in the old Building Works Stores building. Each item now has to be recorded, numbered and bagged and placed on shelving. The most difficult part of the process comes in identifying, if at all possible, what each item is or was used for. Some are easy and some are not!



*Andrew Passmore*

*He really hates this picture  
but we put it in anyway*

The North Site's archaeological assistant, Andrew Passmore (hence the title above 'Educating Archae.. Andrew!') is doing his best but does require the input and more intimate knowledge of past employees to assist in identification. This does not exclude newer members who did not work at the Establishments as there is still the task of cataloguing and recording the many items. This work is on-going and is expected to take many months. At the moment you can't see the floor for boxes!

### MORE VOLUNTEERS REQUIRED

Up until now work parties have taken place once or twice a month on Fridays but, if we get enough volunteers we hope to hold them on Mondays and Fridays and to increase the frequency. Regular attenders have been, Bryan Howard, Denis Mansell, Ron Treadgold and Norman Paul with the recent addition of Dave Sims. We are planning an additional party for a Monday for those who cannot make Fridays. If you are willing and able to help please contact the organiser, Bryan Howard, 10 Lea View, Waltham Abbey (tel: 01992 760912).

### ADDITIONAL COLLECTIONS

Apart from sorting out items currently on site there is yet more Waltham items to be collected from elsewhere. First, there are 150 items currently stored at Westcott, including 14 apprentice's models, 52 folders of photographs and 41 fire appliances including the cast iron fire alarm pillars.

Then there are all the items still at Fort Halstead, including the Powder Barge, Explosives Truck and Sundial when there is suitable storage space.

We haven't yet considered other RO sites that 'plundered' Waltham in 1989 and may not need the item now.

It looks as if 1999 will be another busy year!

[3]



## ASSOCIATION NEWS

### FRIENDS AGM & SITE VISIT

The inaugural AGM of the Association was held on site on Friday 13th October at which 58 members attended. The Constitution (as circulated to all members) was adopted with the following amendments:

2. Objects ii) "museum" changed to "National Interpretive Centre"

7. Management i) "four other" changed to "five other"

The following officers and committee were elected:

Norman Paul (Chairman), Jim Burgess (Treasurer), Richard Penfold (Secretary),

Bryan Howard (Work Party Organiser), David Manners, Dave Sims, Ernie Cooke and John Wright. Honorary Auditors elected from the membership were Martin Ives and Ron Atkins.

The meeting was followed by a tour of the site.

### REUNION

In the afternoon of the same day as the AGM a Reunion was held in the Royal British Legion Hall, Waltham Abbey, attended by 110 members and guests. This was a most enjoyable afternoon and our thanks go to the British Legion for the use of their facilities and for the provision of a first class buffet.

Although the majority of those attending were past workers it was gratifying to see some of our newer members at the event. We will be holding a reunion next year and details will appear in the June Issue.

### IN MEMORIAM

ALBERT BLACKFORD

Albert (Joe) Blackford who spent many years as a 'mate' in South Site Services passed away on 30th September aged 90 years.

ALAN HEXTALL

Alan passed away on 28th September aged 86 years. He started work at RGPF in April 1935 and, apart from the war years when he was transferred to ROF Bishopton, spent all his working life at Waltham (the last 25 years in P2 Section) retiring in 1978. As many readers will remember, Alan's first love was golf. He always carried his clubs in the car boot. Fridays, weather permitting, he was away sharpish to Whitewebbs.

## TOUCH BYTES

### READER'S NEWS

*Well! I'm still waiting for the flood of letters that I'm sure you're going to send any day now, together with those articles and other items of interest. Meanwhile the following have arrived:*

**Remember, Remember.....** Just to say how much I enjoyed the Reunion. I thought the venue and the catering were excellent. It was nice to see some of the old faces again, or perhaps I should say 'older faces', it's amazing how much some of them change during the course of the year and others never seem to change over the years.

If one recognised a face the next difficulty was dredging up the name, christian name maybe, surname with the second or third sighting, failing that a surreptitious look at the name badge became necessary.

I also enjoyed, what was for me, an educational walk round the North Site of which I know so little having spent all my time working on the South Site. A good day all round.

Stan Wills (South Site Machine Shop 1954 - 1980)

**An Appeal .....** David Sims remembers that there was a medal struck to commemorate the deaths of 6 workers in an explosion that occurred at the RGPF in the 1800's. This formed part of a collection stored in Walton House but mysteriously 'disappeared' when the building was refurbished in the early 1980's. David tells us that a number of replicas had been made, using copper filled epoxy resin, for a number of interested people. Does anybody out there remember this and has anyone still got one? I am sure it would be an interesting item for the project.

### ORAL HISTORY

Speaking to a number of older workers has prompted one of our members to volunteer to restart the Oral History Project. This project aims to record the experiences of past workers of the Establishment in the form of taped interviews. Ron Treadgold is very keen to get this off the ground and has volunteered to manage the project. If any member is interested in helping him or to have their voice and experiences recorded for posterity Ron will be very pleased to hear from you. In the first instance drop the Editor a line and he will put you in touch.

**DON'T FORGET THE DEADLINE OF FEBRUARY 13th  
FOR INCLUSION OF ARTICLES IN THE NEXT ISSUE  
DUE FOR PUBLICATION EARLY MARCH**

## ROYAL GUNPOWDER FACTORY WORKERS

### Living in Waltham Cross in 1891

Many of the workers at the Mills lived in the Waltham Cross area and, thanks to the work done by the Local History Group of the Lea Valley University of the Third Age, I had access to the 1891 census for Waltham Cross and Cheshunt. From this census I have been able to identify RGPF workers living in that area at the time. The area included Waltham New Town, Waltham Cross and then northwards about half a mile up the main High Road to the 'Old Pond' area of Cheshunt. The nearest housing west of the powder works is Holdbrook, renovated in the 1960's which was built on the original Waltham New Town development which local historians believe to have been developed in response to the growth of the RGPF when guncotton was introduced in the 1860's.

The other local large employer at the time was the Royal Small Arms factory at Enfield Lock. On the returns the initials RSAF are used to indicate small arms workers. At some point during the processing of returns someone had annotated the numerators entries with either Powder or Gun and there are some instances where the wrong allocation has been made. Another problem area is the Gun Cap Factory which employed many of the young women in the area. I have been unable to find which of the two larger factories it came under, or if indeed it was a separate establishment.

A total of 64 RGPF workers were identified, of which 7 appear to be explicitly connected with gunpowder and 3 with guncotton. There are 11 foremen and the manager of the smokeless powder factory and 30 described simply as labourers.

Christopher Hicks

Thanks to Chris who has also made a detailed analysis of the origins, relationships and marital status of those identified. If any member has relevant information from their family history we would be very pleased to add this to the survey.

A similar study of workers living in Waltham Abbey would be very valuable if anyone has access to records.

We would also like any further information on the Gun Cap Factory.

Editor

*The following page gives basic information extracted from the survey  
Apologies for the small type!*

### RGPF Workers from Waltham Cross - 1891 Census

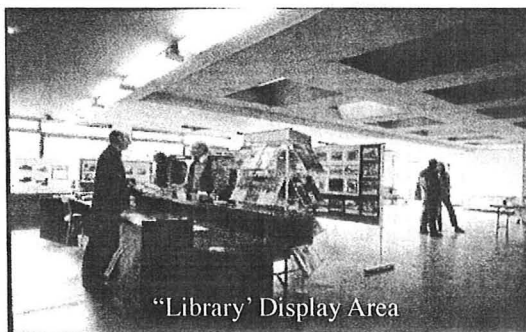
John Savil	Cold Hall Road	Labourer, Gun Cotton Factory
Frederick Weston	"	Labourer, Powder Mills
Edward Mitchell	"	Barge master, RGPF
Frederick Bell	"	Writer
John Furnham	"	Foreman
George Campbell	"	Foreman
Henry Askew	Harold Road	Engine Driver, RGPF
George Pearman	"	Labourer
George Gater	"	Stoker
Thomas Chalkley	"	Gunpowder Incorporator
Alfred Ackwill	"	Labourer
Samuel Berry	"	Labourer
John Hopkins	"	Labourer
George Ford	"	Labourer
Henry Sibley	"	Foreman
Joseph Stamp	Melbourne Road	Foreman, Powder Stores ?
George Smith	"	Corning House
John Elee	"	Fitter
James Larman	"	Labourer
William Savill	"	Labourer
Henry Ward	"	Storeman
Charles Kimberley	Sydney Road	RPF
Arthur Kimberley	"	RPF
Edward Brown	"	RPF
Fredk Wraighte	"	Foreman
James Thomson	"	Manager, Smokeless Powder Factory
George Partridge	Waltham Lane	Assembler RGPF ??
Samuel Berry	"	Foreman
Chas Allison	"	Foreman
Alfred Beales	"	Storeman
James Perry	"	Foreman
Sidney Perry	"	Stores Assistant
Alfred Greenland	Alexandra Road	Chargeman (Danger House)
Henry Perry	Albert Road	Storeman
Samuel Clapham	"	Cooper
Thomas Chapman	High Road WX	Gunpowder Maker
Benjamin White	"	Saltpetre Refiner
Peter Edwards	Swanfield Estate	Labourer, Powder Mills
Frederick Ison	Eleanor Road	Millman, Powder Mills
Henry Kirby	"	Labourer
Henry Hickson	"	Labourer
Phillip Watts	"	Labourer
Frank Watts	"	Labourer
Albert Wombwell	"	Labourer
William Crampton	"	Labourer
R Hickson	Queens Road	Labourer
J Brooker	"	Storeman
A Rulton	"	General Labourer
William Jordan	Eleanor Estate	Labourer
?	"	Storeman
Ernest King	"	Writer, Inspection Dept
Mark Pettitt	"	Labourer
Albert Miller	Park Lane	Labourer
Cyril Wraight	"	Artificer
Alfred Brace	?	Labourer
Louis Brace	?	Labourer
Japeth Parker	Middle Row WX	Powder Maker
James Morley	Trinity Lane	Powdermill Labourer
William Harris	"	Powdermill Hand
Albert W Leader	Crossbrook Street	Acting Foreman
Richard Sharpe	"	Stoker
Arthur P Andrews	College Road	Labourer
Thomas Jackson	Turners Hill	Labourer

## HERITAGE WEEKEND

In mid-September the North Site was open for visitors as part of the nationwide Heritage Days '98 programme. Unfortunately the notice for this was too late for our last issue although many of you were aware and were able to book.

Initially numbers for the open days was limited to 250 people but the response was so overwhelming that we were asked to provide additional tour guides from our membership. As a result the number of tours each day was doubled and over the 2 days some 850 people attended. The weekend was judged a great success, engendering much interest and support for the project. Arising from this our membership increased significantly. Many thanks to all those members who acted as both guides and on reception over the weekend.

In addition to the tours a number of stands were erected in the main Library 'Reading Room' by special interest groups and included a Friends Stand advertising our organisation. A number of talks were also arranged in the upstairs Lecture Theatre and notably, included an illustrated talk on the history of the site by Dr Geoff Hooper. Those attending over the weekend came from a very diverse section



"Library" Display Area

of the local populace and many from quite far away.

In addition to members from special interest groups and societies it especially pleasing to see significant numbers of local people, many of them with memories of relatives who had worked at the site many years ago. One of the special interest groups, from the Sealed Knot Society, came in costume and with a cannon, which unfortunately they were not allowed to fire.

## PICTURE GALLERY



Similar tours will be held in future; we will keep you informed as and when they are organised.

We shall of course, once again, be looking for volunteer help!

## PUBLICATIONS

### ADVERTISEMENTS

We have been given advance notice of two books to be published next year which readers may be interested in as they both relate to the area and both include specific historical information on the Waltham Abbey Site:

.....

The first of these is **London's Lea Valley** by **Jim Lewis** which chronicles the industrial and technological developments in the Lea Valley. A pre-publication flier is enclosed with this issue giving more details.

.....

The second book is an English Heritage publication by **Wayne D Cocroft** entitled **Dangerous Energy**. This book relates the archaeology of gunpowder and military explosives manufacture with special reference to the Royal Gunpowder Factory at Waltham Abbey. It details the development of gunpowder manufacture from the Middle Ages, the introduction of higher power explosives materials and rocket propellants. The social history of the industry, provision of worker accommodation, safety provisions, protective clothing and the employment of women in the early twentieth century is also recorded. A final section looks at planning, survey, preservation, conservation and presentation in relation to prospective future uses of explosives manufacturing sites.

A pre-publication 15% discount on the final price (~£30) is offered on advance orders placed before January 1999.

To order contact: English Heritage,  
PO Box 229,  
Northampton  
NN6 9RY

or telephone the credit card hotline on 01604 781163

Please remember to quote the Product Code XH20089
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## CHRISTMAS PUZZLE

IT'S REALLY EASY SO WE SUGGEST YOU SAVE IT FOR  
CHRISTMAS DAY AFTERNOON, OR BOXING DAY, WHEN YOU  
AREN'T FEELING QUITE SO BRIGHT

### CHRISTMAS CONNECTIONS

It's Christmas morning and 5 children, aged 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 have come down to open their presents. Unfortunately Father Christmas had a bit too much sherry the evening before and didn't put the labels on the presents.

There was a BIKE, a GAME, a TRAIN SET, a DOLL and a SCOOTER. The children's names were: JANET, JOHN, JAMES, JUDITH and JILL (their parents had a thing about the letter J) and they all had different coloured hair (please don't enquire too closely as to why this was) which was: BLOND, BLACK, BROWN, AUBURN and GINGER.

From the additional information below work out who got what, their ages and the colour of each child's hair.

6 year old JILL got the DOLL with BLOND hair to match her own.

JOHN had BROWN hair and got a SCOOTER but won't be allowed out in the street because he is the youngest.

JANET is older than JILL by 1 year and the eldest child was a girl.

The 8 year old with GINGER hair got the TRAIN SET

The 9 year old got the BIKE but didn't have AUBURN hair

JANET got the GAME and had AUBURN hair

*WARNING: Further puzzles will be much harder !*



## CHRISTMAS PUZZLE 2

WE WARNED YOU!  
THIS ONE'S HARDER

### HEADS & TAILS

Each of the words below have lost the first 2 and the last 2 letters which, for each word, are the SAME 2 LETTERS in the SAME ORDER.

-- U --      -- BL --      -- AT --      -- ALG --  
-- ING --      -- PTU --      -- FF --      -- STA --  
-- CA --      -- I --      -- IT --      -- RISCO --  
-- GIB --      -- QUI --      -- EEPI --      -- GLIC --  
-- XI --      -- OR --      -- IFI --      -- PPSA --

(Note: some answers are proper nouns)

IF THAT'S TOO HARD TRY THIS:

### SILLY CROSSWORD

#### ACROSS

1. A boxer's blow
2. .... and Judy
3. Suffolk ....., type of horse
4. A humorous magazine
5. Party drink in bowl

1	2	3	4	5
6				
7				
8				
9				

#### DOWN

1. Small round green veg
2. Female sheep (plural)
3. Egg layers
4. You could sail 7 of these
5. Often dropped by Cockneys

DESPERATELY NEEDED - SENSIBLE COMPETITIONS

This seasonal cartoon originally appeared in the Works Staff Magazine "Quickmatch" (the forerunner of Touchpaper) that was produced by the then Social & Sports Club. It was submitted by Ray Hackett, one of the Ministry of Defence Police officers, who made regular contributions. Back copies of Quickmatch are in our possession and represent a rich seam of articles, cartoons and reports that we intend to mine for future Touchpaper editions.



**MERRY CHRISTMAS**  
*and a*  
**HAPPY NEW YEAR**  
*to all our Readers*