

**ROYAL  
GUNPOWDER  
MILLS  
WALTHAM ABBEY**

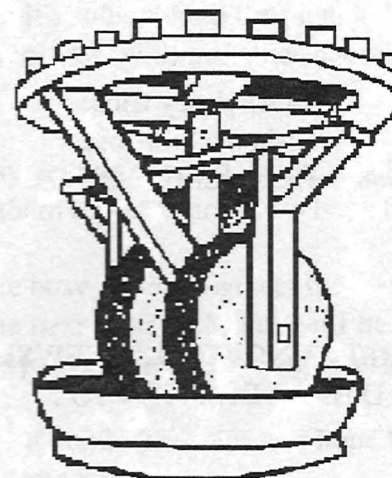
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# **Touchpaper**

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The Newsletter of the  
**ROYAL GUNPOWDER MILLS WALTHAM ABBEY  
FRIENDS ASSOCIATION**



**DECEMBER  
2004**

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PLEASE NOTE: Deadline date for submissions to  
the next issue is 15th February 2005



## EDITORIAL

Doesn't the year come round quick these days? It doesn't seem a year since I last wished you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year which I now do.

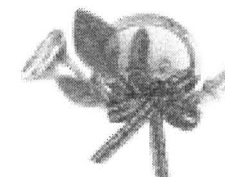
It also means that it's subscription time again. Please see the message from the Treasurer (with my other hat on) at the end of this issue.

It has been a busy year on site and visitor numbers have started to climb; many of them repeat visits. Let's hope trend continues.

The Company are busy putting together the events programme for next year and the next issue in March will be accompanied by a copy of the 2005 publicity leaflet giving details.

Once again, have a good Christmas and hope to see many of you at the site in the New Year

Norman Paul  
Touchpaper Editor



## CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

The nights are drawing in and Christmas will soon be upon us. My very best wishes to you all for Christmas and the New Year.

The regular working parties on Wednesday and Friday mornings have been busily employed over the past year on; the restoration of the fire alarm pillars, site maintenance, cataloguing of plans and photographs and construction of a new cannon carriage (Gerry Miller).

The Committee have been considering possible projects for next year.

Among these are:

Minimising further deterioration of the barge in L168.

Rebuilding a pair of lock gates north of the Wildlife Tower.

Construction of a full size replica of a gunpowder incorporating mill to go in L 157.

Publication of booklets by Les Tucker and others in book form with very welcome financial assistance from the Kaiser Trust.

Completing the set of photographs of previous Superintendents and displaying them in A205, the main exhibition building.

Constructing and displaying a Volunteer Noticeboard showing current projects for visitors to see.

Additional signage and explanatory notices of Beam Engine and Incorporating Mill in L157.

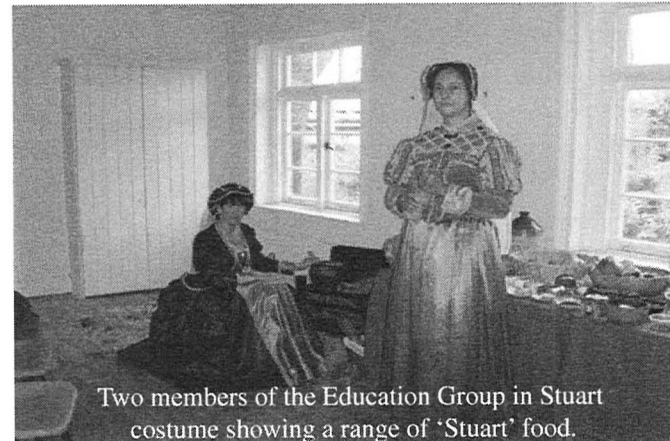
If you are interested in any of these, talk to me or any of the Committee or come along on Wednesday or Friday mornings.

Although the site is now closed to visitors until 30th April 2005 we continue to work on site throughout the winter.

John Wright

## GUNPOWDER, TREASON AND PLOT

Following the sudden departure of G M Education, I am pleased to say that the future of the education programme has been secured and is back under the control of the company (Royal Gunpowder Mills). During the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> of November we offered the story of Gunpowder Treason and Plot to schools KS1 and KS2.

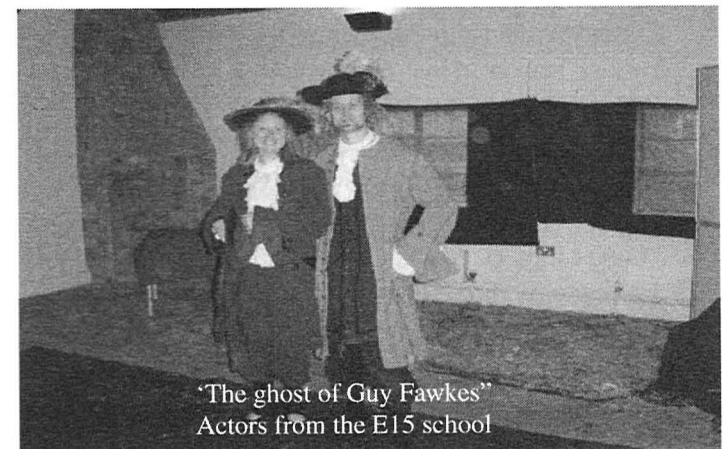


Two members of the Education Group in Stuart costume showing a range of 'Stuart' food.

Over 850 pupils attended which involved the children experiencing; Stuart foods, Stuart dance, past times, lights and lamps (where they made a Guy Fawkes lantern), Secret messages and to meet the ghost of Guy Fawkes, which was played by two actors from the E15 acting school in Loughton.

The week was very successful and the feed back from the schools has been excellent. Many have already booked for our 2005

Gunpowder Treason and Plot programme. If any readers would like any further information on our education programme to pass on to a family member or friend with children please either contact the site on 01992 707370 or by visiting our web site where a full list of our

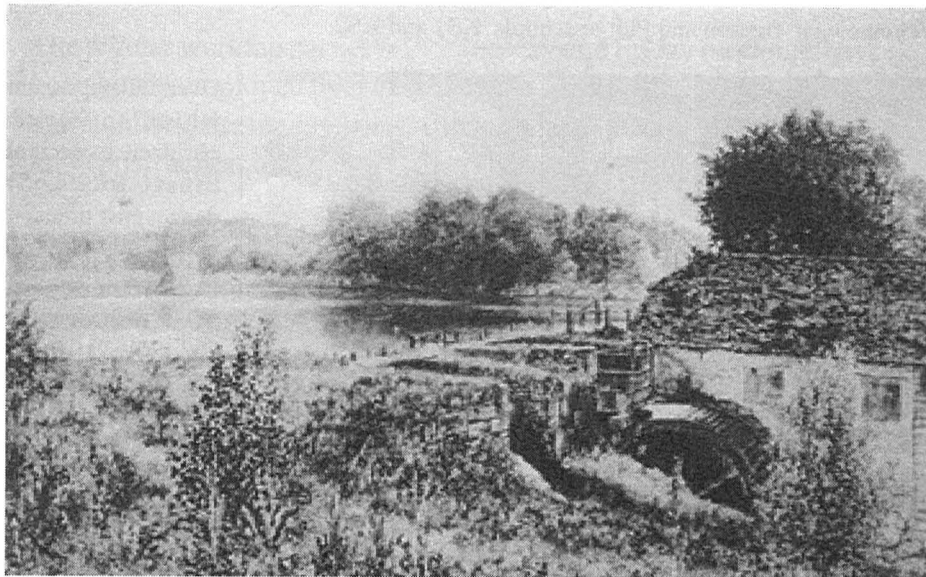


'The ghost of Guy Fawkes'  
Actors from the E15 school

education programme is available on [www.royalgunpowdermills.com](http://www.royalgunpowdermills.com)

## GUNPOWDER IN SURREY

The picture below of Abinger Mill in Surrey shows one of the numerous water mills that once stood in the valley of the River Tillingbourne. Water mills were in use here in the 16th and 17th centuries for a variety of purposes, including several in the early manufacture of gunpowder.



*ABINGER MILL from a painting by William Mote, late 19th century*

Downstream from Abinger were the powdermills at Chilworth, mentioned by Les Tucker in his reference to 'Chilworth mounds' (traverses) at Waltham Abbey (December 2003 issue), which appears to continued in production, retaining its dependence on water power until the end of World War I.

My attention was first drawn to Chilworth when it was one of the subjects in a radio programme I heard last summer (223), part of Radio 4's occasional 'Land Lines' (landscape detective) series. The site was immediately identifiable I thought by the references to a double canal system and to large cylindrically shaped millstones lying about the landscape - features familiar to visitors to Waltham Abbey. Further references to dovecotes, recognised as an early source of saltpetre, confirmed the impression.

I had not realised the close association of the Evelyn family with gunpowder, who listeners heard had the rights to collect the guano from all the dovecotes in the country. Whether and how these rights might have been exercised away from Surrey however were not clear.

When the mills at Faversham were the backdrop to another Radio 4 broadcast in July this year (the BBC has been doing well of late!) the story that emerged was that the king decreed in 1625 that manufacturers of saltpetre could enter wherever they thought the nitre might be found. Whatever the precise details historically, it seems that domestic saltpetre was regarded as a valuable commodity until more substantial sources could be established overseas. A book I have been looking at recently ( *A History of Surrey*. Peter Brandon, 1998 edition) gives more on the Evelyn connection, with John Evelyn the diarist (1620-1706) attributing to his ancestors the distinction of having been 'the very first to bring that invention (powder mills) into England'. There may be another conflict here as Faversham appears to claim the gunpowder mills there as having been the oldest of their kind in the world. Nevertheless it seems that his grandfather, George Evelyn, established gunpowder mills elsewhere in Surrey before buying the estate at Wotton in the Tillingbourne valley in 1579 which became the Evelyn family's home. As an Evelyn who became famous as a manufacturer of gunpowder George Evelyn was not the only projector of water-powered technology in the Tillingbourne valley, which also saw similarly based operations for corn, cloth, brass (used in the local gunpowder industry) and iron. The interests of John Evelyn on the other hand were wide and varied, his particular tastes being towards: reforestation, woodcrafts and garden making in this part of Surrey. Appropriately perhaps, although practices may have varied in different localities, the illustrations of charcoal making which have been used in the RGPM pocket tour guide for visitors are taken from John Evelyn's book on tree culture "*Sylva, or a Discourse of Forest-Trees and the Propagation of Timber*", produced in 1664.

Chilworth today is described in the local tourist guide as "the quiet village which belies its history of gunpowder production" (Guildford Borough Council). Before this, Brandon quotes a reference ((1675-80) to 18 powder mills at Chilworth together with a boiling-corning-separating-and-finishing house, strung out along the river to minimise the spreading of any explosion. Whilst we may think of these early days with a degree of nostalgia, not everyone saw things so rosilily. A century or so later the visiting William Cobbett, traveller and journalist, described what he saw, namely the making of gunpowder and bank notes (for a part of the mills at Chilworth had by then been converted to paper manufacture) as "two of the most damnable inventions that have ever sprang from the minds of man under the influence of the devil".

Dave Hartley

## REFINING SALTPETRE

*The following article concerns the manuscript notebook of Alexander Spears, and contains his notes on, among other things, making gunpowder.*

*After our day focussed on Saltpetre in May, we held a more general meeting of the Gunpowder & Explosives History Group on 30 October, a Members' Day.*

*A wide range of subjects was presented, but several of us chose to follow-up the subject of saltpetre. I did so because it gave me a chance to raise the matter of this notebook. We had a very helpful discussion, and as I had already consulted Faversham colleagues about this, I thought it would be a good idea to seek guidance now from a third expert body, the Friends.*

*May I therefore ask you to consider including the attached notes on Alexander Spears and the refining of saltpetre, on the offchance that someone may know of his name or his family, and perhaps also help to date the processes as he describes them. It would be appreciated.*

*Dr.B.J.Buchanan, Foundation Trustee of the WARGM and Chair of the Gunpowder & Explosives History Group*

### ALEXANDER SPEARS' ACCOUNT OF 'REFINEING THE SALTPETRE' BACKGROUND NOTES

A manuscript notebook attracted my attention in 2000 because, according to the antiquarian bookseller's catalogue, it contained in addition to extracts copied from a history of Kent and a work on fossils of 1853, 26 pages on the 'Manufacture of Gunpowder'. The notebook did not disappoint. It contains many details of gunpowder processes and machinery, expressed in an idiosyncratic way that makes it possible to endorse the opinion of the bookseller that 'from the spelling mistakes and the way it is written it would appear to be an original description'. I transcribed the notebook, but there the matter rested until the Group's meeting on 'Saltpetre' at the Waltham Abbey Royal Gunpowder Mills, attended also by members of the History Group of the Royal Society of Chemistry (May 2004). We explored the history, chemistry and practicalities of making saltpetre with such enthusiasm that it seemed worthwhile returning to the subject as my contribution to our recent Members' Day at the Institute of Historical Research in London (October 2004).

It has to be admitted that as an historical document the notebook is sadly lacking. The only evidence that it contains about the author is the simple book label, which provides the following details:

ALEXANDER SPEARS,  
No. 3, St Andrews Terrace  
Marine Town, Sheerness

The Kent address led me to make enquiries of Dr Arthur Percival of the Fleur De Lis Heritage Centre in Faversham, especially as the society had recently published a *Faversham Gunpowder Personnel Register, 1573-1840*, compiled by Raymond Godfrey and Arthur Percival. There are three entries for Spears but unfortunately no Alexander, and no reference has yet been found in the post-1840 work currently being undertaken by John Breeze. The family names in the register however continue to suggest the possibility of a connection

with the Faversham Gunpowder Works. Dr Percival also enrolled the Sheppey Local History Society in the search, and I was delighted to learn from Jonathan Fryer that the Directories of 1901 and 1905 show Alexander at that address. The terrace was built in the late nineteenth century and occupied by professionals and the middle class. Number and name have changed several times as new streets were built, but No.3 St Andrews Terrace survives as 80 Broadway.

Information from the Census Returns has come courtesy of Dr Gerry Moss. In 1901 there were two of the name we seek at that address: father, 47, an inspector pattern 'makies' (maker); and son, 23, a draughtsman engineer. In 1881 the father, then 27, had himself been a pattern maker 'engine' (engineer). It seems likely that the manuscript was his work, probably written in the 1870s when he was in his twenties. The handwriting is readable but untutored, showing little knowledge of spelling and punctuation. This suggests that he was self-taught, making up for his lack of schooling by keeping manuscript notes, an effort that made his accession to the ranks of an engineering inspector all the more creditable. Engineering drawings in the first pages of the notebook indicate his skills and interests, and his brief but detailed description of the 'Navy Well Sheerness' and the Maudslay steam engine made for 'the Steam Factory at Woolwich' in 1839, suggest an association with the Board of Ordnance. Some of the accounts, of for example the dimensions of the water wheels, are remarkably precise, suggesting a close familiarity with the machinery in question, but no gunpowder works are named except for Waltham Abbey. Indeed, the fact that Spears identifies the 'Dusting House Reels' as being 'at Waltham Abbey', suggests that the other machines were elsewhere or he would not have thought it necessary to be specific about this item.

It is hoped that the following transcription of four pages may prompt further ideas and advice on the author, date and purpose of the notebook, and some elucidation of the processes described. Modern punctuation has been added in brackets.

### 'REFINEING THE SALTPETRE' pp.1-2

276. Gallons of water to 20. Cwt. of Saltpetre boiled and kept skimmed while boiling as it rises to the top, and occasionally throw in a dash of cold water the which will cause the skim to rise more freely [.] the solution must then be allowed to boil 4 or 5 hours until it is free from scum and the liquor is sufficiently reduced [.] a point to be ascertained by practical experience, [.] it is then pumped out of the copper into a trough with 4 brass cocks, through which the solution then runs off at 170 degrees heat into the filtering bags. Then removed in copper poreing pans to the crystelizing pans. The time from liting the fires to the running off is from 6 to 8 hours. Previous to Charging the copper with Petre a wooden bottom perforated with holes. [.] with iron shod rim and stand is placed in the copper to prevent anything from sticking to the bottom, [.] Troughs and bags are well cleaned, having poured on them from a watering pot boileing water till completly cleaned from all signs of petre. the washings are put into the pan the same as the others [.] after the pans are filled they must be washed all round the sides with boiling water. And all the shills (*sic*) on which the pans stand are all washed in a similar way. the [crystalizing ?] pans are then covered close with wooden covers to keep it from working over the sides

and to make it crystalise solid together [...] it must then stand for the space of about 36 or 40 hours. in warm weather longer [...], perhaps 3 days [...] the pots are then uncovered the following morning to allow them to cool. when ready to be poured off they are all scraped and watered with cold water and blocked [raised ?] up on one side. let them stand that way for 6 or 8 hours or longer if not wanted. The mother-water that runs out of the pans when poured. runs along drains into cisterns in the refining house. Each stage must have different cisterns if the petre differs in quality; then it is pumped up out off the cisterns into iron pots which may hold 300 Gallons [...] with a steady and slow fire it is kept boiling till the petre becomes to such a consistency that it congeils freely when dropt on a cold surface, [...]

pp.3-4

It is then ladled out of the pots into single filtering bags of a more open texture than the first [...] put into crystalising pans the same as the other and stand the same time [...] this petre that is got from the mother water is returned into the boiling house to be boiled and filtered again along with the other petre – being considered as grough. The petre from the crystalising house is now tested and if it does not stand the test it must go through the same operation of boiling again [...] if the petre is so foull [...] the quantity of petre is deceased and the quantity of water is increased. if it stands the test it is then taken to the melting house [...] it takes about 2 hours to melt 1 Iron pot full of between 3 and 4 Cwt. the furnace door is then opened and it is required to stand about two hours. before it is ready for casting [...] it is then jeted out into circular moulds made of bell metal, that holds about 40 lb. it is tested again and if any common salt be detected in it. [...] it must all go back to the first operation again (it is tested by nitret of silver and distelled water), [...] the common salt is retained in the mother-water and it is left at the bottom of the reduceing pot [...] the common salt is filtered through a petre bag put into a basket placed on a handbarrow laid across the Crystaliseing pan. Saltpetre in the Grough state is generally refined three times [...] that is [...] after standing the usual time to crystalise brought back again and again to the refining copper [...] the last is called the treble and taken to the Melting-house to be cast into cakes.

## CONCLUSION

Any interpretation of this information will be most welcome, especially as to time, place and procedures. The account of the refining of saltpetre seems to come between the simpler system described by John Stephenson of the East India Company (*Treatise on the Manufacture of Saltpetre*, Calcutta, 1835), and that reported by the explosives engineer Oscar Guttman (*The Manufacture of Explosives*, 2 vols, London, 1895), but this does not mean that the procedure fits between them chronologically, despite the mid-century date of the book on fossils already mentioned. A well-established powder works may have gone on using older procedures long after one that was more-recently set up. Also, the refining of saltpetre provides only a small part of the account of gunpowder making in the manuscript, and some details in the fuller transcript may provide better clues as to the date of this survey. Whatever the case, this stray notebook has raised many questions about which all advice is welcome.

Brenda.Buchanan

## A Dorset record ?

Further to the report on the visit to the Royal Naval Cordite Factory Holton Heath in the December 2003 Touchpaper :

The Mills photograph archive contains a series of photographs taken there in 1944 under the title ' Men and Women behind the guns of the British Navy'. One of them is of Mrs. Mary Sweetapple who appears to be engaged in cordite blending/packing and who, the caption states, ' worked here in the last war and insisted on returning in this' - interesting enough in itself (1), however the caption then becomes even more interesting, or startling. It reads ' She is sixty-three and has had nineteen children.'



(1) We are trying to find out if anyone who worked at the Mills in WW1 came back for WWII. We have one military person, but it is possible he was subject to official recall.

If you know of anyone could you please write to the Editor?

Les Tucker

## EXTRACTS FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Mills Archive includes the Waltham Abbey Special Collection. This is a collection of around 1500 documents relating in some way, directly or indirectly, to the Mills. The subjects cover a wide range - the early history of gunpowder and later history of chemical explosives, technical texts, personal recollections, newspaper articles, official visits, documents relating to purchase of the Mills, to cite just a few. It is intended from time to time to describe an item from the Collection. The first involves a link between Lawrence of Arabia and the Mills.

### Extract No.1

#### Lawrence of Arabia and Waltham Abbey

A major element in Lawrence of Arabia's attacks on the Turkish Army in WWI in what is now Saudi Arabia was the destruction of the railway running through the area known as the Hijaz. The line ran from Damascus in the north for about 500 miles to Medina in the south, which served Mecca. For this reason the Hijaz Railway was also known as the Pilgrims Railway. But it also had great strategic importance as the main supply route for the Turkish forces controlling the area.

In 1963 a consortium of British firms secured the contract for rehabilitation of the Hijaz Railway. They had sent survey teams out from Damascus and Medina, but did not cover the central section, relying on previous knowledge of the terrain. Prior to commencement of the work a director of one of the firms undertook a journey over about 200 miles of the southern part, starting about 20 miles north of Medina. Lawrence had attacked both the infrastructure of the line and the trains travelling it, including the Damascus Express. After the first 8 miles, which took 1 3/4 hours, the party came across the first major destroyed bridge and here to their astonishment they discovered a perfectly preserved guncotton pack complete with fuse. The director reported that the pack had been stamped 'R O P F 1916' and had a stab at what the initials might have stood for - 'Royal Ordnance Powder Factory'. It was a good guess, however it is virtually certain that what he read as an O was a G, giving R G P F, the Mills stamp, as shown in the table. So after 47 years were linked the deceptively rural Mills and the turmoil of Lawrence's war in the deserted wastes of the Hijaz. The wrecking of the Damascus Express ended use of the line and the stations, maintenance buildings and rolling stock were all abandoned, as were the unfortunate Turkish troops manning the isolated guard forts along the line. The group came across an entire wrecked train with trees growing through its wagons and the Damascus Express just as it was on the day it was destroyed. Later they discovered two complete trains still standing in sidings and locomotives in their sheds untouched since 1916.

Les Tucker

## A MARTIAN CHRISTMAS

Christmas is a time for recalling past festive seasons and I'm sure that Tony Barratt will never forget Christmas 1962 and the following winter of 1963. As impoverished scientists we lived in Waltham Common lock house with Dave Parker on the Lee-Stort navigation. Forget gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, I would opt for good honest water out of a tap; we had it at Christmas but not again until March 25th 1963!

Throughout that winter we collected water in a container strapped to a golf trolley from a canal-side house that had been a pub called the 'Jolly Bargeman'. Our Elsan toilet had solidified so we had to use the facilities at work. Baths didn't present a problem as P742 on south site had been built as a ladies changing room and had four baths in it.

Heating and lighting were provided by Calor gas and Paynes of Abridge never failed to deliver throughout that bitterly cold winter. In addition we had a Tilley type paraffin lamp which was often taken to 'The Malsters' pub to supplement their candle illumination as electricity was a rare luxury.

For additional heat there was an old-fashioned oven range which some readers will recall, needed to be polished with 'Zebo'. One day some sticks of wood were put in the oven to dry; when the oven door was opened there was a spectacular ignition, lots of smoke and smuts and some charcoal sticks left in the oven!

On another occasion Bill Smith opted to sleep at the lock house in his sleeping bag next to the oven to keep warm. The problem was how to put out the Calor gas light from the comfort of his sleeping bag. The solution was simple, a long piece of string tied to the chain of the light. An unexpected result was that when the light went out the globe fell on Bill showering him with hot glass fragments in the dark!

Some of you may wonder what all this has to do with the 'Martians' of the title. Well, as we lived surrounded by marshes we were known as Martians.

Bryan Howard

## SO WHY DID YOU BECOME A FRIEND?

My name is Nila Monckton, nee Snazell. I was born in Enfield but christened in the Abbey Church. My parents, John and Joyce (nee Nielsen), had married in the Abbey. My mother had been born in Waltham Abbey, daughter of Carl Nielsen and Alice (nee Wade). Alice's sister, Henrietta (Nett) had worked at the RGPF during the first world war and had met her husband, Harold Spooner, there. I was brought up in Enfield and went to Enfield County Grammar School where I met Daphne Barton and we came to know each other well. Daphne worked at ERDE where she met and married Brian Clements. We kept in touch at Christmases and, as children grew up, we had more time to visit each other. Brian became involved in the opening of the Royal Gunpowder Mills to the public and persuaded me to give them the vast sum of £7 per year in exchange for a quarterly newsletter, which I always read with great interest and admiration although, I must confess, sometimes with little understanding.

On my next visit to Daphne, which had become an annual event, Brian gave me a guided tour of the site. This normally quiet and introspective man became animated and voluble and his enthusiasm was infectious. The struggles of the volunteers to raise money and awareness brought out the zealot in me and each visit would send me home to Scotland buzzing with ideas on how to organise and help in whatever way I could from such a distance and with my presence at the Mills only one day a year.

I have helped financially, not easy for any of us, by purchasing some of the necessities one year for ground maintenance undertaken by the Volunteers. I have written pages of suggestions for fund-raising and organisation over the years which have been received very kindly by the Volunteers and I have gradually become aware of the frustration and restrictions the Volunteers experience.

Each year I notice a difference at the site, the obvious one this year being the progress of the railway, mainly due to the work of Volunteers. I have gradually become acquainted with most of the stalwarts and can now put names to faces. Their continuing enthusiasm and optimism being the spark that starts me off again.

On my last visit I was asked to write an article for Touchpaper; and this is it. So, why did you become a Friend? How about telling us?

Nila Monckton

## DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME!

Although in an explosives laboratory there are many 'fires' (bunsen burners etc.) sources of ignition are carefully controlled in case they go 'walkabout'. In the Main Lab this was an ancient flint lighter kept chained to the bench but which sometimes had to be removed to light the bunsen under the stability bath in the room next door. The inevitable happened, the lighter went missing overnight so there was no way in which we could start work the next morning. The late Ted Hitch remembered that he had read somewhere that fire could be produced by mixing potassium permanganate with glycerol and then adding concentrated sulphuric acid. Nothing daunted, Ted found a large porcelain dish to which he added a substantial quantity of potassium permanganate and moistened it well with glycerol. Cautiously adding a few drops of sulphuric acid he (and the rest of the lab staff) waited with baited breath for a flicker of flame but no such luck. A few more drops - same, nothing! Ever the impatient Ted gave the dish a good dose of sulphuric when it all happened at once. The permanganate reacted, the glycerol charred then a cloud of purple vapour erupted from the dish filling the lab with pungent fumes - but no flame. Before we could start work we had to decontaminate the lab or all the results would have been haywire. Fortunately the lighter was found and life returned to normal (or as normal as it ever was!)

## CONVERSATION STOPPER

The mention of Major John Ponze (late of the Railway Inspectorate) reminds me of a story which, although not directly connected with the Factory, indicates that there can be another world out there and the Major might be interested in it.

Many years ago I acquired a book entitled 'English Domestic Silver' which included a photograph of a silver chalice said to have been donated by a Sir Geoffrey de Poyntz to a church in Suffolk in the 14th century. I had been in the Explosives Inspectorate for about 3 years when we were joined (from RNCF Holton Heath) by a new inspector called John Geoffrey Newdigate Poyntz whose home was in Gloucestershire. As I was the unofficial 'trainer' of new inspectors I took John off on a tour of some of our sites in order to get to know him. He arrived at my house driving a 6 litre Alvis open tourer which impressed my neighbours when left on my drive as we drove off in my Morris Oxford.

While driving along I thought to make conversation by mentioning the chalice, to be met by the conversation stopper of all time. John listened to me, thought for a second or two and then said "Do you know, we have always wondered what Sir Geoffrey was doing in Suffolk!"

Jim Jeacocke

# TOUCH

**APOLOGY TO STEVE BELL** ....Oh dear I've upset a Superintendent again. Another poor annual report this year I suppose. Actually Steve I was not implying you knowingly failed to recall drying NC on the Quinan Stoves. I was implying that, as Superintendent, such fine detail was simply something you would not have known about. You had far more important issues to deal with. I remember your time as Superintendent was characterised by innovation. The most important of these was, of course, the introduction of the P1 Christmas Party. A subject far more deserving of your attention. My first Christmas at Waltham we crept out for Christmas lunch in the back of a van; hoping not to get seen by the then Superintendent, George Williams. To my youthfully innocent surprise people were genuinely terrified lest they be caught. Things had eased a little prior to your arrival, but when you arrived you inaugurated an official Christmas party in the Shifting House. With you providing the beer. We thought Utopia was upon us. People started weekly raffles to fund the party food and in fact the whole work of the branch was geared to this one crucial, annual event.

Of course just as in Iraq after so many years of a repressive regime we all went a little wild. I remember on one occasion walking home to Chingford Mount from the Christmas party and encountering a wide deep ditch, which I needed to cross. With an optimism borne from a combination of stupidity and an excess of alcohol I decided to jump it. With one supreme effort, worthy of an Olympic athlete, I leap over the ditch. Well actually, no I did not. I leapt into the ditch. When I pulled myself out on the other side covered in mud I looked a bit like Worsel Gummage on a bad hair day. It was obvious I was going to find it hard to pretend I had only had the odd pint or two when I got home to Mrs Stone.

In relation to safety Steve, in your attitude and thinking you were well ahead of your time. You took a personal interest in, and gave a strong lead on, the Nitroglycerine headache problem. And with regard to the safety of the Quinan stove operation; if something had gone wrong I suspect myself and Richard Wallace would have carried the can. After all, it was us who signed all the relevant process instructions. Just like the Directors of Railtrack, you would have escaped prosecution. And in any case, I believe it was not an unsafe operation as carried out at Waltham Abbey. As I said in my last note, this was due in large part to the very high standard of our Process Workers. I am not sure that I would let some other Establishments that I can think of do it though. I expect you can guess who I mean! And one other innovation you introduced springs to mind. Although of nowhere near the same importance as the Christmas Party, it was never the less interesting. That was the introduction of new processing techniques for Nitrocellulose Based propellants. At the time, being as I worked exclusively with the older techniques, I thought the whole project ill fated. And as far as I am aware time has proved me right; I don't think anyone has introduced any fundamentally new techniques on a large scale. However, I must say that from my present, rather broader perspective, that I was wrong and you were right Steve. We ought not to be still making propellants in the same way our grandfathers did.

All this is a rather long winded way of saying sorry for any offence caused Steve.

Peter Stone

# BYTES

First of all as the next issue of Touchpaper will be coming out before Christmas, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you and all Touchpaper readers a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year.

We began 2004 with the news that our cat Katy had a nasal lymphoma (a tumour in her nose, in layman's language). This was diagnosed in December 2003 at a specialist vet practice in Higham Gobion, Hertfordshire and she was started on three treatments of Chemotherapy, then in January 2004 we started on a series of three visits to the Vet School in Cambridge where she was given Radiotherapy. Apparently this is the only place in the UK to offer radiotherapy treatment for animals !

During this time we met some really amazing people - the Vets and Nurses and some of the pet owners who had inspiring stories to tell about their devotion to their animals. Thankfully, at her check up in February Katy was declared fit and well again.

In July, my Mum celebrated her 80th Birthday and together with my brothers we arranged a surprise party for her at a local hotel and 26 members of the family were able to attend.

If any of your readers had children attending the infants schools at Milton street, Quendon Drive or Honey Lane between about 1967 and 1984 they will remember Mum - Mrs. Blow who helped them with their work and attended their cuts and grazes, as a classroom assistant.

Brian and I have kept busy throughout the summer with gardening - we have two greenhouses and a vegetable patch which keep us supplied with tomatoes, peppers, carrots, onions, beetroot and runner beans.

We are just starting to get to grips with the Internet now and have ventured into internet banking and shopping. We are also just starting to put together Family trees for both Brian's and my families.

Best wishes from Sandra Day.

## WATCH THE BIRDIE!

On a recent visit to the Lee Valley Park 'Bittern Hide' at Fisher's Green I enquired of the incumbent twitchers as to the sightings of this elusive bird.

"It's been seen briefly wading in open water" said one, "then it's been spotted on two further occasions trying to secrete and camouflage itself in the reed bed" said another. So the sightings so far that day had been:

**'Once Bittern, Twice Shy' (Boom, Boom).**

Richard Penfold

**DON'T FORGET  
DEADLINE FOR THE March 2005 ISSUE:  
15th February 2005**

## GREETINGS CARD



The Company has produced a greetings card which can be used as a Christmas card. These can be ordered from the Company (cost £1 each) by either calling in at the Lodge or ringing Sue on 01992 707370.

### **‘BLAST’**

A special event was held on site after the official season when a group of young actors from the E15 Acting School staged a special interactive play on site called ‘Blast’ which was their interpretation of some of the history of the site. This was arranged just 3 weeks prior to the event and we were unable to publicise it to members. Since it was in the Company’s closed season their publicity had to be severely limited as the publicity budget had already been spent. For those of you who missed it, all is not lost. A repeat performance will take place next year and full details will be in the March 2005 Touchpaper.

## MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Membership subscriptions for 2005 are due from 1st January and members will find a renewal slip with this issue.

We do appreciate your continued support, especially those of you who live some distance away. Your subscriptions enable us to continue sending out Touchpaper as well as building up funds for the various projects that the volunteer working parties undertake for the maintenance and development of the site. Despite considerable expenditure in the past year and the many projects in line for next year the level of subscriptions will be unchanged for 2005.

We hope that you will continue your support and get your renewal in as soon as possible. Last year we had to send out a large number of ‘reminders’ during the year. Make one of your New Year resolutions to ‘get your renewal in as soon as possible’.

Renewal forms and cheques (made out to ‘Waltham Abbey Royal Gunpowder Mills Friends Association’) should be sent to the Treasurer. An addressed envelope is included for your convenience.

**Please note that, as our financial year ends on 31st December, cheques for renewal will not be banked until after 1st January 2005.**  
(It makes life so much easier for both the Treasurer and the Auditors!)

Norman Paul  
Hon. Treasurer

