

'TOUCHPAPER' ©  
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# Touchpaper

The Newsletter of the  
WALTHAM ABBEY ROYAL GUNPOWDER MILLS  
FRIENDS ASSOCIATION



June  
1999

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PLEASE NOTE: Deadline date for submissions for  
the next issue is 17th August 1999



## EDITORIAL



This issue marks the first full year of the Friends Association which means that it is time for renewal of membership subscriptions. A renewal form accompanies this issue and you are reminded that the 1999/00 subscription should be received no later than July to ensure your continued membership.

We shall also be holding a Reunion meeting to coincide with the Association AGM in October and a booking form is also included. A further reminder of this will appear in the September issue but, if you wish, you may send a combined cheque now for subscription and reunion.

In this issue we have the promised survey of RGPF workers from the 1891 Waltham Abbey census to complement the earlier survey in the Cheshunt area and a follow up to the Congreve Rocket article in the March issue.

I am always on the lookout for articles for future issues (*this seems to be a perennial problem for all editors*) and would appreciate some feedback from the readership. Any contributions of whatever nature will be most welcome.

Norman Paul Editor



## FRIENDS ASSOCIATION ACTIVITIES

Regular working parties continue to operate each Friday on the Site. Numbers have increased and we now have a regular band of 8 members carrying out much valuable work in reorganizing the main artefact store and continuing the identification and cataloguing of items. We are probably about three quarters of the way through the 3000 or so items and the next big job is to transfer the paperwork to a computer data base. Now that the weather is improving (well, less cold!) we are now starting some of the minor estate work which involves clearing some of the encroaching weeds and brambles around some of the buildings. Another job we have 'volunteered' for is the regular grass cutting of the garden surrounding the Director's House, which is due to become the administration headquarters later in the year.

All are welcome and there's plenty to do. We hope to expand the opportunities to hold additional work parties if more members are able to help.

Contact Bryan Howard at 10 Lea View, Waltham Abbey, 01992 760912

### Oral History Project:

This is being run by Ron Treadgold who urgently requires volunteers to record their work experiences on the site. It's quite a painless procedure and your experiences will be recorded for posterity. Contact Ron on 0181 529 5673 - he will be very pleased to hear from you.

### Friend's Day:

As an Association member you will have an opportunity to visit and renew acquaintances at the site on Sunday 11th July. You can gain entry by showing your membership card but **we do ask that you let us know if you intend visiting by returning the enclosed form.** As facilities are at present limited we suggest you bring a picnic.

### Other Activities:

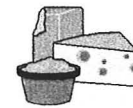
We continue to provide tour guides and give talks to a number of local societies to promote interest in the site development.

SEE INSIDE BACK COVER FOR CALENDAR OF EVENTS

## REUNION



**O**n October 8th we shall be holding our AGM at the Site. In the afternoon of the same day there will be a reunion for all members which will be held at the Royal British Legion Hall in Waltham Abbey commencing at midday.



A full buffet lunch will be served from about 1pm which is included in the cost of £6 per head (*no increase on last year!*).

This does not include any drinks from the bar but, as always, you will find the bar prices to be very reasonable.



**S**ince our annual subscriptions are now due you may wish to book your place at the reunion now and send one cheque to cover both, thus saving you postage.

A **separate booking form** is included with this issue as we know that many of you prefer to keep your copies of Touchpaper intact and may not have access to a photocopier.

If you prefer to wait a while before booking there will be another reminder in the September issue.

## WARGM PROGRESS

Success of the project is dependent on HLF grant and, as such, is subject to certain HLF objectives on which the grant was agreed. These were:

Stabilisation and protection of the monuments in the north of the site

Conservation of five designated heritage buildings and general repair of all significant buildings on the site

Protection and development of the natural landscape of the site and the existing SSSI

Provision of access to the site for the public and its interpretation for visitors

Within these objectives it would be possible, at one extreme, to spend money on improving buildings, the site infrastructure and the landscape and environment. This would provide a first class static exhibition of heritage buildings in attractive surroundings.

At the other extreme, work on buildings and the environment could be kept to a minimum and resources devoted to up-to-date, state of the art exhibition and show with first class facilities to meet all visitor needs.

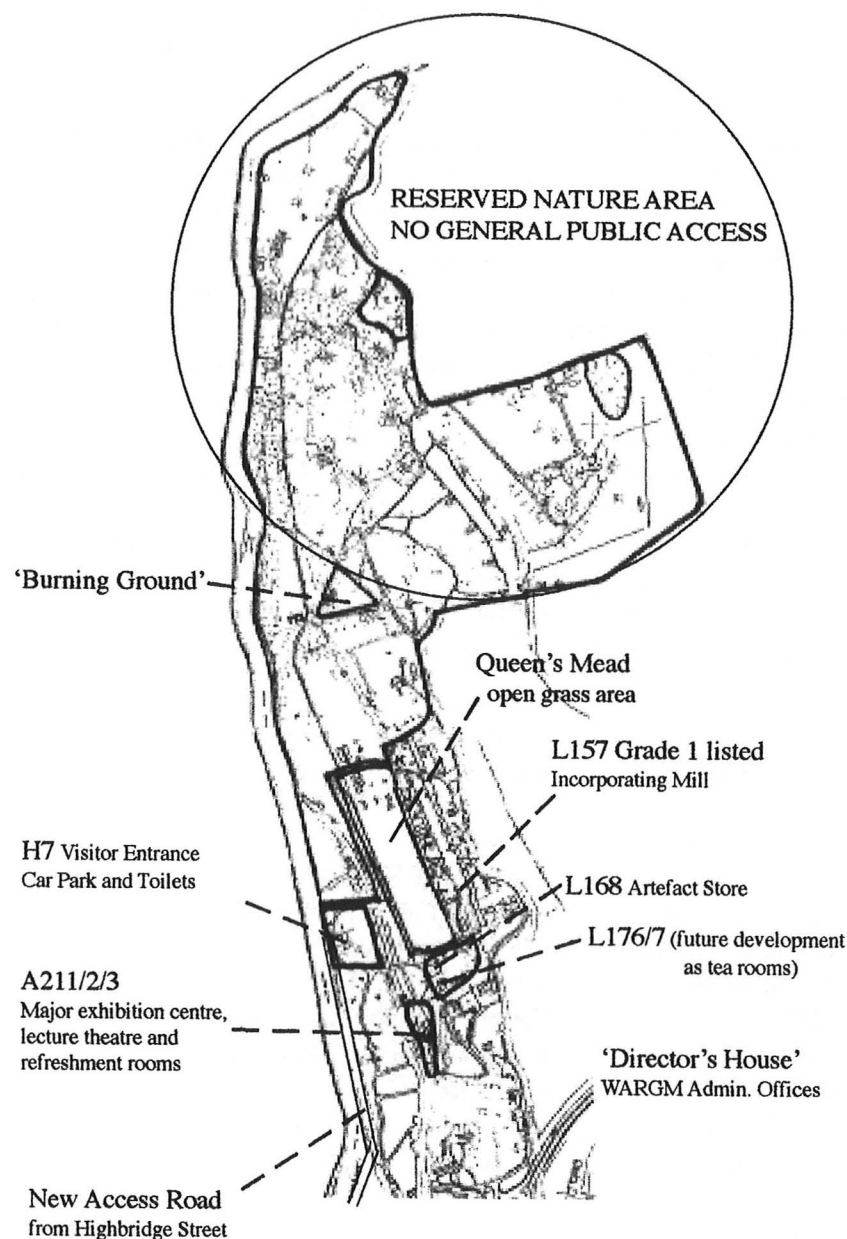
The accepted final plan aims to achieve a working balance between these two extremes and is designed to provide the basic infrastructure and services needed for both current work and to allow later phases to be implemented without major disruption to achievements made in Phase 1.

It should be noted that basic services are to be tailored to a 6 month, Spring to Autumn, opening season which reduces heating and ventilation specifications.

The completion of Stage 1 will provide an informative visitor attraction whilst retaining facilities for educational purposes. All elements of the site will be enhanced from the historical and technical aspects to the landscape, wildlife and ecology.

Preservation of the natural habitat is a paramount objective and the more northern part of the site will not be open to the general visitor but reserved for specialist parties. This is essential to protect the flora and fauna that has established itself over the years where disturbance must be kept to a minimum.

## MAIN DEVELOPMENTS PHASE 1 WORKS





## RGPF WORKERS LIVING IN WALTHAM ABBEY from the 1891 Census

The December 1998 edition of Touchpaper listed people living in Waltham Cross and Cheshunt who gave their occupation in the 1891 census as working in the Royal Gunpowder Factory. I have now analysed the 1891 census ( the most recent that we are allowed to see) for Waltham Abbey itself.

I found 203 people, all male, who said they worked at RGPF. Most people in the census simply gave their trade, so there must have been some pride when men said they belonged to the RGPF. I did not include people working at the Percussion Cap Factory, which, as reported in the last issue, was a private factory in Farm Hill Road. The workers there were mostly teenage girls, often with brothers in the RGPF.

The average age of the RGPF workers was 32. The majority called themselves labourers, although there were no less than 23 foremen. Some labourers said they worked at the Gunpowder Mills, others at the (relatively new) Guncotton Works. Most referred to the Gunpowder Factory, but the better trained census enumerators who covered the Crooked Mile and Farm Hill Road included the word 'Royal'. Some men gave more details of their work, such as;

John Primdale	Dipper Guncotton Factory
Pegrum Christophy	Proof Foreman
Edmund Maston	Water Warden
James Clayden	Furnace Stoker RGPF
John Knowles	Saltpetre Refiner
George Cook	Timekeeper Nitroglycerine
Edward Jackson	Foreman Fire Brigade RGPF
William Gething	Gunpowder Maker
Arthur Burgess	Messenger RGPF
William Perry	Foreman Sulphur Refinery
Frederick Adams	Labourer Saltpetre Refinery
William Mumford	Stores Boy
David Sebon	Incorporator of Gunpowder
James Findley	Master Worker RGPF
Edward Findley (son)	Apprentice RGPF

It is also interesting to note that 3 described themselves as 'Pensioner RGPF' with ages 68, 62 and 60. Another entry is George Wraight aged 58 described as a Retired Gunpowder Maker. This might lead us to suppose that the RGPF

retirement age was 60 but, looking further at the detail we find a number of workers over 60, but under 65.

Here is a breakdown of streets where the local workers lived:

Street	No.of workers	Street	No.of workers
Silver Street	4	Town Mead Road	6
Franchise Place	2	Woolard Street	16
Paradise Row	3	Greenfield Street	7
Green Yard	1	Reeves Gate	5
Bakers Entry	11	Claveringbury	1
Highbridge Street	30	Galley Hill	2
Camps Alley	5	Crooked Mile	19
Malting Yard	1	Green Man Road	1
Lee Road	6	Broomstickhall Rd	9
Powdermill Lane	2	Paternoster Hill	4
North Place	5	Pick Hill	2
Romeland	11	New Road	1
The Marsh	1	Horseshoe Hill	1
Edmondsea	2	Copt Hall	3
Sun Street	12	Honey Lane	3
Sewardstone Street	10	Avey Lane	2
Quaker Lane	5	Lippits Hill	1
Little Sewardstone Rd	2	Farm Hill Road	4
Fountain Place	4		

There were often workers from the same family. 30 of the men, including 9 foremen and a timekeeper, lived in Highbridge Street, close to the works. Only 2, both Foremen, lived in Powdermill Lane and 12 workers lived in Sun Street. Some of the names are familiar to ERDE or RARDE people and may well be ancestors. They include, Adams, Chapman, Berry, Burgess, Perry, Threagold, Dyer, Pegrum and Raby.

The full list is too long to print here (5 A4 sheets) but I have handed over the complete list, with ages and addresses, for the records of Friends and the Royal Gunpowder Mills Company.

John Vernon

*Our grateful thanks to John for all his hard work in compiling this very valuable information. If any of you believe that you may have had ancestors working at the RGPF at this time let us know and we will compare names. Ed.*

## IN AND AROUND WALTHAM ABBEY

The original establishment offices were in Government House which was situated in Highbridge Street opposite the original entrance to Powdermill Lane, now by the roundabout. In January the Epping Forest District Council invited local residents to suggest what they would like to see built on that piece of land. We await the outcome of planning deliberations but it was known that the options included a supermarket or a multi-screen cinema. The problem that seems difficult to resolve is one of access to the site. Already traffic is blocking the Highbridge Street roundabout due to the new traffic lights at Refinery Gate and the entrance to Lower Island Way. These came into operation earlier this year even though the 'Southern Relief road is far from completion. Huge concrete girders and extensive piling has been needed to replace the Bailey Bridge at the Highbridge end while, at the other end, a kink has been put into Sewardstone Road so that a large part of Quinton Hill can be removed!

Work on the South Site has been hampered by rain which has resulted in mud, so glutinous, that the heavy earth moving equipment has been bogged down and unable to move. Only one building remains standing, P743, which is being used as the site office for the road builders.

In another adjacent area, Ordnance Road, the Co-op Unity Buildings (*known locally as Untidy Buildings*) have been pulled down and the Co-op have moved to a smaller supermarket with a large car park on the site. At the other end of Ordnance Road at Enfield Lock a large bridge has been erected to span the canal giving access to the former RSAF site.

Looking back to the time that the South Site closed in 1989 it is amazing how many changes have taken place in the area.

From our local reporter: Bryan Howard

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### Last of the Summer Wine

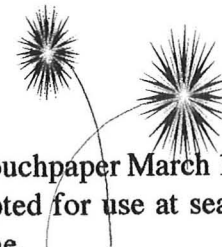
For those of you relatively new to Touchpaper this is the name given to a group of ex-employees who retired at about the time the establishments closed. It is an *ad hoc* group who meet one Friday each month for a chat and a drink in a local hostelry. Until recently these meetings took place at The Owl in Lippits Hill but, for a number of reasons have now moved to a venue in the town itself. Reasons given were:

Seating arrangements in The Owl were changed which made it difficult to form a compact group, the food became somewhat mediocre, a car was needed to get there, thus disenfranchising some and, last, but not least, the price of coffee shot up from 60p to £1!

In April the group 'moved' to The Crown in Romeland which is more convenient for those without a car and indeed, found several former colleagues there. Also it's only a short stroll from the North Site where Friday morning working parties continue to flourish. Any locals wishing to come along; lunchtime, third Friday in each month.

Bryan Howard

## MORE ABOUT ROCKETS



At the end of the article on Congreve Rockets (Touchpaper March 1999) brief reference was made to rockets being adopted for use at sea as a means of passing a tow line or breeches buoy line.

The story of William Schermaly and his attempts to get his rocket apparatus adopted by the Government surpasses, in time scale, even that of William Harrison trying to extract his prize money for the development of the marine chronometer.

In 1897 the first "Ship's Line Throwing Apparatus" was produced and, at that time, was obviously powered by gunpowder. At the Diamond Jubilee Exhibition of that year it was awarded a Gold Medal.

Even so it was not until 1927 that the Merchant Shipping Act was amended to require all but small ships, to carry on board an efficient line throwing apparatus.

## .....AND AN ODE TO GUNPOWDER

During the second world war there were two Simmons in the guncotton factory; WH and D. When I joined the Home Office Explosives Inspectorate in 1961 I found D Simmons as the "Second Inspector" (deputy chief). He had received from C D Schermaly (Managing Director of SPRA works and son of the inventor) a copy of the privately printed history of the company, which he passed to me shortly before his death. It makes fascinating reading.

D Simmons also bequeathed to posterity a poem which describes Gunpowder in the process of detonation.

Jim Jeacocke

INITIATORS fire the chain Acceleration boards the train Fierce and fast reactions zip Ingredients, self sufficient, whip The pace beyond COMBUSTION Past the point of DEFLAGRATION Atoms fly with mounting pressure EXPLOSION then becomes the measure Ah! but for some that's not enough For they are made of rougher stuff And still the pace goes up and up Until it reaches ceiling, top The pace by now extremely hot No more acceleration can be got Energy loosed in SHOCKING WAVE Atoms agitated so behave With truly violent reputation The label then is DETONATION
--

# TOUCH -

## LETTERS AND

### From an RSAF member ....

I am a member of the RSAF Apprentices Association and read about your project in their newsletter. I thought your members might be interested in the following:

My grandfather, William Perry, worked at the RGPF for 37 years, retiring in 1937, when he was presented with an illuminated testimonial and a mantelpiece clock which I now have. Why a clock should be given on retirement when time is no longer so important I have never understood.

At the beginning of WWII my grandfather was approached and invited to return to the RGPF as an inspector, due to his previous experience. It was something of a family joke that his testimonial was hanging on the wall and he was still working there. I have the original letters and also his copy of the Rules for the operation of the RGPF railway. He was the son of a farmer and hurdlemaker from Linton in Cambridgeshire and came to Waltham Abbey to visit relations. He met my grandmother, Florence Lavinia Watson, daughter of Thomas Cornelius Watson who also worked at the Mills and lived in a house in Highbridge Street opposite Powdermill Lane. Thomas's father was William Watson, a military man and Chelsea pensioner, who married a Spanish lady from Gibraltar and was, I believe, also involved with the Powder Mills. My grandparents set up home in Broomstickhall Road and celebrated their Diamond Wedding Anniversary there in 1954. I was born at their house and spent a lot of time with them so I have a considerable affinity with the 'Abbey'.

Ken Dee



### Letter from Australia (another 'Lockie') ....

As a 'Lockie' I had contact, from 1963-7, with the then ERDE lads doing their first year training at the RSAF. I had regular contact for a while with Peter Chapman and Terry Lacy whom I am interested in, as we carried on a friendship for many years, including him visiting my parents, until, suddenly, he and his brother Barry left home and I lost contact. Does anyone have any information on what happened and their current whereabouts? I also wonder if a Michael Haslam was one of the ERDE apprentices. I knew his father was something in the Drawing Office at the Lock in the 1960's while I was living in the hostel at Ordnance Road. Any information greatly appreciated.

Michael D Barnard (Lockie 1963 - 72)  
Clifton Springs AUSTRALIA.

# - BYTES

## SHORT ARTICLES

### Family Connections...

I read with interest the article, 'Family History', in the March Touchpaper. Although I originate from Lancashire I found, to my surprise, that I have close family links with Waltham Abbey. My great great grandparents were married in the Abbey in 1831; their names - Tamkin and Maynard. The Tamkin family, I believe came from Faversham. Great great great grandmother Tamkin gave Faversham as her place of birth on the census returns. Unfortunately her husband, Thomas, died by 1841 and I have no other information about him.

It occurred to me, some time ago, that the connection was the gunpowder manufacturing industry since there were the Mills at Faversham. I would be interested to know if there is any documentation listing workers at Faversham or any who transferred to Waltham Abbey in the late 18th or early 19th century.

Valerie Day

*Documentation from this era would have long ago been archived and may be available from the Public Records Office. Nevertheless, members of the Gunpowder Study Group may have some information and Valerie has been put in touch with Prof. Alan Crocker who may be able to help. "If we don't know; we know a man who might!" Ed.*

### Robert (Monty) Bank

Sorry to have to report that 'Monty (Robert) Banks died on 9th May at the age of 84. He certainly carried his age well.

Monty began his engineering in the railway workshops at Wolverton, moving to Enfield Lock in 1936. During the war he was seconded to Poole and Maltby but returned to the Lock until 1950 when he, with others, came to the Powdermill Mills where he worked in the machine shop until his retirement in 1979.

Shortly after retirement he and his wife moved to Newport Pagnell where he enjoyed his garden and greenhouse until recently, when it became a bit too much for him, so he had the pond filled in and part of the garden covered in pebbles.

So, it's goodbye to another Powdermill colleague - we are getting thinner on the ground.

Stan Wills

## FRIENDS ASSOCIATION

### MEMBER'S TIE



An order has now been placed for 200 Friend's ties which are expected to be available around the end of June.

They have a single gold/yellow embroidered logo on a dark blue background. A smaller number of ties with maroon and bottle green background have also been ordered for those who prefer a different colour.

Past experiences have shown that the majority of people opt for the blue background but if there is a high demand for the other colours these can be the subject of a repeat order with the manufacturing company.

Cost of each tie will be £6 and we hope to have them available at the Friend's Day in July and certainly available at the AGM and the Reunion in October.

For those wishing to order by post we have first to obtain suitable packaging and there will have to be an additional post and packing charge. We will give details of this in our next issue.

We have no feedback from the ladies as to whether they wish some suitable item but if anyone can come up with an idea we will be pleased to see what we can do.

### CALENDAR

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| JUNE        | <b>Subscription Renewals due</b>  |
| JUL 11      | <b>FRIEND'S DAY</b><br>Special day for members  |
| AUG 29-30   | <b>Millenium Attack Exhibition</b><br>Lee Valley Regional Park Showground<br>Friends to man publicity stall |
| SEP 11 & 25 | Epping Forest DC Library & Museum<br><b>Site Open Days</b> run by Friends                                   |
| OCT 8       | <b>AGM &amp; Site Visit</b> followed by<br><b>Reunion</b> at Royal British Legion Hall                      |

**DON'T FORGET THE DEADLINE OF August 17th  
FOR INCLUSION OF ARTICLES IN THE NEXT ISSUE  
DUE FOR PUBLICATION EARLY SEPTEMBER**