

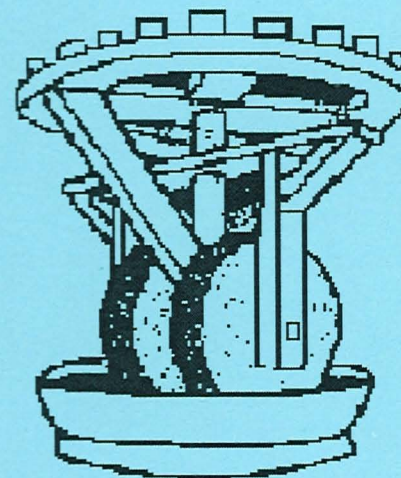
**ROYAL
GUNPOWDER
MILLS
WALTHAM ABBEY**

‘TOUCHPAPER’©

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Touchpaper

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



**MARCH
2007**

OFFICERS OF THE FRIENDS ASSOCIATION

Chairman:

John Wright

1 Albury Ride
Cheshunt

tel: 01992 624210

Herts EN8 8XE



Secretary:

Richard Penfold

10 Thaxted Way
Waltham Abbey

tel: 01992 712623

Essex EN9 1LQ



Treasurer:

Norman Paul

24 Anglesey Close
Bishop's Stortford

tel: 01279 465568

Herts CM23 4PE



ALL ENQUIRIES RELATING TO THIS NEWSLETTER
SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO:-

Norman Paul

Touchpaper Editor

24 Anglesey Close

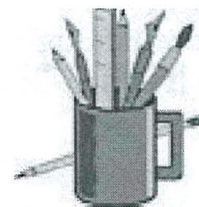
Bishop's Stortford

Herts CM23 4PE

tel/fax: 01279 465568

e-mail: WARGMFA@aol.com

PLEASE NOTE: Deadline date for submissions to
the next issue is 15th May 2007



Editorial

Welcome to the first issue of 2007. It is with this issue that I have completed 15 years of editing and producing Touchpaper; firstly as an 'ad hoc' newsletter started when the Establishment was closed in 1992 and then, in the current format, as the official newsletter of the Friends Association in 1998. Although I have enjoyed producing Touchpaper over the years I believe it is time to pass the reins on, perhaps to someone younger, and I have indicated to the Committee that I am looking to relinquish the post within the next 6-9 months. I would prefer that there be an overlap with the incoming editor and ask you all to consider, as a matter of some urgency whether you are willing to take on the post.

This a rather full issue and I am in the enviable position of having to hold back some articles for the next issue. The previous articles on the Drop Tower seems to have sparked an enormous interest in the ISRG Group about which much was kept secret at the time, even to those working at the Establishment.

The new booklet, 'Trials, Tribulations & Pranks' is now available and can be ordered using the reverse of the AGM/Reunion booking form enclosed for members. It will also be on sale at the Reunion.

Norman Paul



CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

Preparations are under way for the new season starting on 28th April and some excellent events have been booked for weekends during the summer.

SEETECH, who did a lot of grass and tree maintenance work on the site are, regrettably, no longer with us. Although this is not a major problem at the moment it will become much more so as time passes. Our thanks go to them for all their past work. As always, more volunteers are welcome.

The rocket and laboratory exhibition in L157 is being modified to include more rocket motors. Unfortunately this has met with some problems and might not be open by the beginning of the season. The new exhibits are from Westcott and Bristol Aerojet (BAJ).

We will also be showing some artefacts from the L181 Archive Store which were used on site. These will replace Brian Street's models on the landing outside the film theatre in A203.

The Ballistic Pendulum and Ballistic Mortar, mentioned in the last Touchpaper, have now arrived but have yet to be assembled. This is going to be a major task for which outside specialist contractors will be needed.

Following the sale of land on the eastern side of the site, including the Power House and Lodge, access through Powdermill Lane is no longer available. Entry for everyone is now via Beaulieu Drive.

The Friends Committee hope to see many of you during the forthcoming season.

John Wright

2007 AGM and REUNION

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Association AGM will be held in café of the Royal Gunpowder Mills on Friday 11th May 2007 commencing at 11.00.

Nominations for Committee Members and Officeholders should be sent to the Secretary at least two weeks prior to the meeting.

Any motions or amendments to the Constitution should be made in writing and be sent to the Secretary at least two weeks prior to the meeting.

The current Officers and Committee Members are willing to stand again but additional nominations will be welcome.

ANNUAL REUNION

Following the AGM at the Gunpowder Mills on Friday 11th May we shall be holding our Annual Reunion.

This will start at midday with a buffet lunch served at around 12.30pm.

A bar will be available from 12.00

The cost has been held at £7 per head

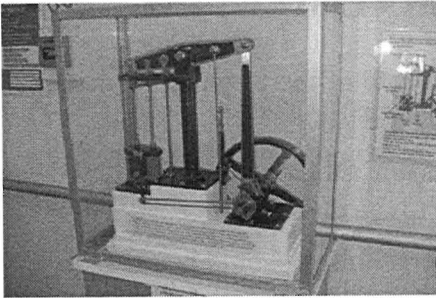
MEMBERS WILL RECEIVE A SEPARATE
BOOKING FORM WITH THIS ISSUE .

**PLEASE NOTE THAT CARS MUST BE PARKED IN THE
MAIN CAR PARK AT THE END OF BEAULIEU DRIVE.
ENTRANCE TO THE SITE WILL BE SIGNPOSTED.**

**DURING THE AFTERNOON THE MAIN EXHIBITION, FILM AND
OTHER FEATURES OF THE SITE WILL BE OPEN TO VIEW.**

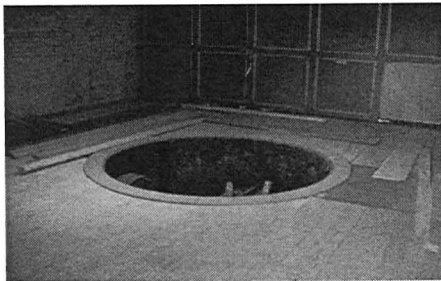
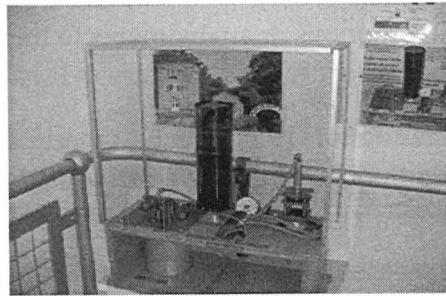
PROJECTS

Thanks to John Wilson for two splendid working models that he has made and recently installed in the Central Beam Engine Tower of L157.



This a working model of a Beam Engine. Visitors can observe the action by pressing a button on the stand.

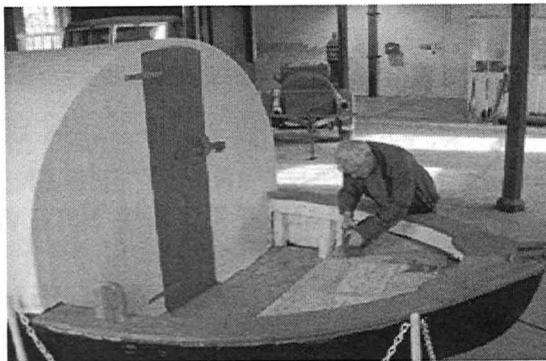
Once again a working model showing the action of an hydraulic Gunpowder Press



Flooring of one of the working bays in L157 is now complete and lighting installed.

Work has now commenced on the construction of the full size model of an Incorporating Mill.

POWDER BOAT L168
Restoration of the boat is nearing completion and should be ready in time for the new season.



Dr. GILBERT JAMES JEACOCKE



With much regret we report the death of Jim Jeacocke in November 2006. Jim was a keen supporter of the Friends and wrote numerous interesting and humorous articles for Touchpaper with his reminiscences of his time at Waltham Abbey. He was educated at the Latymer School in Edmonton and joined the Royal Gunpowder Factory in 1937, working initially in the Main Lab. He left the Establishment (by then ERDE) in 1963 to take up a post in HM Explosives Inspectorate in which he had along and distinguished career advising on explosives safety. He then became a consultant for ExChem and represented the European Explosives Industry at international meetings; such as the UN Group of Experts advising on the Transport of Dangerous Goods. His knowledge of explosives and commonsense opinions were highly valued by the explosives community.

In recent years both Jim and his wife Peggy (who he met at the Latymer School) became quite frail and Jim spent some time in hospital last year. By that time they were both moving to a retirement home when Jim was again hospitalised and died shortly after.

His funeral was attended by family and friends and a number of his ex-colleagues. Early on in his time at the Explosives Inspectorate he had occasion to advise the Rev. Ron Lancaster, a well known figure in the field of pyrotechnics and owner of the Kimbolton Fireworks Factory. It was the start of a long friendship and it was most appropriate that Ron conducted the funeral service. A poignant moment was the closing music - Music for the Royal Fireworks by Handel.

A great loss to us all. Our sympathies to Peggy and family.

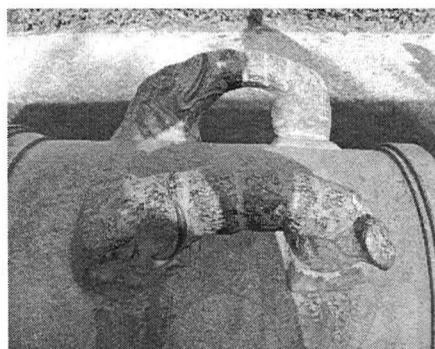
'GLOWING POLES' IN DENMARK

It all started with Kristian Jensen's article in Touchpaper describing the Gunpowder Mill Museum in Frederiksvaerk. Brian and I were very taken with the idea of Danes "standing on glowing poles" at the celebrations to mark the 250th anniversary of the building of the town. After numerous emails to and from Kristian we finally settled on Monday 16 October and were delighted to have the company of Nila and Hugh Monckton on our trip.

Kristian kindly sent us train tickets and detailed instructions on how to find our way from the airport to the Central Station and indeed on to our hotel. Armed with this information we had no problems in locating our hotel. Nila and Hugh flew from Scotland to Gothenburg, then took the train into Copenhagen. Unfortunately, I omitted to pass on the directions from the station to the hotel and they took a rather circular route.

On Tuesday we followed Kristian's instructions and found our way to Frederiksvaerk where he met our train. He took us on a tour of the foundry and museum where we saw the exhibition mentioned in his article. The cannons cast all bore a distinctive pair of elephants on the barrel. Apparently all cannons made in this foundry were marked in this way.

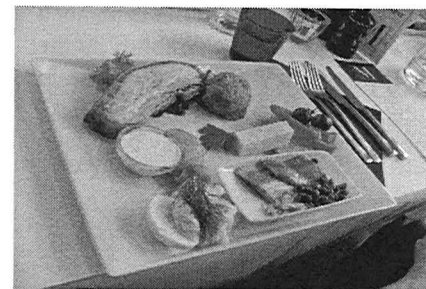
We were very fortunate to have Kristian as our guide as he is very knowledgeable about the history of his town.



After our tour Kristian took us home to meet his wife Lene who had prepared a lovely Danish lunch of pickled herrings, salad and quiche. We were delighted to sample three varieties of Schnapps before leaving to visit the Gunpowder Mill Museum.

The Mills were producing gunpowder until 1965 and, remarkably, when they were closed the machinery and buildings were saved and formed the basis of the Krudtvaerksmuseum (Powder works museum). My first impression of the site was that it is considerably smaller than Waltham Abbey but it was good to see water in the canals and the water wheel turning. Several pieces of machinery were activated for our visit. **For further information, Kristian wrote a comprehensive article, with photographs, of the Museum for the June 2006 edition of Touchpaper.** We then went back to Kristian's home where we had a delicious cup of tea and an almond cake to die for. We thoroughly enjoyed meeting Lene and Kristian and very much appreciated their hospitality.

On Wednesday Kristian came to our hotel to collect us for a whistle-stop tour of Copenhagen. We visited more places than I can list here but some of the highlights were the Naval Museum, (the Naval Base where Kristian reported for his National Service) a water bus, various fountains, ships, the new Opera house and St Albans church. At the Amalienberg Palace we watched the changing of the guard. We were rather surprised how close the public were allowed to get to the soldiers who were all under 22 years of age and doing their National Service.



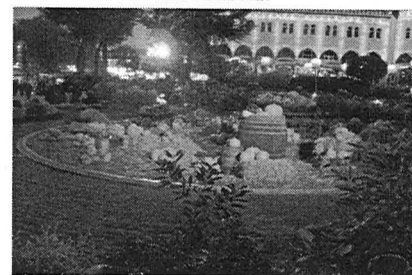
For lunch, we went to a restaurant serving typically Danish food where we sampled many different toppings for our smorgasbord. All very delicious. Interestingly, the Danish don't appear to have a weight problem which may be due to all the fish they consume.

Copenhagen is famous for its green copper roofs. We saw many historic buildings including a church with a gold painted, spiral staircase on the outside of the steeple. I saw several people walking on it. As the roof had recently been restored it was actually brown but it will eventually oxidise to green.

On top of the Stock Exchange there is a spire of plaited dragons' tails.



In the evening we visited the Tivoli Gardens which were decorated for Halloween. I have never seen so many pumpkins in one place! With all the lights and decorations it was quite magical. Unlike Alton Towers the rides were not fenced and people strolled underneath the corkscrew and rollercoaster.



Thursday we went to the Viking Ship Museum. In 1962, the wrecks of the five Viking ships on display in the Viking Ship Hall were unearthed from the bottom of Roskilde Fjord, offshore from Skuldelev. These date from the late Viking age, and dendrochronological studies show that one of the ships was built around 1042, using wood from the Dublin area. In 2000, the reconstruction of this Viking Warship commenced at the Museum's boatyard. The ship holds a crew of up to 80. Eight boatbuilders used Viking methods and replicas of Viking tools to build the ship. Four years and three hundred oak trees later, the ship was finished. It also has two kilometres of cordage and a flaxen sail. The ship weighs almost 25 tons when fully equipped. and a flaxen sail. The ship weighs almost 25 tons when fully equipped. At the launch in September 2004, Queen Margrethe christened the ship, "Havhinsten fra Glendalough" (Sea Stallion from Glendalough), after a ship that provided evidence of contacts

and trade between Denmark and Ireland 1000 years ago. A round trip to Dublin is planned for 2007-8 to test and record the ship's seaworthiness, speed and manoeuvrability in the same waters used by the original ship. It is intended that Havhingsten will set out for Dublin in the summer of 2007 and will winter in Dublin, returning to Roskilde in summer 2008. As the route will take the ship past the Orkneys we are hopeful that some of us may be able to see it in action.



At present it is moored in the harbour along with several other boats which I understand are used for trips during the summer months.
Friday we came home!

Naturally I asked Kristian the meaning of the "glowing poles" and here is his explanation.
"In pre-historic days, when trolls and witches reigned over the world and people had less to say, they lived in what we now know as burial mounds where the Vikings buried their chieftains. On midsummer night they celebrated and made great feast and danced wildly all night until the first cockcrow.

If you went out at night and passed one of these mounds, you were in the greatest danger, because the witches were interested in having beautiful young men (and the trolls beautiful maidens) as partners in their dance. If you did take part in the dance, you would never come back to normal life but would disappear into the fog covering the moors the following morning.

You could see the feast was going on from a long distance, because the mound was lifted up as a roof and – you guessed it! – standing on glowing poles.

Therefore, when we have been to a really big celebration, a golden anniversary, a jubilee or the like, we afterwards tell those who didn't take part: The house/town stood on glowing poles."

Daphne Clements

EXTRACTS FROM THE ARCHIVE

In order to give Friends a glimpse into the Archive Touchpaper has been publishing an ongoing series of Extracts from the Archive. It is now proposed to complement this with a series of Extracts from the Archive Image Collection. This will run back from more recent images to earlier times. The first of these appears below.

Extracts from the Archive Image Collection No. 1

A photograph was previously published in the March 2005 Touchpaper of a shirt sleeved son of scientific toil demonstrating the remote control miniature railway to two serious looking besuited gentlemen.

This photograph of the railway with Daphne Clements was taken by a Ministry of Technology photographer in the late 1960's. It is apparent that his take on the attractions of railway operation were quite different from the earlier version.



Les Tucker Hon. Archivist

Rugwood story

One of my erstwhile colleagues died recently (Dickie Doe) and that sad event stimulated my memory to recall the early 1970s.

At that time I was fortunate enough to have been appointed Section Head of what was called Advanced Explosives Research. One of the principal tasks of the Section at the time was the development of a novel, more powerful, explosive for underwater use in a new weapon system. When I took over, a lot of work had already been done, under the capable hands and guidance of my predecessor, Ron Campbell, and my main challenge was to select a candidate explosive composition and to try and persuade the Navy to provide the support necessary to take it from a 'pilot' scale to 'manufacturing' scale. The medium scale performance figures were very encouraging but it's rather like trying to get a book published, you really need some publicity (in the right quarters) and influential sponsorship.

In those days, the Authority for approving the acceptance of new explosives (and other armament components) into Service was the Ordnance Board (OB) and that organisation had the funding and authority to conduct critical trials. As an aside, the OB has had a long and distinguished history although it's changed its name and structure in recent years. The first record of the OB stems from 1415 when Henry V was keen to ensure that his cannons would perform reliably before the engagement at Agincourt! Each of the three Services was represented in the OB. The Naval representative at the time was a certain Captain. I'll never forget the fellow. He was keenly imaginative and had a 'devil-may-care' buccaneer attitude (the Nelson touch!) that was very refreshing. We invited him to Waltham Abbey and, with support from the Explosives Superintendent, gave him an enthusiastic but absolutely honest 'sales pitch'. The Captain was convinced. We explained that we hadn't sufficient funds in the Research Budget to take things beyond the pilot scale and to present realistically the results of our efforts for impartial and informed consideration for Service. The Captain offered to arrange for us to 'hitch a ride' on a forthcoming series of OB trials. This was very generous because it involved us in minimal costs. The trials would include tests vital to the acceptance of a new explosive material. These included accelerated ageing (hot storage), behaviour in a fuel fire and attack by an anti-tank missile. To carry out such trials, we needed to fill our candidate explosive into genuine torpedo warhead cases. The Captain arranged for us to receive some cases (they were rejects and we had to fill welding faults with a suitable mastic material but 'beggars can't be choosers!'). We were supplied with six cases, each with a capacity to take 35kg of our explosive. It was quite a challenge to fill them as we were limited to two 12kg mixers and, as the explosive was held together with a 'curable' rubbery binder, mixing and filling time was an important factor if the explosive wasn't to 'set' before being filled into the cases. Nonetheless, we did it!

In planning trials, it's desirable that there are no filled warheads left over which might have been rendered 'unstable' or more difficult to handle as a result of being, for example, 'cooked up', so concluding trials are chosen to ensure destruction or that the final result is 'safe'.

To cut a long story short, one of the warheads, towards the end of the trials programme, was to be subject to attack from an anti-tank weapon. This experiment was to be carried out at Shoeburyness, (Rugwood Battery). As 'Scientist in Charge', I was invited to be present as a witness and participant. The facility was run by the Army and, consequently, everything was efficient and regimented. The Observation Post was a substantial two-story building and the upper storey provided a reinforced window through which proceedings could be viewed. When I arrived, the warhead had been mounted horizontally on a wooden trestle. The Major instructed the Bombardier to 'mark the target'. The Bombardier marched, quick-step, armed with a piece of chalk and described a perfect circle on the side of the warhead (I have heard that to draw a perfect circle by hand is a sign of genius...!). I was then invited by the Major to inspect the target. On the face of it, there wasn't a lot of point in doing this but it was all part of the military procedure and it would have been churlish if not rude to decline. As I walked towards the target, the chalk circle seemed to get bigger (!).....but there was nothing I viewed upon which I could comment. On my return walk to the Observation Post, I stepped out the distance. The warhead seemed rather close especially bearing in mind that the energy of the explosive was nominally two-and-a-half times that of TNT and that most explosives respond 'robustly' to being fired at with an ant-tank weapon! However, I declined to voice such thoughts to the military who, I thought, would simply class me as another 'wussy' boffin. Just as the countdown was about to start, the procedure was halted. "We have a visitor", announced the Major, with no good grace. Being escorted up the steps to the first floor of the OP was an ageing Naval Commander with a rather vapid Wren on his arm - 'sugar-daddy' came to mind! "You're going to see what these boffins do", the Commander drawled rather unnecessarily to the young lady. By this time, the countdown had started. The ageing Commander looked at me with disdain as I crouched down, making sure that I had minimum body-contact with the structure of the OB. "I was under fire at Suez," he boasted, just before I rammed my fingers in my ears. I didn't say a word! The Warhead detonated 'full order' and met all my expectations. The ground shock lifted me off my feet. The Commander looked ashen and his female companion was shaking violently - it almost seemed as if her eyes were going 'round and round'! "I bet you didn't encounter anything like that at Suez", I said to the Commander as I went to inspect the 15 foot crater...!

Jim Burgess.

Airborne Dropping Trials.

Referring to Sheilagh Owens report in the December issue. The aircraft in the picture is NOT a Lancaster, it is a Blackburn Beverley. The Beverley provided the RAF's heavy lift capability from 1956 until the Hercules (C130) arrived circa 1968. The aircraft shown is XB261. It was one of two sent to Boscombe Down in 1955 for initial trials then retained in D Squadron for dropping trials and similar tests. On retirement from Boscombe some time after 1971 she went on display at Southend Air Museum then to Duxford where she deteriorated rapidly out in the open and was scrapped. The cockpit section was saved and displayed at Duxford. It has now been moved to the Newark Air Museum. The last complete Beverley, XB259, is at the Fort Paull Museum to the east of Kingston-upon-Hull.



photo: Beverley XB261; by Richard Vandervoid and is reproduced courtesy of the Blackburn Beverley Association.

The load on the parachute is a one ton container and would not have been anything to do with us; we rarely dropped loads in excess of 120lbs and used single parachutes. We often just hitched our trial on to someone else's flight and this photo was probably taken out of curiosity while waiting for our own drop later in the sortie. Our dropping trials served three purposes. Firstly to ensure that the exit from the aircraft and the parachute deployment was safe. No problem with the Beverley or C130 via the open rear platform but more critical with the Hastings or Valletta via an open side door. The larger tail plane on the Hastings MkII was set very low. Secondly the container being dropped and the stores within had to be fully serviceable after the landing. Thirdly in the event of a parachute not opening correctly the stores had to be safe to move off the DZ (drop zone). This outcome was tested for all energetic stores by deliberately preventing the parachute deployment to get a "candle" and a very heavy impact. In many cases the container would break up and disgorge its contents. We had to find it all for examination, even grovelling around in the grass to find all the missing detonators! I don't recall any explosions on impact but before Bert Harrison and Jack Owens got the packaging right we often opted for burning badly damaged stores on the DZ rather than transport them back to Waltham Abbey.

Over the years we used many different aircraft of all sizes, Anson. Auster, Beverley, Britannia, C130 (USAF, before the RAF got theirs), Hastings, Valletta, Varsity and York. They came from several different units e.g. 24 Squadron RAF Abingdon and later from RAF Colerne, RAF Lynham, RAE Farnborough, A&AEE at Boscombe Down and the Army Air Corps at Middle Wallop.

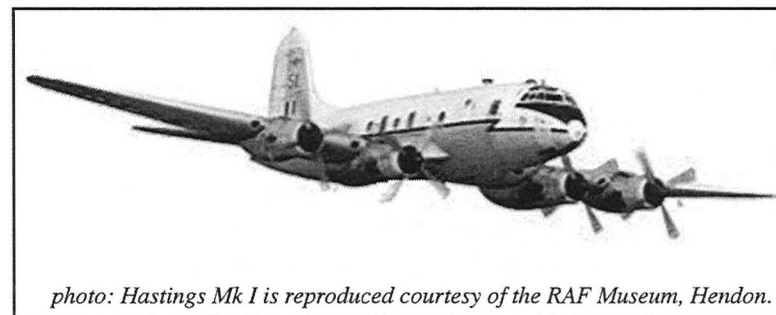


photo: Hastings Mk I is reproduced courtesy of the RAF Museum, Hendon.

The Valletta was a transport development of the Wellington while the York was a variant of the Lancaster. The York we used was almost certainly the last one in RAF service and was scrapped a few weeks after we used her.

Alan Feraday, Jim Bell and myself were sent on a Flight Observer course at Farnborough and two of us would fly on the aircraft for each trial to act as dispatchers. When we were kitted out in standard RAF blue coveralls we looked like proper aircrew! At the recent ISRG reunion Alan reminded me of an incident at Boscombe before one trial. We had got our stores onto the D Squadron Valletta, tied down and ready to go but were waiting for our pilot; when he arrived he asked us "How do I start this thing?" Fortunately we knew! It turned out that the pilot was from the fast jet test A Squadron and was filling in. He knew all about the supersonic Hunters, Lightnings and Phantoms but had never flown an ancient twin piston engine, propeller driven, tail dragging Valletta before; we zigzagged our way around the perimeter track to the runway but once airborne he flew like a dream. We had to guide him to the DZ following the roads across Salisbury Plain and talk him through the dropping procedure.

Our normal routine was to load up the Landrover on a Monday afternoon and leave WA around 16.30, two of us in the Landrover and two in a car (Allen's or mine). We stopped for a meal en-route to get to The Kings Arms in Amesbury around 9.30 to 10pm (i.e. before the bar closed) and 5 hours overtime. We worked on Tuesday, Wednesday morning and Thursday with a gentle drive back on Friday morning. There was no work on Wednesday afternoon because it was the RAF sports afternoon and Boscombe Down closed down. We had to fill in our time visiting the sights around Salisbury Plain, Stonehenge, Woodhenge, Old Sarum and pretty villages on the plain. Often we went into the city of Salisbury and the wonderful cathedral.

Roy Atkins

More on ISRG Exploding Turnips and all that

The prolific author Ken Follett has based some of his novels on incidents in WW II. One of these 'Hornet Flight' deals with the efforts in 1940 of MI6 in conjunction with the Danish Resistance to obtain information on a mysterious German installation on a Danish Island. The Hornet in the title refers to the de Havilland Hornet Moth biplane, which was mechanically similar to the better known Tiger Moth but had an enclosed cabin with two seats side by side. A note at the beginning of the novel states –

“Some of what follows really happened”

But tantalisingly doesn't specify which parts.

The heroine is Hermia working in MI6 at Bletchley Park, home of the later famous Enigma code breakers, on organising the Danish Resistance. By chance she stumbles across the suspicion that the Germans are operating an early form of radar which could account for the disruption to British bombing raids which was occurring. Due to bureaucratic intransigence she is not allowed to pursue the matter. Risking her job she approaches a contact on the staff at 10 Downing Street to try and obtain a radio receiver which could be used in a Danish crewed fishing boat to pick up any distinctive radar pulses (At that time British fishing boats, which included Danish crews who had fled Denmark, were still able to fish on the Dogger Bank, within receiving range of Denmark, without interference from the occupying forces in Denmark).

The following conversation ensues :

‘ Could you put together a radio receiver suitable for picking up such signals ?

It's got to be portable presumably.

It should pack into a suitcase.

And work off a battery so it can be used anywhere.

Yes.

It might be possible. There's a team of boffins at Welwyn who do this stuff all day. Exploding turnips, radio transmitters concealed in bricks, that sort of thing. They could probably cobble something together.

Welwyn is the village adjacent to the area in which Welwyn Garden City was built and as we now know ISRG was originally housed in a country house called 'The Frith' in Welwyn.

Les Tucker

ISRG CONTINUED

Further to Les Tucker's article in this issue and to the item in the December 2006 Touchpaper on the ISRG Air Drop Tests in which my father, Jack Owens, was involved. ISRG stemmed from the war time activities at Welwyn in a country house called 'The Frith'. I visited my father there but cannot recall the exact time or year but on one of my visits I saw a vast number of towed gliders passing overhead which must have been destined for Arnhem. After the war the group moved to the Waltham Abbey site.



This first photograph was taken during the war and my father had annotated on the reverse "ISRG, explosives concealed in coal." The 3rd figure on the left was Sergeant Major Fred Stalton, Royal Artillery. The person on the left in both photographs is Charles Erwood. My father is on the right and the seated person is Colin Meek who was in charge of ISRG.



Sheilagh Owens

THE MILLS and a VICTORIAN MYSTERY

From Jack the Ripper on the Victorians were fascinated by the grisly murders to which they seemed prone. These along with similar fictional material were reported in 'penny dreadfuls' which had a mass readership, not least from the railway station bookstalls which were springing up. Even the august Times was not immune and reported a particular case in 1875 over several issues. The crime concerned the discovery of a body in a cab, followed by the arrest of the occupants. Apart from the general macabre nature of the discovery a particularly grisly aspect was that the body appeared to have been mutilated and kept for a considerable time. The following reports speak for themselves:

Times 13-09-1875 Suspected Murder .*The mutilated body of a human being, stated to be that of an adult female, was discovered on Saturday night on the Southwark side of London Bridge in a cab which had been driven there from the east of London. The surrounding circumstances are such as to lead to the certainty that a brutal murder of the Greenace type has been committed.*

Times 14-09-1875 *Yesterday, at the Southwark Police Court, Henry Wainwright, 36, respectably dressed, described as a manager of a schoolhouse at Chingford Essex and Alice Day, aged 20, a dressmaker of 2 Queens Court, Commercial Road East, were charged before Mr. Benson with having in their possession the mutilated body of a woman, at present unknown, supposed to have been murdered.*

All very interesting, but what has it got to do with the Mills?

- Read on:-

Times 22-09-1875 The Whitechapel Road Mystery.

Henry Wainwright is a married man and has several children. Some time ago he became acquainted with a young woman named Harriet Lane, a daughter of John Lane, a gas manager at the Royal Gunpowder Works Waltham Abbey. At the time of her death, in September last, she was 23 years of age.



This is believed to be her picture.

On 21st December 1875 Henry Wainwright was executed for the murder of Harriet Lane.

The reference to Lane's occupation as gas manager prompts the question what kind of gas. The Mills did take in town gas from about 1915, however the 1875 date would indicate that Lane worked with the gas system associated with charcoal production whereby the gas produced in the process was employed as process fuel.

Can we assume that it was pure chance that the victim was connected with the Mills? Not necessarily, the plot thickens. An overseas Friend, Veronica de France, in Amsterdam has with fellow researchers investigated the murder and has discovered what amounts to a 'labyrinth' of clues (shades of the da Vinci Code) in books written at the time which would indicate a much deeper political connection. More we cannot say, but Veronica hopes to publish in due course and her conclusions are eagerly awaited.

Les Tucker

TOUCH

On November 5th, I gave a small lecture on Gunpowder history and technology at the Delft Army Museum. Readers may already know this: the Delft Army Museum has a small exhibition going on Gunpowder. Robert Douglas Smith has been working very hard to make this an interesting exhibition, even on that small scale. They have video footage of some experiments to extract nitrate from animal waste, making of gunpowder, etc. This is really good. I can highly recommend a visit to this Museum for those who may plan to visit the Netherlands anyway.

<http://www.legermuseum.nl/legermuseum.nl/legermuseum.nl/i000546.html>

The (German) Institut für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften publishes a series of books named "Natural Sciences in Islam". They contain reprints of articles that are very rare and very hard to find these days, and they address issues that are interesting to those who find the history of blackpowder of interest. More information:

<http://web.uni-frankfurt.de/fb13/igaiw/publication/naturalsciences.html> I have purchased a number of these volumes since they had very hard to find articles I was interested in. **Rutger Webb**

Sandhurst Hospital

I was interested in the article about the Sandhurst Hospitals in the December 2006 issue as I lived at No.1, part of the brick built one, for about 28 years. No. 1 flat, as it was called, went with my job as Water Warden and as we were on call 24/7 (24 hours on, 24 hours off) with my mate Ron Kerr. The date in the article is wrong as the plaque reads 1894. When I got the job I took my wife and son to inspect it. In the garden were two large pine trees, one of them only about ten foot from the flat. My son said "Dad, that tree is moving!" and it was with millions of wood ants running up and down the trunk, then following a well worn path through the grass and disappearing through an airbrick into the flat. My wife said "I'm not moving into that flat so you can cancel the job." When I reported the problem on the Monday morning I was told to get some sprays to kill them and "don't forget the receipts or you won't get re-imbursed." One problem with the flat was that the ceilings in the bedroom and the large sitting room facing the river were 15 foot high and cost a bomb to keep warm. The women's annexe, built in 1916, was a very cheap and quickly built affair consisting of a timber frame lined with wood cladding outside and, I understand, lined with asbestos sheets on the inside covered with wallpaper. Even the roof tiles were asbestos. **George Savill**

BYTES

More on the Drop Tower It is correct that ISRG used the tower for dropping experiments on live explosive stores which were to be parachute delivered. In my time in ISRG, W G (George) Critchell told me that the structure was originally part of an assembly tower for a prototype Black Knight rocket. (Whether this was at Westcott or Saunders Roe's test firing site on the Isle of Wight I do not know.) It was put up for sale as surplus and ISRG's engineers went to inspect it and arranged for its dismantling and re-erection at WA. I don't know when this was but could be late 50s/early 60s.

I used it for some small scale drop tests in the late 70s but its last use as far as I was concerned was as an antenna site for a radio relay transmitter/receiver for E Branch's personal radio system, since coverage on the South Site from the North Site transmitter was patchy.

I've read the articles on NG production at Edmonsey with great interest. Has anyone to your knowledge delved into the history of New Hill on the North Site? I know this was built (by Wimpey I was told) in 1940 as a stand-by NG facility in case Edmonsey was put out of action, but it was never used.

There is a probably apocryphal story that a gravity run with spent acid was done to test the channels but the fluid never arrived at the other end! In later years its mounded reinforced concrete shells which originally contained the process houses were converted and used as test firing chambers.

Tony Whittaker

Mark Mortlock - a new staff member responsible for Marketing



Mark joined the WARGM staff at the end of last year. He gained a degree in Advertising and Marketing Communication at the University of Hertford and then worked for Jabisco as a marketing assistant, moving to Catalyst Management (telecommunications company) as marketing co-ordinator.

He finds the site "simply amazing and intriguing and the work thoroughly enjoyable."

He is responsible for the design of the 2007 leaflet enclosed with this newsletter.

DON'T FORGET
DEADLINE FOR THE June 2007 ISSUE:
15th May 2007

MEETINGS & CONFERENCES

BRITISH ROCKETRY ORAL HISTORY GROUP CHARTERHOUSE CONFERENCE 2007

'SPACE REALLY MATTERS'

The conference will be held from April 12-14th at
Charterhouse School near Godalming in Surrey.

for details: <http://www.brohp.org.uk/conf.html>
or 0151 281 1134

During the conference the
BRITISH INTERPLANETARY SOCIETY
will be running a parallel session

THE ROYAL AERONAUTICAL SOCIETY SPACE GROUP

26 June - 1st July 2007 - Visit to Peenemunde and Nordhausen

David Richer

Space Group

The Royal Aeronautical Society RAeS www.raes.org.uk
4 Hamilton Place Space Group www.raes.org.uk/space/
London W1J 7BQ email space@raes.org.uk

GUNPOWDER & EXPLOSIVES HISTORY GROUP SPRING MEETING at the ROYAL GUNPOWDER MILLS WALTHAM ABBEY, Saturday 12th May 2007

CHARCOAL - completing the series of such meetings
on the three ingredients of Gunpowder.

10.00 Meet in the Saltpetre House where coffee, tea and biscuits will be served

10.30 MORNING SESSION Chairman's Welcome. The plan for the day

10.35 Brenda Buchanan (University of Bath and Foundation Trustee of WARGM)

"Charcoal : 'the largest single variable in the performance of Black Powder'?"

11.15 Colin Russell (Professor, Open University and University of Cambridge)

'The Secrets of the Cylinders : a preliminary examination'

12.00 Wayne Cocroft (English Heritage, WARGM archeologist)

Informal contribution on role of William Congreve sr. in introducing cylinder charcoal

12.30 Discussion on charcoal, its sources, significance and changing methods of
production

12.45 LUNCH TIME

Tea and coffee will be served, but please bring lunch to allow time for site visit

13.00 Site Visit led by Wayne Cocroft

14.15 AFTERNOON SESSION Chairman's Introduction

Fieldwork Reports on the ingredients of gunpowder previously studied

14.20 Robert Smith (formerly Head of Conservation, Royal Armouries)

"Saltpetre making in India"

14.50 Alan Cocker (Professor, University of Surrey)

"Sulfur from Sicily"

15.20 The three main ingredients of gunpowder: general discussion

15.40 CONCLUDING SESSION

Tea followed by Annual General Meeting of the Gunpowder and Explosives
History Group

Discussion on the future plans for the Group. Subscriptions.

16.15 Meeting ends

Cost per person : £10. This will include refreshments but not sandwiches

Let us know in advance if you hope to attend so that entry to the site and seating can be
arranged

Contact Brenda Buchanan ssxbjb@bath.ac.uk ; Tel.01225 311508