

Winter 2011

TOUCHPAPER

The Newsletter of the Royal Gunpowder Mills Friends Association

Paintings

Scottish Tales

Ian Wallace

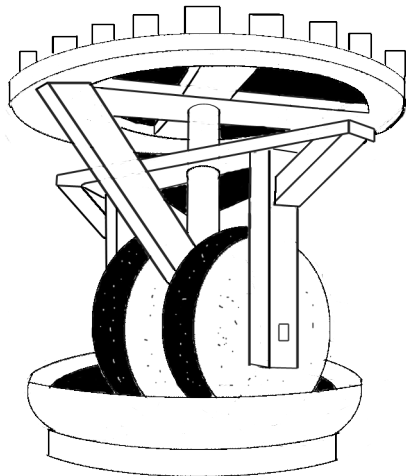
South Site items

Orford Ness pranks

Crossness

Last of the
Summer wine

Letters
and a
Word Search



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Deadline for the next issue is 3rd February 2012

Chairman's Chat

November has seen the education ladies giving their annual talks to schoolchildren on Guy Fawkes. This has involved some Friends and other volunteers in guiding children between various buildings for different talks. This has slowed down our other activities such as refurbishing the third cordite drying truck. We hear that the Railway Group may shortly be obtaining some more cordite trucks. Their condition is unknown - another challenge! We haven't found time so far this year to work on the further restoration of the gunpowder boat.

I have been away in the USA for the latter half of October for a nephew's wedding. Unfortunately it snowed on the day of the wedding (5 inches) but all roads were clear by the next day, not quite the same as here. Snow is rare in Maine in October so I hope we are not going to suffer early snow here.

Visitor numbers were up this season and on Guy Fawkes night we had 1800 people in. I hope those of you who came enjoyed the visit.

Significant changes are happening, some more rapidly than others. By the time you read this we expect to have received a large Stentor rocket engine for exhibition. (More about this I hope in the next issue.)

There was a short item from the Gunpowder Mills about gunpowder on the One Show on BBC1 on 4th November. Sorry we were unable to advertise this in the last issue but BBC schedules are not arranged that far in advance.

Lynne Lennard, who has worked for the company since it started, has been on sick leave for several months. We are all delighted that she is now well enough to return. The contributors to this Christmas issue hope you enjoy it and wish you a Very Happy Christmas and a successful New Year.

Articles short or long are always welcome for Touchpaper. How about writing something on your career at WA and anywhere else?

Previous ones in this series have been very interesting.

John Wright

Powdermills Paintings

bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings

The BBC in association with the Public Catalogue Foundation has recently launched the above website of “The Nation’s Oil Paintings”. Three paintings from the RGM’s collection have met the criteria for inclusion i.e. “Lady of the Lea” explosives barge, “The Gunpowder Press House” and “Gunpowder Incorporating Mill c.1780”. Each painting has a webpage of its own, along with descriptive information about the painting.

To navigate your way to the website go to <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings>, click the tab Galleries & Collections. Click Essex on the drop-down alphabetic menu, then click Secret Island at Royal Gunpowder Mills. The three paintings will appear at the bottom of this webpage as small images, click on any one of these to see them full size. There are also links to the RGM’s website from the BBC’s website by clicking the Secret Island logo.

Richard Penfold.



Lady
of
the
Lea

A Rhum Story

One day in 1982 I was talking to Ian Wallace in H10 when he mentioned that he was chartering a yacht from a yard near Oban with the idea of cruising round the Inner Hebrides. Dick Watkins, who'd just completed a yachtmasters course was also going for some practical sailing experience, I was accepted as another crew member; the rest of the party consisted of Ian's father-in-law and two of Ian's friends, John and Dave, from Bishopton.

The boat was a Verrule 27 i.e. six people were packed into a 27 foot boat. Dick and I slept head-to-toe sardine fashion on the main cabin couch. The rest enjoyed the luxury(?) of pipecots in the bows, apart from Ian who had slightly better accommodation in a single bunk.



We sailed a short distance from the yard to Oban, anchored and went ashore in the boat's rubber dinghy to have a meal. Returning to the boat was made difficult as it was no longer anchored where we'd left it; it was moving away from us! The reason was that another yacht had hooked its anchor into ours and was towing our boat. Eventually after much shouting we got our boat back.

Sunday morning dawned fine and clear but windless so we motored up the Sound of Mull for most of the day, eventually reaching Tobermory by evening. Spaghetti Bolognese was soon prepared and devoured but in scraping the few scraps off the plates into the clear waters of the harbour the spaghetti became alive and swam away. Best of all was one piece involved in a tug-of-war by fish that were not visible!





Ian Wallace

Monday saw us depart for the Isle of Rhum passing Muck and Eigg on the way. We arrived in Loch Scresort by evening and dropped two anchors as the weather forecast was for stormy weather.

We were holed-up in Rhum until Thursday morning although we did get ashore for a wander round, I remember seeing a golden eagle.

The return trip in a fresh breeze was a good sail and only marked by a well executed gybe in the Sound of Mull. Ian warned us all to keep our heads down as the boom whistled across from one side to the other. Unfortunately Ian had his hand on the track for the boom and the resulting language when the track 'bit' him was quite educational!

All-in-all a good trip, although I don't recall Dick Watkins ever venturing on the sea again. He took my advice on the only sure cure for sea sickness was to sit under an oak tree!

Bryan Howard

More on Ian Wallace

I penned a few words about Ian Wallace in an earlier edition of Touchpaper. Colleagues will recall that Ian spent his early career years doing research on propellants and energetic materials at the ERDE Waltham Abbey before moving on to project management appointments in the Procurement Executive in London, where he was responsible for the acquisition of air weapons. He spent some time as Controller Air's Information Technology Director before being appointed as Scientific Advisor to the Chief Inspector of Naval Ordnance in Bath. He succeeded me as Vice-President of the Ordnance Board, the MOD's Director of Standardisation and Director of Safety Policy in 1997 before becoming the first Director of the Defence Ordnance Safety Group and the MOD's Chief Inspector of Explosives. He moved over to Shrivenham in the early 2000's and he is now Professor and Head of Cranfield Defence and Security at the Defence Academy, a position formerly known to most of you as Principal of the Royal Military College of Science. Ian is now mixing in royal circles; this year's graduation ceremony at the College, at which Ian officiated, was graced with the presence of the Princess Royal.



How did this come about? Well, each year Shrivenham presents an honorary graduate award to two individuals that have contributed to supporting the University or the Defence industry. The Princess Royal was awarded the degree of Doctor of Science in recognition of her contribution to the College through her involvement with the affiliated charity organisation, the Cranfield Trust. She is also recognised for her contributions to education as a whole, especially in developing countries, along with her support to the Armed Forces. The second honorary degree went to Dr David Price, Chief Executive of the Chemring Group, one of the fastest expanding companies in the defence sector. Ian can be seen in the photograph with Her Royal Highness in the Defence Capability Centre, a large hall packed with tanks and guns. The array of flags represents all the foreign military being educated at the college.

Geoff Hooper

History of South Site

Les Tucker and Bryan Howard are compiling a booklet about South Site. We're short of information on the WW2 years and early post war years. If you worked on South Site during those formative times we would like to hear from you. Our address is:

Royal Gunpowder Mills
Beaulieu Drive
Waltham Abbey
EN9 1JY

Or Fax 01992 707372

Email: archives@royalgunpowdermills.com

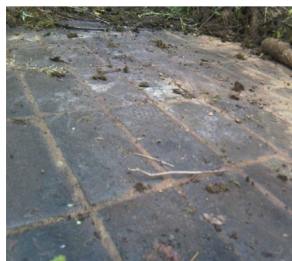
(Or visit in person).

Artefacts on the RGPF ‘SOUTH SITE’

As a keen walker I have come across many interesting artefacts. Take a look at some on the RGPF ‘South Site’.



Vat 27ft x 18ft made up in sections of 3ft x 4ft high as photo on right shows. My poor guess is something to do with acid or nitro-glycerine storage.



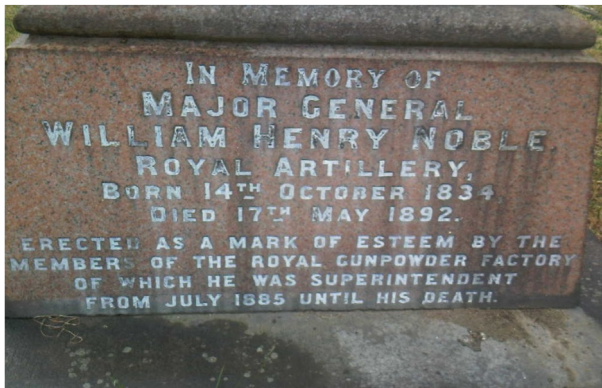
Headstone in front of concrete floor with tiles. Is this the remains of the ‘Acid Factory’ with the characteristic blue acid-proof bricks?



Bridge over Cobbins Brook facing the M25 (Lower Island Lock!) Plenty of artefacts around bridge, such as this steel capstan. This area was a wharf.



Disused Pill Boxes or safety area when testing explosives. Notice the traverses. Pillboxes have now been adopted to provide homes for bats called hibernacula.



There is a belief among many residents born in Waltham Abbey that Alfred Nobel of 'Nobel Peace Prize' fame and his son were buried in W/A graveyard. This is not surprising as Alfred Nobel had a factory in Farmhill Road making ammunition and a row of 12 terraced houses called Nobel Villas in Sewardstone Road. On investigating this credible story I found the grave and as you can see when you read the gravestone a happy coincidence.

Another belief is that bridge number 10 on North Site has been unofficially named Kate's Bridge after Kate Winslet (Hester Wallace) because of her appearance on it in the film Enigma. Well Kate never appeared on bridge 10 in Enigma; it was Saffron Burrows (Claire) with Dougray Scott (Thomas Jericho) who had their lovers tiff on bridge 10!

Ray Stelzner

Life on Mull

I was living on Mull on the West coast of Scotland, employed by an absent owner of an estate. The farm already had a manager so I just kept an overall eye on the holiday cottages, four in total.

Not being a ‘sit around doing nothing’ person I decided to keep some pigs and what fun I had with them.

They were outdoor pigs, Tamworths, and at one time before I penned them in they roamed everywhere (and dug up the place). They did clear a large field of bracken which was good.

Anyway I had 2 pigs that were ready for market but had no means of getting them to the slaughter house so I decided I would use my car, a Morris Traveller. So next day a friend joined me and having put some bracken on the floor loaded the two pigs into the van.

Now if you know Mull it’s all single roads with passing places, and also from the farm to Dervaig, a road clinging to the cliff face. Quite hairy to drive especially with two large pigs in the back who suddenly decided they wanted to look out at the scenery, through the windscreen! One ended up sitting on my lap with its face on the steering wheel and the other sitting on top of my friend. In my efforts to remove my “pig driver” I nearly went over the cliff, so decided to stop and go back to the farm, a reprieve for the pigs. Turning wasn’t easy but I managed it, got back to the farm, put the pigs in the barn and then proceeded to Tobermory, to the bank. I stopped at the bank, my friend got out and went inside. Suddenly there was a piercing scream, my friend rushed out. I asked what the matter was, she showed me her hand, it was covered in pig shit, the pig had found her handbag a useful place to relieve himself.

Sheilagh Owens.

Orford Ness

The June / September issue of Touchpaper included a review by Bryan Howard of the book ‘ The Hidden History of Orford Ness ‘. the defence research centre on a spit of land on the Suffolk coast, originating in WW1.

The science at the Ness was in deadly earnest but in a way only the British temperament could achieve there was still room for some levity. The situation was similar at Waltham Abbey, captured in the Friends booklet ‘ Trials Tribulations and Pranks ‘. The following are two memories of pranks at Orford.

1. The Eggs Experiment

The account was included in a speech by Sir Henry Tizard given at the Golden Jubilee Dinner of the ARE (Armament Research Establishment) in 1953. Sir Henry was knighted for his scientific services to the nation, which had started in WW1 when he was a pilot at Orford Ness.

This is the text of the relevant part of the report of the speech which appeared in the ARE Journal Golden Jubilee Number May 1954 (WASC 2242).

Sir Henry then proceeded to reminisce about his early days as a volunteer gunner and then as a member of the Royal Flying Corps.

He claimed to have taken part in the first full-scale scientific experiment in the RFC when, following discussion in the mess after a lecture on the ballistics of bombs, an aircraft was sent up with a cargo of eggs to test the theory advanced by one bright officer that since the resistance to motion increased with increasing speed of fall, eggs would not be broken on reaching the ground if they were dropped from a sufficiently high altitude! The aircraft duly flew across the airfield and released the eggs ; the observers on the ground, however, completely failed to find any of them even after a

considerable time, and coming to the conclusion that they must still be falling, and being tired of waiting, dispersed again to the mess, quite satisfied with their experiment.



Sir Henry Tizard was amongst the most important and brilliant of all who worked on Orford Ness. A fair pilot, he was primarily an academic with a sharp analytical mind. He 'found' the site for Martlesham heath airfield, developed the concept of the test pilot and then ensured that RDF would evolve into radar.

2.Vulnerability testing

Explosives in armaments are tested for their vulnerability to being hit by hostile fire.

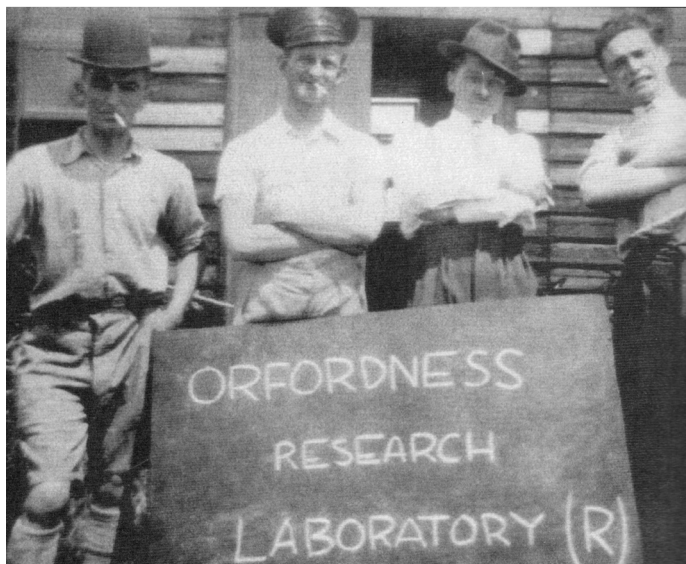
British air defence and later from aircraft in WW2 included 3in. and 5in. cordite propelled rockets and after the War tests took place at the Ness on their ballistic performance in a ground strike role in the first generation of jet fighters.

The following is an account of the somewhat robust attitude to vulnerability testing which appeared to prevail at Orford in the 1950's.

Frank Tanner (later to become an internationally known ballistics expert) relates how a number of rocket motors had been delivered to the Ness for vulnerability testing. Tanner and a colleague took one and brought it back to the office to conduct a practical experiment.

Bruce Gordon, the Director of the Section, tried to set fire to it, without success. Taking it outside the HQ building, they wedged it against the railway line and again tried to set fire to it. By now a small crowd had gathered. Ignition eventually occurred spectacularly and the crowd disappeared as quickly as it had formed. After trying in vain to move the railway line the rocket motor took to the air and executed a rapid loop before exiting stage right. Peering around the ends of all the buildings in the row from the machine shop to the canteen were a number of goggle-eyed heads – a superb introduction to the 3 inch rocket motor.

Les Tucker



These pranksters
rank amongst
the saviours of
the nation - the
original radar
team

Crossness Steaming Day – meeting an old friend.

By the early 1850s London had become a vast open sewer. The contents of all WCs and cesspits emptied into drains which in turn discharged directly into the Thames.

A brand new sewerage system was designed which consisted of a network of new drains running into vast sewers travelling eastwards to Crossness on the south bank and Barking on the north. At Crossness the sewage was pumped into a covered reservoir and held until the ebb tide when it was released into the Thames and thus flowed towards the North Sea. Four huge pumping engines were constructed for this task, together with a magnificent building to house them.

The engines were built in 1864 by James Watt & Co in Birmingham and shipped, in parts, to London by the network of canals and rivers connecting the two cities. Each of the four engines bore the name of a member of the royal family; Victoria, Prince Consort, Albert Edward and Alexandra. After a great deal of renovation the engine Prince Consort is now used on “Steaming Days”.

The engine house has a beautiful brightly coloured Victorian interior.



It was wonderful to be able to stand in the midst of such colour and watch the beam engine moving so majestically. It has been a long held wish to see such magnificence for myself.

When we arrived at the site on a chilly, but sunny, October Sunday morning we were delighted to spot “Woolwich” in a cosy engine house. She looked much smarter than when we last saw her at the Powdermills.

Keeping her company were Robin and Christine Parkinson who have been looking after her since she arrived at Crossness. It was good to see them again too.

Daphne Clements



Robin and Christine Parkinson

Woolwich with saddle tanks removed



For further information about the Crossness Engines Trust see www.crossness.org.uk

Last of the Summer Wine

We have gained two more regulars, Margaret Lee and Christine Needham. Now that Margaret has moved into 12 Lea View during the summer (to keep an eye on her brother Malcolm in No.4?) it's no distance to go to the Crown. Christine Needham has known Margaret for many years since they used to work in the same office.

Jean Richards is expected to return to Waltham Abbey and we're hoping she'll join us. Three other regulars Geoff and Pam Colley and Jock McDougal have taken to meeting in the Crown most Fridays where anyone stewarding in the Mills is likely to join them; LSW is becoming a weekly affair!

The Royal Gunpowder Mills, now sub-titled 'Secret Island', has been open throughout the month of August. Len Stuart has found that an average of 137 visitors per day has been recorded; this is very encouraging but quite demanding on the staff and volunteers.

After many early set-backs the café was ready to supply drinks and snacks in time for the August daily opening. (It is amazing how the riggers' shop has been transformed; what would Stan Titchener think?).

L168 now houses the rocket exhibition and a 'Mad Science' Lab. Throwing a plastic drink bottle containing some liquid nitrogen into a tub of warm water produces a bang (123db) that never fails to make me jump as there's no warning siren.

There's not many LSWs left in 2011, just November 25 with the annual dinner likely to be December 2nd.

Bryan Howard.

Letters to Touchpaper

Dear Friends,

Can anyone enlighten me as to where the last Gunpowder Mill, demolished in the 1950's or 60's, was located and what its building number would have been? This is the one damaged by a German Land Mine around 1942.

There is an information board on Long Walk that points to what we now know is a Dusting House and we want to re-locate the board to its proper location, if possible, so any help would be appreciated.

Thanks.

John Wilson

Wartime Orford Ness

During the early days of the last war I visited Orford Ness a number of times with Dr Williams to attend gun trials. I remember coming back from one with one of a number of nylon parachutes which had been retrieved (such materials, in those days, were precious). The occasion I remember most was when the service car ran out of petrol. We waved down a passing lorry. Room was found in the drivers cab for Dr Williams but I had to put the equipment in the back, climb in myself and pull up a filthy tacmac because it was raining. A service car was provided for our return journey.

Vic(D.V.Clifford)

I thought of this while writing a letter to Bryan Howard and it occurred to me that The Friends might find it amusing.

Best wishes from Vic.

SHARING AN EXPERIENCE

Although on a number of occasions, I have had the opportunity to have shared information with other colleagues, there have been times, when visitors have expressed a certain emotion with me.

Let me explain by quoting the following conversation: -

"Yes we have come here also, to pay our respects to all those past employees, who worked here, at a bygone age; our relatives worked here and we are paying them honour. It is a privilege for us to do so and to be here today".

How's this for clear thinking? 'Lest we forget'.

Just a thought to share.

Minnie Fenton

The Stentor has arrived on site

It has been stored in a field judging from the mud and leaves attached. Some parts are badly corroded but the main combustion chambers and pipes are stainless steel so these are in good condition. We hope to publish an article on Stentor in the next issue.



Missiles & Motors Word Search

Q E N D P E V E R G N O C Y L Y E B K B N F K N L
 R Z H L L Q C Z O P F I S W R S E A S K U A H E F
 J E G Z C G O B B G U L S A E S J E F B C S K U A
 A O C S G N I L B M A R B R R E I P A R M I L A N
 V G O L D F I N C H S T O N E C H A T H C M H H D
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 L F C L K V N S V T Z I I T U Y K B P X N R A E Z
 I R P B L O W P I P E M N M O H D H W K C K M O M
 N O J W K A S Q K H O O P O E T R A T S D E R A S
 U T S E A D A R T P L S X L O O I B P A S G T N K
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 K T Z I G S E A W O L F A W A L A R M B R Q N V L
 C S V U X P M P E L L T U I W S E M I A S R D S A
 U C R Y T A F Q W Q J X I N H L V M V O T P E Q S
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 D I U R N R R G H X H K O J Y D D R C F E I B Q U
 X N T T I I T B D E A M U Q I Z A L T Z A N I B I
 G Y F R R F W D N U O H D O O L B C F E K T R J Q
 E N D P Y L G X Y E B W K B R N F R K N P E D L R
 Z H L L Q C Z N A O P A F I S A W A R H E R F E G
 Z C G O B B J E I W F L B O C S V K R H C M H D K
 P G G A A N R Y M W W L X G M G F E C L K V N S V
 T Z I I P M I T U Y S K B P X N R A N E Z P M N M
 O H D H W K C K V I G I L A N T M O J W K A S Q K

ALARM
 BRAMBLING
 CUCKOO
 IMP
 MILAN
 RAVEN
 SEASKUA
 SKYFLASH
 STONECHAT
 VIGILANT

BANTAM
 CHICK
 GOLDFINCH
 JAVELIN
 PETREL
 REDSTART
 SEASLUG
 SKYLARK
 SWINGFIRE
 WAXWING

BLOODHOUND
 CONGREVE
 GOSLING
 LAPWING
 POINTER
 ROOK
 SEAWOLF
 STARSTREAK
 THUNDERBIRD

BLOWPIPE
 CRAKE
 HOOPOE
 LAW
 RAPIER
 SEADART
 SKUA
 STENTOR
 TROY

Guidelines for submission of copy

As a guide approximately 400 words fit a single A5 page without illustrations, it generally helps to include a separate image to break up the text, so if you have an image(s) please include it(them) although we may be able to find something.

Text may be sent as emails or attached to emails as plain text or Word documents. Pictures are preferred as separate images, either jpg or png although other formats may be useable. If images are included in Word documents more effort is required to separate them and there is a reduction in quality. Paper originals should be scanned at 300dpi, digital photos can be resized to 1200 x 900 or larger, full size pictures from modern cameras are bigger than necessary and waste time uploading and downloading.

Pictures should be in colour if possible, they may only appear as grey scale in print but this is to keep costs down, normally they will be in colour in the electronic version.

We are happy to receive paper copies of text and pictures but cannot guarantee their return, if you cannot send items by email consider bringing them into the Mills or passing them to someone who does come in or can email them

Finally please be sensitive to copyright rules..

Useful free software.

I prepare Touchpaper using Scribus, this may be downloaded and used free of charge from:

<http://wiki.scribus.net/canvas/Download>

To resize images I use Visual photo resizer from:

<http://www.softpedia.com/get/Multimedia/Graphic/Graphic-Editors/Visualizer-Photo-Resize.shtml>

To avoid hours of fun(?) reinstalling Windows backup your complete working system with Macrium reflect free edition:

<http://www.macrium.com/reflectfree.aspx>

(I have backed up my systems but have not yet tried to restore them. I found this program (very easy to use) after spending a day setting up a working Windows system!

Brian Clements