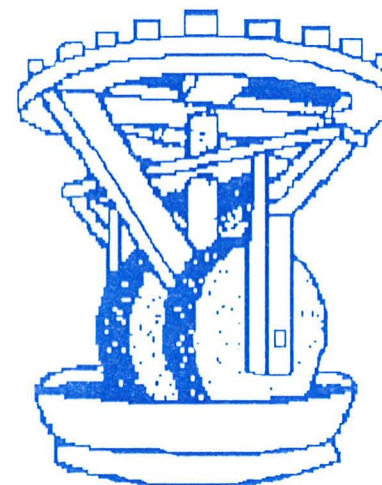


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Touchpaper

The Newsletter of the
WALTHAM ABBEY ROYAL GUNPOWDER MILLS
FRIENDS ASSOCIATION



JUNE
2000



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PLEASE NOTE: Deadline date for submissions for
the next issue is 15th August 2000



EDITORIAL

It's renewal time again and this issue should be accompanied by a member's renewal form. This also gives notice of the AGM in October with an advance booking opportunity for the annual Reunion to be held on the same day. Membership is holding up very well with many new members enrolled in the past year. I hope you will renew your membership and maintain your interest in the project.

One of the problems with editing a newsletter such as this is knowing whether readers find it interesting, or even if it is read. That is, apart from those who obviously scan each issue for those little mistakes (which despite rigorous proof reading, always seem to creep in) and tell me with great delight how many they have spotted. To combat this each issue is now rigorously checked for typographical errors using the latest software; so I shall be most surprised if you can find any in this issue.

Eye have a spelling chequer
That came with my PC
Witch plainly marques four my revue
Mistakes eye mite knot sea
I've run this poem threw it
I'm shore yore pleased two no
It's letter perfect in its weigh
My chequer tolled me sew!

Norman Paul



ASSOCIATION NEWS

SITE WORKING PARTIES

It's been a very busy few months for those attending the regular Friday working parties. A major effort was put into packing up and relocating the large amount of paper archives and associated furniture from the Library building (A203) to the newly refurbished accommodation in the old Director's Lodge. Much effort was also necessary for unpacking and finding spaces in the two rooms allocated on the ground floor. The larger of the two rooms is also used as the Company Board Room and some rearrangement was necessary to give room for meetings. The other room, designated as the 'Friends Room', is now largely taken up with plan chests of maps and drawings but still with enough room to move around. A mammoth task is now to sort out all the various boxes and cupboards and catalogue the large amount of valuable information.

While the contractors are on site they are occupying two other smaller ground floor rooms which then become available for use but, until then, things are a little cramped. The main offices for; Site Manager, Director and support staff are on the first floor so they won't be disturbing us too much!

Because storage space is at a premium we needed to make use of the large garage buildings in the grounds but this had first to be made secure as the wooden doors had rotted. Sterling work by Dave Sims and John Wright has resulted in a fine set of new and very secure doors.

Keeping the extensive garden around the Lodge in good condition will now be a major activity for working parties and this will be helped by the purchase of a new wide-cut petrol mower. In the next issue we hope to include some pictures of both the Lodge and the garden.

PUBLICITY

We continue to give illustrated talks to a number of interested clubs and societies which helps raise the profile of the project. This is an important activity in the run up to opening next year.

We are also manning our publicity stand at two major exhibitions. The first of these is at the Waltham Abbey Festival Week on Saturday 24th June on the Waltham Abbey Town Mead site. The second is at the Waterways 2000 Festival on the Lee Valley Park Showground adjacent to the Lea Navigation canal on the August Bank Holiday weekend.

MEMBERSHIP

Current membership year ends 31st May 2000. Please renew your membership as soon as possible.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This is advance notice of the AGM which will be held on 6th October at 11.00.

In the past we have held our AGM on-site in the A203 (Library Building) with an opportunity for a short site visit afterwards.

With the contractors now on site busy converting A203 to the Exhibition Centre and working generally on a number of buildings it will not be possible for a site visit and we have had to make alternative arrangements for the meeting.

The Waltham Abbey Royal British Legion have kindly allowed us use of their premises for the AGM which will commence at 11am.

Full details and agenda will be published in the September issue.

FOLLOWING THE AGM WE WILL BE HOLDING OUR :-

ANNUAL REUNION

Once again the Legion are providing the venue and catering. For those attending the AGM, you just have to move from the meeting room into the main hall and those coming only for the Reunion should arrive from midday.

The cost of the Reunion is still only £6 per head (no increase for the past 2 years!).

A reminder will be printed in the September issue but you may find it convenient to book your place at the same time as you renew your annual membership
WHICH IS NOW DUE !

Your renewal notice is included with this issue. Please indicate, on the reverse, if you will be attending the AGM and/or the Reunion.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

WESTCOTT 'PENSIONERS'

We have had a communication from John Harlow who is involved with a local area network for RO Pensioners who worked at our sister establishment at Westcott near Aylesbury. At one time we shared a common director and the two establishments were then collectively known as PERME (Propellants, Explosives and Rocket Motor Establishment) under Dr Frank Panton. There was much interchange of workers between the two sites. Westcott became part of RO plc and, like Waltham Abbey, has now been closed down. John Harlow has suggested that we renew our link with, perhaps, reciprocal invitations to events. A small number of them meet each month, similar to the LOSW group of Association members. They are also holding a summer buffet/barbeque in August. If any of you with Westcott connections are interested, drop the editor a line and we will pass on your name.

RSAF

The Royal Small Arms Factory at Enfield Lock also had past connections with the Waltham Abbey Establishment. At one time, in the late 1800's we shared a common director and we know that the Waltham Abbey sailing barges were also used to carry stores to and from the RSAF. In later years both establishments had very active social clubs and many reciprocal visits were made and inter establishment sporting competitions took place. There was also much interchange of younger personnel undergoing apprenticeship training.

Sadly the RSAF is no more and the site has been redeveloped for housing and light industry, much as is happening to the South Site. There is however, still an active RSAF Apprentices Association and we do exchange newsletters with them.

Not having any base for their activities they are concerned about the collection of artefacts from RSAF currently held at Westcott. In addition they have a collection of memorabilia of their own with no permanent home.

Because of the close association, both workwise and geographical, it has been suggested that a home be found on the Waltham Abbey site for a future RSAF exhibition. This has the support of the Operating Company in principle and we are progressing the idea.

Now for a question - ERDE apprentices usually did their first year basic training at the RSAF Training Centre and in the 1980's there were three girl apprentices. They have tracked down the two RSAF ones, Sarah Madge (nee Dawkins) and Alison Harvey but the ERDE one had eluded their researches until recently. Her name was Susie Junner and she started in September 1981. Does anyone remember her and know where she is now? (all responses to the Editor).

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Oral History project, aimed at recording on tape, for posterity, the experiences and recollections of past workers at the Site, is an on-going programme run by Ron Treadgold.

The collection continues to grow steadily but there must be many more stories to tell. Have you told yours yet?

If you have a story to tell, however small or large, and would like to add it to our growing collection please contact Ron at 9, Mark Avenue, Chingford, E4 7NR (tel: 0181 529 5673).

AMONG YOUR SOUVENIRS !

A number of members who used to work at the establishment have, on visiting the site, told us of some interesting artefact items that they have been looking after since leaving. In some cases these have been donated back and form a valuable part of our collection.

Do you have any 'souvenir' that will be of value to the history of the site that you no longer need to display on your mantleshelf or trophy cupboard? Or is it just gathering dust in your loft?

We would be very pleased to receive any items with no questions asked ! Books, photographs or hardware of any description.

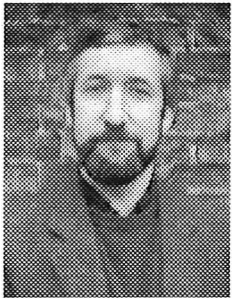
SITE WORKS UPDATE

NEW SITE DIRECTOR

A new Director has been appointed, taking up his post at the beginning of May. His name is Robert Taylor and comes to us from a successful museum site at Amberley in West Sussex.

Robert obtained an honours degree in Chemistry and Physics from the University of Essex and then undertook a postgraduate course in museum studies at the University of Leicester. He has worked for the London Science Museum as a research assistant and Curator of Special Projects and as deputy Curator for the Passmore Edwards Museum. For the past 10 years he has been the Director of the Amberley Museum in West Sussex. As a large open air historic site Amberley has many parallels with the Waltham Abbey site and his experience in all areas of operation will be of great value to us, both in the final setting up and the operational phases.

A Special Message to the Friends:



I am very pleased to be joining this project at this exciting time with less than a year to transform this important site into a major visitor attraction. Although contractors are now on site and construction underway there is a great deal to do to prepare the site and exhibition areas for visitors. It is also interesting for me to be back working in the Lea Valley as, some years ago I worked on a project with the Park Authority in the area where the river joins the Thames. This was a major project at Bromley-by-Bow to restore and open to the public one of the largest tide mills in Britain. Having run an open air museum prior to coming here I am well aware of the needs of visitors coming to such a site as Waltham Abbey and I am sure that we can provide an interesting and educational visit for them. My previous museum was only established and operated with the help of an enthusiastic friends' organisation and I hope that the Waltham Abbey Friends will continue to play a key role when the gunpowder mills are open to the public. I look forward to working with the Friends' organisation and having the opportunity of meeting many of you.

Robert Taylor

The main contractor for the Phase I works has been appointed and have already started on site. INTERIOR, is a London based company that specialises in the refurbishment and development of projects where the sensitive issues of listed buildings are of paramount importance and they have an excellent track record in this area.

Their first task was the refurbishment of the Director's Lodge in Powdermill Lane which is now the main administrative centre. The move from the Library offices was necessary as this building is to become the main exhibition centre.

One of the first areas to be started is the car park and Visitor Centre situated at the end of the new Beaulieu Drive access road. This is at the junction with the new Waltham Abbey bypass road which connects directly with the M25 junction at Honey Lane.

A public meeting was held in the Waltham Abbey Town Hall in March when local residents were briefed on the development and the possible effect on the immediate locality during the progress of the works. After an introduction by the WARGM Chairman, Trevor Knapp, senior representatives of INTERIOR gave details of intended works and assurances that any disruption would be kept to an absolute minimum. Their divisional managing director, John Knight, hoped to build up a good relationship with local residents and was confident that the works will be finished on time.

LOCATION FILMING

Watch out for the film 'ENIGMA', a romantic thriller set in WWII based on the novel by Robert Harris. Starring Kate Winslett, it is a story about the code breakers at Bletchley Park and contains scenes shot at the Powdermill Site in April. You may not recognise which part of the site was used but watch it anyway.

Explosives Testing !

The sad passing of George Whitbread will have stirred many memories of that remarkable man, not least in those who had the privilege of serving under him. One of my earliest memories was of an event shortly after my joining Detonation Section, when George was Section Leader.

One of the ERDE chemists (Dr Batty) had synthesised a new organic liquid whose structure promised a useful high explosive performance but at the cost of a sensitivity that would almost certainly be very high. My job was to devise an experimental setup using electronic timing to measure the detonation velocity of the material, using only a 50 ml sample.

George always took everyone's safety very much to heart, and would invariably undertake any hazardous procedure himself. The worries about the sensitiveness of the substance dictated extreme caution in handling, and George decreed that he alone would undertake the dangerous transfer of the liquid from its container into the experimental setup. This setup I had erected inside the large explosion chamber in the lab. This was a massive steel enclosure, about 2m long, 1m deep and 1m high, with inch-thick explosion-proof windows and heavy sliding doors. It could withstand the detonation of 50g of high explosive, and stood on a concrete bench against the end wall of the lab at the end of Building L149.

When everything was ready, I was surprised to be ordered to wait in the corridor outside the lab, with strict instructions to prevent anyone coming anywhere near, whilst George performed the transfer himself. However, I couldn't resist the temptation to look in through a window to watch what he was doing.

At first, the lab appeared to be empty. Then, to my horror, I saw that he had actually climbed bodily inside the chamber! The restricted height meant he had to kneel down, crouched with his face inches above the receptacle. Moreover, because the light was poor, he was using a torch, but as he needed both hands to perform the delicate transfer he was reduced to holding the torch between his teeth! The transfer could only have taken a few minutes, but it seemed like an eternity, and my mouth was dry by the time he emerged.

The preparations were completed, the warning hooter was sounded, the charge fired and the experiment completed successfully. But for a long time after that I had a nightmarish vision of that liquid sample detonating prematurely and of my having to drag his body out of the chamber and finding the back end of a bloody torch sticking out from the back of his head !

As Jim Jeacocke said of that era, so much for Health & Safety at Work !

Jim Hawkins

THE BICYCLE SHED SYNDROME

Readers will be familiar with this, where a vast project goes through 'on the nod' but much time is spent on trivia. Thus, in any large organisation a multi-million pound expansion plan is agreed with little or no discussion but hours are spent on arguing about what colour the bike sheds should be painted.

Back in the days before pocket calculators, tables of logarithms were *de rigueur* and as we were setting up the 'Sensitiveness Group' in L149 I decided to put a set of log tables in each of the laboratories so that there was always a set to hand and saving on arguments and recriminations as to who'd pinched whose log tables. From laboratory suppliers one could obtain "Log Tables for the Use of Students" price one penny. I ordered 12 copies costing one shilling (we're talking old money here) which I thought, considering the overall cost of setting up L149, as quite reasonable.

Nothing happened for weeks until one day, I was summoned (yes - that is the right word) to see the Education Officer who had before him a file some two inches thick (approx 50mm). Apparently my innocent request had caused great flutterings in high places and questions had been asked as to whether the Department could afford to subsidise part time students at a penny a time. I was asked to make a written submission justifying my request.

I explained my reasoning and the Education Officer heaved a sigh of relief, closed the file and sent the order through.

By this time the price had doubled to twopence per copy and the total cost was now two shillings. What the hidden cost in administrative manpower was we will never know.

Jim Jeacock

This is an excellent example of the syndrome which I'm sure doesn't happen in this day of modern management and 'staff empowerment'. I'm sure there are many similar tales to be told from the old (and not so old) days at the Establishment. Let us know so that we can all chuckle and say 'Look what they did in those days - wouldn't happen now - would it?'

TOUCH

HELP WANTED - RGPF MODEL RAILWAY

I have started to build a model based on the RGPF system for an exhibition in February 2001. The track will connect a number of features and buildings on the locomotive hauled part of the RGPF system. Some 'relocation' is necessary to fit them in a portable layout (12'6" x 1'4") but I want to be as accurate as possible with the details. John Jenkins's published work on the system has provided the basis of the layout design. Now that I have started I would appreciate assistance with answers (or comments) to the following questions. Any photographs would be especially welcome.

This list has been modified thanks to replies from Bill Smith and Dickie Doe who had advance copies. In the absence of any documentation I am seeking a consensus of opinions.

1. WW1 photos show workers on the railway in dark overalls. What colour were these? In the absence of any evidence I will assume they were blue. Process workers were in mid tone long jackets and dark trousers - any advice on actual colour?

2. WW2 - what colour was the clothing for danger building workers and transport workers?

3. WW2 - concrete traverse in front of incorporators facing Long Walk (L157 to L145). Would these have been painted in camouflage patterns and are there photos, plans or drawings? Were they to protect the buildings from explosions on the railway or the opposite?

4. WW2 - L157 to L145. Any advice on typical arrangement of doors and windows to each side of these bays.

5. Building H10 - any plans or photographs?

6. Approx. dates for; last operation of water powered gunpowder incorp., last gunpowder production and last use of sailing barges. (*last 2 barges sold off in 1945. Ed.*)

7. Colour of locomotives and wagons on railway in WW1.

8. How were bags of paste packaged for transport and what were dimensions of solvent containers transported by rail? Are there any photos of loaded rail wagons (apart from cordite trays) or barges (apart from solvent drums)?

I would be most grateful for any assistance that members can give me. Reply direct to:-

Tony Barratt 27 Alders Avenue, Chinley, High Peak, SK23 6DS
e-mail: Barratt2@tinyworld.co.uk tel: 01663 750357

Gerald Ansell - pictured here with his wife Margaret returned from New Mexico to the Abbey Church in Waltham Abbey recently, to renew marriage vows made 40 years ago.



Gerry came to work at ERDE in 1953 and obtained his A level qualification in chemistry by part time study at Walthamstow Tech. During this time he worked in the Vented Vessel Section under Dr Hodge and myself. Colleagues in the Section that are still around are; Geoff Colley, Gordon Bromberger and Bernie Parker. Gerry left in 1955 when he went full time at Essex University where he obtained his degree. He continued his studies, obtaining a PhD before moving to the United States becoming head of the Organic Chemistry Laboratory at Los Alamos.

Ernie Cooke

BYTES

Hello, from a new 'Friend'. Memories were stirred for me last year when I watched a TV programme "One Foot in the Past" that featured the gunpowder mills and again on reading an article in the Times. The article gave a contact address and here I am.

My mother worked at the mills throughout WW2 and made many lasting friendships. Her name was Alice Ensom but she couldn't stand the name Alice so when she started she wouldn't tell her colleagues her name so they nicknamed her 'Lou'. My father called her Sherry as her maiden name was Sheriff so we always knew which circle her friends were from. Only her mother called her Alice, other relations and family friends called her Sherry and her work friends called her Lou.

After completing a commercial course at Tottenham Tech. I joined the establishment in 1948, working in the office of the Inter Services Research Group (ISRG). The clerk there was a very dear old lady known to many in Waltham Abbey; Miss Ada Spanswick, who lived in Woollard Street, we had such happy times. Colin Meek was in overall charge, Charles Erwood ran the physics lab, Mr Owens the chemistry lab, Mr Lansdell ran the machine shop and drawing office. Later, we were joined by Captain James Bell and Geoffrey Owen.

Memories were stirred again watching another 'One Foot in the Past' in April when they featured the airship hangars at Cardington. A group of us from ISRG went there to do a test drop for the scatter range of leaflets - we all set off up one of the metal ladders to reach the walkways high up in the hangar, but I'm not very good on heights and halfway up could go no further. That was tough on those below me as they had to go back down and then back up again. In those days women didn't work in the hangars and Colin Meek had to stand guard outside the gents for me.

The 'big chiefs' from the Services used to visit for regular reports on the various projects being handled for them and there was great hilarity when I made a typing error and referred to 'field tests for the wench' instead of 'winch'. Very embarrassing for a 17-year old girl working amongst so many men.

Yes, we certainly enjoyed working at ISRG. The setting of the offices was a delight with pheasants strutting around and lots of birds and wild flowers and we were such a friendly team. I have a number of photographs taken both on and off site and, if I have the good fortune to attend a Friends meeting, the photographs will come along with me. **Nancy Harris** (nee Ensom)

(currently living in Nottingham)

Congratulations to Vic Clifford who celebrated his 80th birthday on 27th March. He invited a number of friends round for drinks and snacks which kept his wife, Dorothy, busy in the kitchen with son Raymond (now retired) and grandson handing round the drinks. Vic was highly delighted to receive a phone call from Ron Treadgold in addition to the 30 or so cards from friends.

Best Wishes for future happiness to Colin and Connie Lawson who recently moved from Bury St. Edmunds to Worthing.

REMINDER

PLEASE KEEP YOUR
ARTICLES AND
NEWS COMING IN

THE DEADLINE DATE
FOR THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE
15th August 2000

SUPERSTARS

PYTHAGORAS

A name we heard in days of yore
 When in our youth we knew not the score
 No fanzine hero, no crowd pleaser
 Hence no cries of 'oo's that geezer'
 But to him a corner meant an angle
 A shape with which his mind would tangle
 Being ever 'On the Square'
 He thought the possibility fair
 That right angled triangle that he treasured
 Might be one that's easily measured
 On right-angled sides lengths a and b
 with hypotenuse dimension c
 He drew three squares to consider their size
 And lo, behold to his surprise
 The square on c was shown to be
 Equal to the squares of a plus b
 Thus established his famous equation

$$c^2 = a^2 + b^2$$

 A result to be regarded with some elation.
 So what whole numbers can we use
 To find the length of the hypotenuse?
 From above we see that $a^2 = c^2 - b^2$
 Hence $a^2 = (c - b)(c + b)$
 And if $c - b + 1$ then $a^2 = c + b + 2b + 1$
 Thus any odd number (above 1) squared
 Will give a solution for 'a'.
 If $a = 3$ then $b = 4$ $c = 5$.
 If all this drives you up the wall
 And your ladder is 61 ft tall
 Just place the base 11ft away
 And you can most certainly say
 That at a height of 60 feet
 Both ladder and wall will surely meet!

Editor's note: I don't completely understand all the above but was intrigued enough to include it. I am also puzzled as to who 'Arturo' is, although I have my suspicions.

FERMAT

A real go-getter
 Thought perhaps he'd go one better
 "Index 2 is very poor -
 Perhaps Big N will open another door"

$$\text{Can } c^N = a^N + b^N$$

 With numbers whole you'd have to fight
 To get all your answers right
 Brains have toiled over the years
 And many great men brought to tears
 Any solution Fermat found
 Now it seems has gone to ground
 Can anyone say, with hand on heart
 They've really made a promising start.
 If so, did they then finish the game
 And so ensure continued fame
 And could we understand what they
 have done?
 Higher mathematics is not much fun.

Written not by a man of letter
 But, who then can say 'I can do better'?

"Arturo"
 North Site
 circa. 1955

DOUBLE MEANING - ONE ANSWER QUIZ

Another puzzle from the pen of Bryan Howard. Unlike the last quiz where the answers were double words this one gives two meanings for the same word.

Two alternate meanings are given for each answer, eg: Metal or Policeman = Copper.

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Associations or Card Suit | 13. Dance Shoe or Transfer Fluid |
| 2. ex-PM or Army Officer | 14. Type of Horse or Spiced Drink |
| 3. Song Composer or Capital City | 15. Ox, Cow, Bull or Tidy |
| 4. Burrowing mammal or Spot on Skin | 16. Old Weapon or Freshwater Fish |
| 5. Equestrian Sport or Sweet | 17. Formal Dance or Sphere |
| 6. Card Game or Means of Crossing River. | 18. Garden Tool or Hell Raiser |
| 7. Month or Advance Steadily | 19. Obstinate Animal or Loose Slipper |
| 8. Cake or Feature of Hair Style | 20. Aquatic Bird or Zero Score |
| 9. Salad Plant or Missile | 21. Scorch or Cleaner |
| 10. Weight or Enclosure | 22. Guide or Young Ox |
| 11. Gasps for Breath or Underwear | 23. Corncrake or Means of Transport |
| 12. A Sail or Show Objection | 24. Drinks Mat or Small Cargo Ship |

As usual, answers in our next issue

MARCH ISSUE QUIZ ANSWERS:

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| 1. Yo-Yo | 9. TuTu | 17. Pooh Pooh |
| 2. Ro-Ro (Roll On Roll Off) | 10. Can Can | 18. Pom Pom |
| 3. Duran Duran | 11. Da-da | 19. Yum Yum |
| 4. Never Never | 12. Beri Beri | 20. Dodo |
| 5. Cha Cha | 13. Mau Mau | 21. Pawpaw |
| 6. Hush Hush | 14. Tom Tom (or Tam Tam) | 22. Dik Dik |
| 7. Sing Sing | 15. Baba | 23. Aku Aku |
| 8. Dum Dum | 16. Ha Ha | 24. Cous Cous |