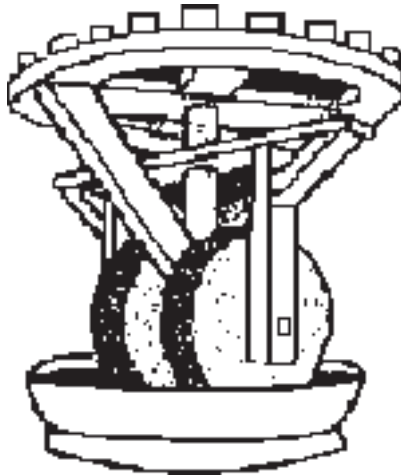


# Touchpaper

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



**SEPTEMBER**  
**2007**

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



## *Editorial*

*I am happy to report that we have found a willing volunteer to take over as editor and this will be my penultimate issue. The next issue in December will be a joint effort by myself and the new editor, Malcolm Bergh.*

*Just so that you may recognise him here is a mugshot taken on the land train at a recent weekend:*



*Although Malcolm worked for a number of years in the Computer Section on North Site he has only recently joined the Friends Association but I am sure he will soon become well known to you all and I am sure you will assist him by continuing to submit articles etc. for him to edit.*

*Norman Paul*



# CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

Another good start to the season. Up until early July the site has had about 20% more visitors than the corresponding period last year.

As last year, the site is open on Wednesdays during the summer school holidays with extra children's activities. This is proving very popular, particularly in the making and firing of air powered paper rockets. Participants even get a rocket firing certificate signed by a real 'rocket scientist'! With good weather some of these extra opening days have attracted more visitors than some weekends.

We have recently welcomed a further batch of rockets from IMI Summerfield, some of which came originally from Westcott. The display in L157 annex is greatly improved as a result and has attracted many favourable comments.

While on the theme of rockets, we have been asked to help arrange a special 'Rocketry Weekend' event in next year's programme and a small sub-committee has been set up to propose and investigate an activities programme. Watch this space for developments.

Dave Sims and assistants are making good progress with the replica gunpowder incorporating mill in L157. The woodwork is essentially complete up to the base of the mixing pan. We are still looking into a slow speed motor (about 12 to 20 rpm) to drive the mill.

The Powder Boat renovation is complete and we are looking now for ideas for further main projects; so if any of you have any ideas please let us know.

The weather earlier in the year has ensured that vegetation, particularly nettles, has grown up very well and needs extensive cutting down and the land train route has needed considerable pruning work.

John Wright

## The Vikings come to Orkney

Last year, as you may remember, following an exchange of emails Brian and I, with our good friends Nila and Hugh Monckton, visited Kristian Jensen in Denmark. (see previous article in March 2007 Touchpaper) We were interested to see the replica Viking ship, “Sea Stallion of Glendalough”, in Roskilde harbour. She is a copy of a 30m long warship, built in Dublin in 1042, the remains of which were found in Peberrenden, a natural channel in Roskilde Fjord near Skuldelev. When we learnt of the plan to make the long voyage from Denmark to Dublin, arriving in August 2007, we resolved to try to meet her in Orkney.



Following the progress of the Sea Stallion on her website it was difficult to predict when she would actually arrive in Orkney. However, as I was staying with Nila and Hugh in Scotland anyway we thought we would visit Orkney and hope for the best. The weather had not been kind to the sailors and they were stuck in Norway for a while. Eventually, we heard that she was underway again so Hugh booked us on the car ferry from Aberdeen to Kirkwall on the 17 July. It is a 6 hour cruise/voyage and we arrived at our hotel about midnight. To our amazement we discovered the next morning that Sea Stallion had made it to Kirkwall at 2am. She had been towed part of the way across the North Sea until the wind was of sufficient strength to inflate her sails.

With much excitement we made our way to the harbour and found a large number of exhausted but happy Danish sailors having their breakfast of porridge and rye bread. As Kristian and Lene had requested, we made ourselves known to their friend's daughter Vibeke. Although clearly tired, she came and spoke to us before posing for a photograph with Nila and I.

We had hoped to see the ship in sail or being rowed by these modern Vikings but, unfortunately, we were unable to be present when she left Orkney for the next stage of her voyage.

**Daphne Clements**

## **A VISIT TO ORFORD NESS NATIONAL TRUST SITE**

Atomic bombs are not usually associated with the quiet Suffolk coast but the National Trust who manage Orford Ness have a tactical nuclear missile as part of their display (suitably free of energetic materials!).

My visit to the site in mid-June was with a party of members of the Lowestoft Archaeological Society. The ferry from Orford crosses the Alde River to the spit of land south of Aldeburgh, only a matter of minutes takes you into a land of past secret military activity, now populated by a rich variety of flora and fauna, particularly birds. We boarded a land train identical to ours at the Mills (not surprising since Brian Harvey tells me that our one came from Orford). During WWI there was an airfield there for the testing of aircraft flying characteristics and also to act as a base for the interception of zeppelins. Between the two World Wars the site reverted to water meadows. However, in the 1930s the first experiments for the use of radio waves to detect aircraft were made at Orford Ness; the birth of Radar, which was then transferred down the coast to Bawdsey Manor.

WWII saw the reverse of the grassy area of the site as an airfield for the development of bomb sights but also testing of German aircraft vulnerability and the converse by firing captured German rounds at British aircraft. The BBC World Service is now transmitted from a building on the northern end of the site which was built with American money to house an early warning radar system that failed to live up to expectations.

The seaward part of the site consists of shingle separated from the inshore grassland by a ditch spanned by a Bailey Bridge. This area was selected by AWRE to test nuclear bomb firing mechanisms. Two pagoda like structures are the most noticeable legacy of this era and their design was meant to attenuate any explosion by directing the blast downward to reduce air shock. Fortunately the theory was never put to the test and this work on nuclear weapons was discontinued in the 1970s. In case you were wondering about the atomic bomb, it was not the 'Blue Danube', Britain's first one but a type 177 anti-submarine bomb (case only).

**Bryan Howard**

## “WILDLIFE”

Truth to tell some of the more prominent wildlife are becoming less wild!

The **Fallow Deer** in particular are getting more and more used to visitors at the site. In the first few years of opening it could be a rare sight to see any of the deer and those spotted would soon beat a hasty retreat into the thick woodland and scrub. Over the last couple of years they have become much bolder and can frequently be seen grazing on Queens Mead. I have to say that they do tend to disappear into the woodland when major events are taking place - especially those involving the firing of muskets and cannons! It is now a common sight now to see them



approaching the land train in the expectation of some additional food. Some of our drivers make a point of carrying carrots and apples and the boldest deer have even come up and taken food from the hand.

The other example is the large fish in Newtons Pool. These **Carp** have grown to a really respectable size and once again, some drivers carry bread to feed them. It has now got to the point where the land train guides have to stop speaking for a few minutes since no one is listening and they are all admiring the fish. It is suspected that they sense the vibrations caused by the land train approach and surface, congregating by that end of the pool.



**Norman Paul**

# European Route of Industrial Heritage

**the Launch of  
'THE INDUSTRIOUS EAST'**  
at the  
**Royal Gunpowder Mills**  
**4th July 2007**

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We reported in the September issue last year of a meeting, held on site, of representatives of a number of attractions and museums in East Anglia to come together as an important regional part of the ERIH.

An inaugural meeting has now taken place with the Mills being recognised as a major industrial site and designated as an 'Anchor Point'.

All major attractions in the UK compete for visitors and with only a limited budget for advertising the site will benefit from membership of the ERIH; giving us a higher profile and cross-marketing with other sites, not only in East Anglia but beyond, right through to Europe and is funded by the EU.

The ERIH will also help with leaflets, exhibitions and a web site.  
([www.erih.net](http://www.erih.net))

Members also benefit from the exchange in expertise and experiences.

So called 'Anchor Points' publicise all other sites in the ERIH network and information is directly available to the millions of visitors interested in industrial heritage.



The event was attended by over 80 interested parties including a number of Friends.

The Launch programme started with a welcome by the Board Chairman, Trevor Knapp, followed by a showing of the WARGM film.

After an introduction to ‘The Industrious East’ a presentation on the ERIH project was given by Dr Wolfgang Ebert followed by success stories from three key sites.

An ERIH plaque was presented at the meeting and can now be seen displayed on the wall by the visitor entrance.



After lunch the delegates were given a live firing display on Queens Mead by the Rocket Troop of the 95th (Rifles) Regiment, resplendent in their uniforms. There were firings of a 3 pounder ‘galloper’ gun and several spectacular firings of Congreve Rockets.

# GEORGE CROSS MEDAL

## William Sylvester

At 10.42 am on Thursday 18th January 1940 there was a serious explosion in the No. 5 Mixing House when some 6,000 lbs of nitroglycerine, guncotton and mixed paste exploded, completely demolishing the building and damaging a number of surrounding buildings. Five men were killed. 150 yards away was the No. 2 Wash House where three men, William Sylvester, Leo O'Hagen and Stanley Sewell were working on a very critical stage of the production process. The structure of the building was little affected but the liquid in their charge was very susceptible to shock and the men could have left their posts for a safer place. William Sylvester (then aged 25 yrs) maintained a watch over more than a ton of nitroglycerine while the other two oversaw the process of bringing the material to a point of relative stability. All three men stayed at their posts for a further two hours. Each was awarded what was then known as the EMPIRE GALLANTRY MEDAL. Later on the GEORGE CROSS was instituted in place of the EGM and each man subsequently received this.

William's son, John Sylvester, visited the site on the 18th August and presented the medal with two other medals belonging to his father to the Mills where they can be given pride of place with an appropriate caption telling of this gallant act.

It is a great honour for us to receive them and our sincere thanks to John and his wife Marilyn.





John Sylvester presenting the medals to the Company Chairman, Trevor Knapp.



L to R: George Cross - GR V Silver Jubilee medal - ER II Coronation

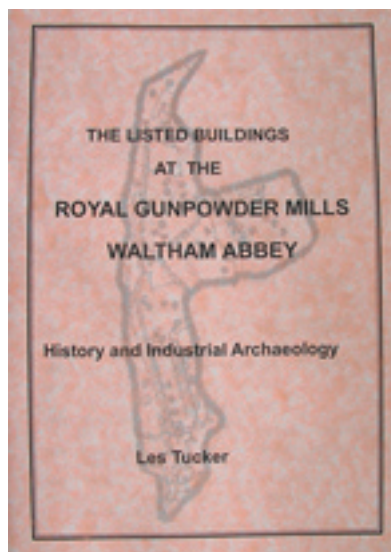
# FRIENDS ASSOCIATION

The Friends have published four booklets on the Mills – The Listed Buildings, The Woodland Trees, The Beam Engines, Trials and Tribulations.

Apart from the Mills Shop, the first two have been on sale at Loughton, Epping and Hoddesdon Bookshops and the Waltham Abbey Tourist Information Office. It was interesting to see that one of these, Epping, reached the shortlist for the Independent Bookshop of the Year award. With the onset of mass marketing of books by supermarkets etc as commodities independent bookshops have to fight harder than ever.

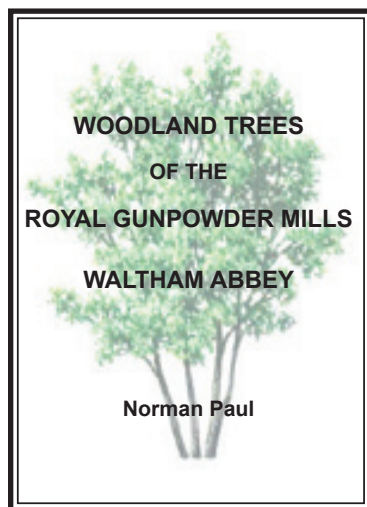
When visiting the shops to check on sales it has been very noticeable that there has been significant growth in the number of ‘local interest’ publications on offer, some at what appear to be totally uncommercially low prices.

first published 2001



**1087 sold**

published 2001



**375 sold**

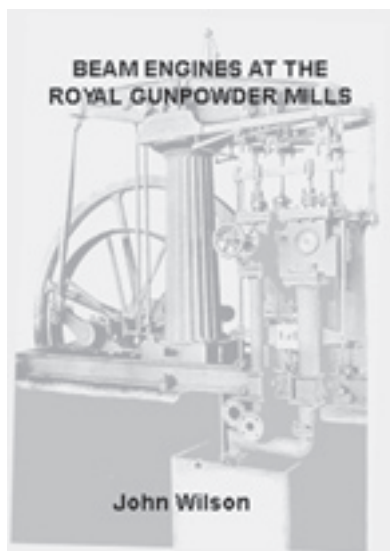
All these booklets are available to members at a specially reduced price

# PUBLICATIONS

Apparently the reason is the availability of subsidies from interested organisations using them as a medium of publicity for the subject, enabling them to include such items as expensive glossy covers, colour photography etc. The Friends booklets stand alone, i.e. they are supplied at a level just covering costs and have to be of fairly ‘utilitarian’ appearance. In this increasingly disadvantageous environment it is gratifying to see that an element of the public continues to have sufficient interest in industrial archaeology to buy our, in superficial comparison, modest publications.

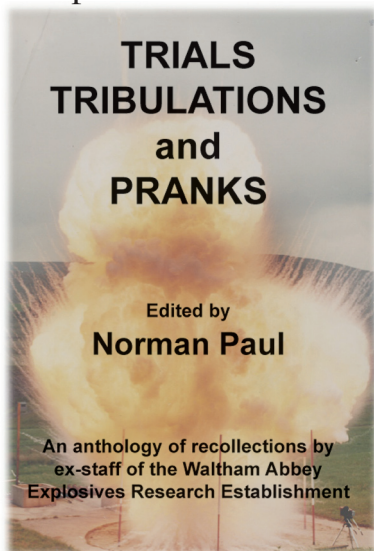
It is also gratifying to note that the Central Reference Section of Essex Libraries have become aware of the Listed Buildings booklet and have taken in several copies and have included it in their database, which should ensure its permanence.

published 2006



**118 sold**

published 2007



**240 sold**

Available from the Treasurer.

All at £1 each except the ‘Trials’ booklet which is £1.50

## WEEKEND

Since our last issue a number of special weekend events have been held, some old favourites and some events new to the Mills:

**June** saw a return of the English Civil War event by the Sealed Knot Society, the 'Diehards', WW1 event and the ever popular Military Vehicle Show.



In **July** an event new to us - A Jousting Tournament with the Knights Of Royal England.

This was a great spectacle and a real crowd pleaser. The enactors involved the audience right from the start with a parade of visiting children. The Portuguese Lipitano horses they used seemed to enjoy the fun as much as the enactors .....



# EVENTS

..... and the riders gave no quarter with each other with much boasting, arguing and mock fights.

Some of the action appeared to the audience to be quite serious but no one seemed to be injured although we suspect that some of them ended the day with significant bruising. A very enjoyable event.



Also in July was the return of the National Archaeology weekend and the Regia Anglorum re-enactment.

**August** saw a return visit by the English Civil War by the English Civil War Society and the American Civil War Re-enactment Group re-enacting the battle for a town called Winchester. This town was fought over 43 times with first one side and then the other pushing their opponents out.



## .... and more

Both sides used cannon to support the infantry and there were some really loud bangs which probably upset our neighbours again!



Another new event during August was the Legend of Robin Hood - A medieval spectacular by the Golden Archers. Once again there was good audience participation and the main characters acted out a good script.





# EVENTS

There were displays of archery against targets and a demonstration of the power of the longbow with one archer pulling a 150lb bow, Most bows are generally only 50lbs!

The use of fire arrows was also demonstrated as shown in the photo below, although it might be hard to make out the flames in a black and white picture!



Keeping very much in character some of the re-enactors joined a land train ride on which I was the guide. It was the most entertaining tour I have taken with much barracking from the re-enactors, highly enjoyable for me and the rest of the visitors but I was feeling a bit shattered by the end !

The last August event on the August Bank Holiday weekend was the return of The Napoleonic Association but this issue went to press prior to their appearance.

**Norman Paul**

## **Extract from the Archive Image Collection No. 2**

archive reference WAI 1463

The photograph on the page opposite was included in a batch kindly donated by Mrs. June Cox, daughter of Mr. Percy Knapman MBE, the eminent Superintendent who left in 1943 to take up a post in Whitehall.

1943 was the penultimate year of operation of the Factory as a full scale production unit, finally ceasing in 1944 when tetryl production ended.

*The title given is;*

### **1943 Waltham Abbey RGPF Photo of Nitroglycerine and Tetryl Section Management**

The photograph is of great historical interest, encapsulating as it does, in what could be a fairly normal ‘ works photograph’, a microcosm of what was a vital and secret contribution to the capability of the Armed Forces in WW2.

The interest is heightened by the availability of a name chart comprising personal signatures and of particular Touchpaper interest is the inclusion of Samuel (Bob) Berry, 2nd from right 2nd row, who started at the Factory in 1901 aged 14, at a much later stage in his career.

Details of Mr. Berry were given in an article in Touchpaper June 2007 P.14.

**Les Tucker**  
Honorary Archivist

WAI 1463



1943  
 Nathan Abbey R.G.P.F.  
 Dept. of Management and Tel. Section  
 Management

Walter A. Abbey, R.G.P.F.  
 Dept. of Management and Tel. Section

Walter A. Abbey, R.G.P.F.     J. H. ...     G. B. ...     J. H. ...

Walter A. Abbey, R.G.P.F.     J. H. ...     J. H. ...     J. H. ...

Walter A. Abbey, R.G.P.F.     J. H. ...     J. H. ...     J. H. ...

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# TOUCH BYTES

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It is good to report that one of our members and a former employee at the Establishment, Tony Kinloch, has been elected to the Royal Society. Tony started at the research establishment in 1972 and worked on many aspects of rubber and plastics adhesion. He left in 1984 to take up a teaching and research post at Imperial College London as Professor of Adhesion in the Department of Mechanical Engineering.

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## 1920's Rocketry in Cars



Touchpaper of December 2006 P.9 described the experience of Brian Waite who almost became the subject of an involuntary human rocket experiment astride a hydrogen cylinder. A few years ago Opel, subsidiary of GM, brought a number of historical cars to Brooklands. Amongst them was a reconstructed version of a 1920s rocket car, in the photograph. The original could well have provided an experience similar to Brian's if the hydrogen cylinder had taken off. In the car once you pressed the accelerator pedal it ignited more and more banks of rockets so there was no chance of 'back off' – the mind bogles.

**Les Tucker**

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<p><b>DON'T FORGET</b> <b>DEADLINE FOR THE December 2007 ISSUE:</b> <b>15th November 2007</b></p>
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# QUIZ PAGE

Apologies for mistakes in the puzzles in the last issue.

1. A vital piece of information was missing in the CONNECTIONS puzzle in that the third lunch was ‘Boiled Eggs’.

2. HEADS & TAILS

answers:

SEahorSE      AMalgAM      NEptuNE      REquire

LEgible      REstore      ANglicAN      PeriscoPE      ERasER

*The clue for REstore was incorrectly given as . . . STOR . .*

## CROSSWORD PUZZLE

### ACROSS

1. Boxer's blow
2. .... & Judy
3. Horse from Suffolk
4. Humorous magazine
5. Party drink in a bowl

1	2	3	4	5
2				
3				
4				
5				

### DOWN

1. Small green veg.
2. Female sheep
3. Domestic egg layers
4. Sail the 7 these
5. Dropped by cockneys

You should find this quite easy to solve using just the DOWN clues.

# JOKES

## ABOUT BLONDES

**all recently culled from a US source on the internet**

### SPEEDING TICKET

A police officer stops a blonde for speeding and asks her very nicely if he could see her license.

She replied in a huff, "I wish you guys would get your act together. Just yesterday you take away my license and then today you expect me to show it to you!"

### KNITTING

A highway patrolman pulled alongside a speeding car on the freeway. Glancing at the car, he was astounded to see that the blonde behind the wheel was knitting and steering with her knees!

Realizing that she was oblivious to his flashing lights and siren, the trooper cranked down his window, turned on his bullhorn and yelled, "PULL OVER!"

"NO!" the blonde yelled back, "IT'S A SCARF!"

### IN A VACUUM

A blonde was playing Trivial Pursuit one night. It was her turn. She rolled the dice and she landed on Science & Nature. Her question was, "If you are in a vacuum and someone calls your name, can you hear it?"

She thought for a time and then asked, "Is it on or off?"

### AT THE DOCTOR'S SURGERY

Blonde patient tells the doctor that whatever part of her body she touches it hurts and proceeded to demonstrate. Touches her leg and screeches "OW"! Then her arm "OW"! , her back "OW"! , her ear "OW"! : etc. etc.

"Well" said the doctor. "It's quite simple really.

"You've **BROKEN YOUR FINGER**!!!"

## **REMAINING EVENTS FOR THE YEAR**

### **SEPTEMBER**

**1st -2nd      Home Front**

**8th -9th      Victorian Experience Family Day**

**15th - 16th    Essex Militia Re-enactment**

**22nd - 23rd    The World Aflame**

**29th - 30th    Guy Fawkes Experience**

### **OCTOBER**

**6th - 7th      Last Open Weekend of the Season**

**ROYAL**  
**GUNPOWDER**  
**MILLS**  
WALTHAM ABBEY

‘TOUCHPAPER’©

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