

Winter 2013

TOUCHPAPER

The Newsletter of the Royal Gunpowder Mills Friends Association

617 Squadron

Unveiling a plaque to Bert Woodend

Hide and Seek

Where do you park your walking stick?

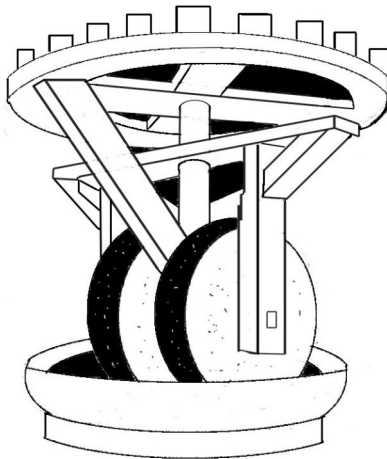
Finney Press explosion

Recollections of Jack Powling

**Work at the
South Site
Guncotton
Factory in WW2**

**Letters and
Puzzles**

**Obituary:
Les Grindrod**



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Deadline for the next issue is February 14th 2014

Chairman's Chat

There's a lot to read in this issue and I hope you enjoy it all. We are grateful to authors who always make an effort to ensure their contributions are interesting and entertaining.

My particular thanks go to Brian Clements the editor. Sometimes he has plenty of material for an issue but other times there is a shortage of items so he has to balance lean times with times of plenty, He always welcomes new contributors and new items.

The committee has some very good members who do a lot for the Friends and the Mills and I am very grateful to them. Special thanks go to Len Stuart who as well as being secretary does a lot towards new exhibits and repairing old ones. My thanks also to Dave Hewkin who, while not on the committee, audits the accounts and has spent a lot of time and effort trying with some success to get the water wheel turning on the 1854 hydraulic press and to Richard Thomas and Michael Seymour who have contributed, with Les Tucker, to archiving and finding out things that nobody knew about.

My best wishes to you all for Christmas and the coming year.

John Wright

Editorial

The next article in Les Tucker's series on Rockets has been deferred to next year to allow me to catch up with some other material that has been submitted and to allow room for a couple of puzzles. The answers appear towards the back, but no cheating.

Les Tucker is a regular contributor and is planning three articles for next year to celebrate anniversaries for the year '14. Many thanks to Les and all the other contributors who make the production of our Newsletter easy. Apologies to those still waiting to see their efforts published, I have a few items in the queue but please keep new material coming. Short items of news are particularly welcome, preferably good news!

As mentioned in the last issue the Treatise on Gunpowder and other books are now available to buy online, brief details (space does not permit a full list) on page 29. These should also be available in the site shop next year.

We have recently started work on the 'Green Hut', L185, near the Main Lab hopefully to accomodate the powder boat currently stored in a tent. We know that Dr Uri had a lab and office in this building and also that some people played table tennis in there. Can anyone supply dates for this and information on any other uses?

Forms are included to renew your membership and book for the Reunion / Social Event on 9th May 2014. We hope to see you there especially if you have not come in previous years.

Finally have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Brian Clements

617 Squadron

Further to the article in the last Touchpaper there is another connection between The Dambusters and Waltham Abbey. In the late 1970s I was privileged to spend two weeks at RAF Scampton on detachment to 617 Squadron.

It was quite an awesome experience for a former National Service LAC acting Corporal to be welcomed as an honorary Squadron Leader by the Commanding Officer of such an illustrious unit in Guy Gibson's own office. At the time the squadron was equipped with Avro Vulcans, a very impressive aircraft that were getting short on hours. They were being used in a low level role which imposed loads on the airframe that were greater than those it was designed to meet so their flying was being restricted to the essential low level training. This meant that I could not be offered a ride in a Vulcan, only the two pilots had ejector seats while other crew (and passenger) had to get out downwards; not a realistic procedure at low level. The squadron had been stationed at many different airfields around Lincolnshire with its Lancasters and Canberras but moved back to Scampton on receiving the Vulcans in 1961. They were disbanded in December 1981 but reformed again with Tornado. They started their final tour to Afghanistan in October 2013.

It is now possible to visit the historic rooms and the grave of Gibson's dog, Nigger, at RAF Scampton. An original smaller training bouncing bomb is on display together with a full size replica of the "Chastise" weapon.

The squadron was equipped with Avro Lancasters for the dams raid and the duration of the war, There are 20 Lancasters, some only parts, that still survive around the world but only two are still flying. The best known of these is PA 474 "City of Lincoln" of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight based at RAF Conningsby and the other is in Canada, FM213 moved to the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum in 1978, underwent a 10-year restoration, and has remained airworthy since



PA 474 "City of Lincoln"

1988. The aircraft is flown in the paint scheme of KB726 VR-A, depicting an aircraft of No. 419 Squadron RCAF, and is known as the "Mynarski Memorial Lancaster" in honour of a Canadian VC, Andrew Mynarski.

Hendon has a B1, R5868 S Sugar, on static display. She was delivered to 83 Squadron at Scampton on 29th June 1942 and took part in 125 operations (or 137 depending on which reference you read) before the end of the war and was designated as a display aircraft in August 1945. After years in storage and restoration R5868 went on display at Hendon in August 1972. There are five others in the UK, KB899 is at IWM Duxford (a Canadian built Mk X) and one at IWM Manchester. NX611 is at the Lincolnshire Aircraft Heritage Centre at East Kirby, the engines still run and taxi runs are offered to visitors. The centre hopes to return NX611 to an airworthy condition. Ten survive in Canada one of them airworthy, all are Canadian built Mk X. KB976 is stored at the Fantasy of Flight museum in Florida awaiting restoration. NX622 is on show at Aviation Heritage Museum of Western Australia, Bull Creek, Western Australia, Lancaster B VII NX665 is preserved at the Museum of Transport and Technology in Auckland.

By the time of the Falklands war in 1982 only five Vulcans were serviceable. One Vulcan B2, XH558, has been restored to flying condition and appears at a few airshows, it is based at Robin Hood Airport (formerly RAF Finningley). The Vulcan at the RAF Museum at Hendon, XL318, joined 617 Squadron on 1st September 1961 and served until 17th December 1981, it was later allocated to Hendon. Other Vulcans are preserved, there is one at Duxford, XL426 is at Southend Airport, XM603 is at Woodford, Cheshire, XM655 is at Wellesbourne near Stratford upon Avon and XL319 is at the Northeast Aircraft Museum at Sunderland Airport.

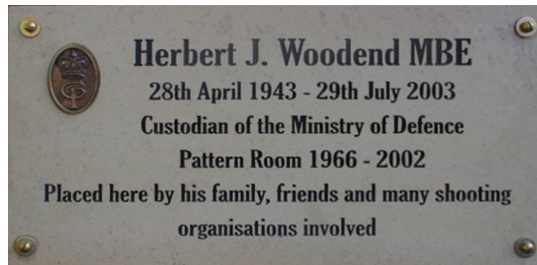


During my National Service in 1949/50 I worked on Lancasters similar to those used by 617 Squadron, we had five at RAF Yatesbury for training purposes; the electronic equipment fitted to the war time Lances was still in use on other RAF aircraft. The T1154/R1155 wireless, Gee and Rebecca radars were still in use in the Hastings we used for our dropping trials and overseas journeys during the 1960s.

Roy Atkins

Unveiling a plaque to Bert Woodend

Our sister establishment, the Royal Small Arms Factory (RSAF), saw an unveiling, which I attended, of a plaque on the site on Monday 29th July 2013 to commemorate the life of Bert (Herbie) Woodend whose passing away was ten years previously.



The ceremony was at the former Pattern Room. Bert had been custodian of the Pattern Room at Enfield from 1966 through its move to ROF Nottingham when Enfield closed in 1988, and some time thereafter. He retired in 2002 when the collection was again moved, this time to the Leeds Armouries. The Pattern Room was where examples of all the old Enfield weapons were held, as the name suggests, as a model from which they were copied before the widespread adoption of drawings. It covered the period from the opening of the then Royal Armoury Mills in 1816, through 1857, when the RSAF became the first factory in Britain to manufacture weapons with interchangeable parts using a system of mass production, up to site closure in 1988. Those that visited the Pattern Room will vouch for the fact that it was, and still is, a great collection. Its existence owes much to the infectious enthusiasm of Bert Woodend, an Irishman with an encyclopaedic knowledge of small arms of every description. Bert re-created the Pattern Room collection from a small British only collection, to weapons, ancillary equipment, manuals, and books from all countries. The Pattern Room became famous for being the best and

most comprehensive in the world. It was for his utter dedication that he was awarded the MBE, presented to him by the Queen in 1995. Other official recognition came as the Freedom of the City of London and election to the Worshipful Company of Gunmakers in 1999. Herb was made an honorary member and Vice President of the Historical Breech-loading Small Arms Association in 2000, and awarded a Medal of the Arms and Armour Society.

The unveiling of the plaque was presided over by David Izod, who had an office adjacent to mine in the British Embassy in Washington in 1978; he had the “RARDE desk” when I had the “PERME desk”. He later became Technical Director at RSAF, responsible for sorting out the many problems with LAW80, SA80, ADEN 25, the RARDEN Improvement Programme and the 7.62 Chain Gun. He subsequently assumed wider responsibilities in the then BAe-owned factories, ending his career at the Defence Academy at Shrivenham as a visiting professor. He is a member of the Worshipful Company of Gunmakers, which is scheduled to visit the Powdermills later this year. It was the first time that I had visited “Enfield Island Village” for many years and it is almost unrecognisable from its former RSAF days, but there are just a few traces of the past to be seen. There is an “Interpretation Centre” just behind Tesco with a few RSAF products on display and the old clock tower which dominated the factory has been restored to its former glory, the clock now keeping good time once again.



Geoff Hooper

Pop Music Quiz

Fill in the blanks with the names of pop groups or artists

- 1 Very Dark Sunday _____
- 2 Precipice Dick _____
- 3 Revolvers With Flowers _____
- 4 Ready-Made Vegetables _____
- 5 Not Yet King _____
- 6 Bracelets _____
- 7 Gorgeous Antarctic _____
- 8 Fat Verifier _____
- 9 Metal Woman _____
- 10 Young Men Selling Animals _____
- 11 Transmitter Chief _____
- 12 Top Of The Milk _____
- 13 Impolite Etiquette _____
- 14 Uncomplicated Russian _____
- 15 Cul-de-sac Boys _____
- 16 Treacherous Vicar _____
- 17 East London Revolutionary _____
- 18 Sibling Of The Bard _____
- 19 South American Instamatic _____
- 20 Under A Spell _____

21 Crazy Kebab	_____
22 Ultraviolet	_____
23 X	_____
24 Next Command	_____
25 Padded Room	_____
26 Throw Soft Fruit	_____
27 Nuclear Cat	_____
28 Friend With Jaggy Leaves	_____
29 Motown Revolvers	_____
30 Officer Bird	_____

Answers on page 27

My young grandson called the other day to wish me a Happy Birthday. he asked me how old I was, and I told him 80. My grandson was quiet for a moment, and then he asked, "Did you start at one?"

When my grandson asked me how old I was, I teasngly replied, "I'm not sure." "Look in your underwear, Grandpa," he advised "Mine says I'm 4 to 6."

Grandpa is the smartest man on earth! He teaches me good things, but I don't get to see him enough to get as smart as him!

Hide and Seek

I was giving a talk recently to the Cabinet Gardening Club at Reed, near Royston, about the History of the Gunpowder Mills. Among many other things, I spoke about the use of elephant hide as a flooring medium for safety. After the talk was over, I invited people to view the varied selection of exhibits which I had brought with me. A lady picked up the small sample of hide and brought it to me, telling me that it was not elephant hide but most likely a piece of cowhide.



This rather set me back, as an established part of our history is the use of elephant hide as a safety medium for flooring in danger buildings and for lining and as fenders on the gunpowder boats. The lady, Miss Malan Goddard, told me that she was a Master Saddler and she would recognise elephant hide from the thickness, weight and surface graining. She kindly offered to act as a consultant if I wanted to investigate further.

So, where to go from here, seeking information? Back, initially, to the Waltham Abbey Special Collection Archive. In WASC 1927 there was correspondence from 1976 with the Mammalian Division at the British Museum of Natural History and the Science Reference Library at the British Library concerning the use and thickness of elephant, hippo, rhino, buffalo and cow hides. The summarised responses informed us that elephant hide could be between 40mm and 60mm and was the thickest of all the hides. Cow hide could be between 5mm and 20mm. All measurements depended on which part of the hide was used. It was also stressed that these were measurements of the living animal not cured leather. They pointed out that that it was unlikely that exotic

hides would have been used because of the large quantities required. As a very rough guide, 21st century elephant hide costs about 5 times the price of cow hide.

The sample I had was 5mm.thick. However, on site were at least three accessible examples of hide. In the exhibition hall there is a work table covered with hide that is between 15 and 20mm thick.



In the Artefacts Store is a piece of hide up to 20mm thick. A sample of this was obtained and shown to Miss Goddard who immediately identified it as cured and tanned elephant hide.

She told me that the elongated hole at the upper end of the example was where the raw hide had originally been hung before being scraped to remove the fat and veins. There would have been a row of these hooks to support the considerable weight of the fresh hide. She pointed out the two curved cuts on the reverse side which were made when the person who was skinning the animal accidentally cut too deeply. They are called “fleshing cuts”. She believed that the sample had come either from the neck or underarm (underleg?) area of the animal.



She also confirmed the original sample as oak bark tanned cow hide and provided me with a modern piece of that leather as an example of what the original cow hide might have looked like, when the workers at the Mills used it to cover floors and boats.

The lower step of the covered loading bay of L135 is protected with hide measuring between 5 and 8mm. I wondered about the appearance of the steps at L135 when newly clad...



L135 step now...



and as it was

In summary, it seems as if the elephant hide claim is correct but only in part. It would only have been used where cow hide would not have been sufficiently thick or resilient. Cow hide, much lower in cost and far easier to obtain, would have been used as a flooring or fendering material which was easier to bend round angles and shapes and trim around the edges.

However, there is surviving evidence of a danger building where elephant hide was used as a shock reducing floor covering. This was

in the No 7 Blending House on the South Site. This became M348 in later years and was used as 1.1 class storage for detonators and igniters. The photograph below was identified by Ron Treadgold. Unfortunately, the image quality is not sufficiently good to enlarge to show seams between the hides which were nailed down using copper nails. The straight lines are tapes marking storage areas.

Finally, a report from the Sioux Sentinel on a similar theme:

“An Indian Chief married some years ago. After the ceremony he took his wife to their new tepee and they spent their first night on a bed covered with an elephant skin.

We report that in the fullness of time she gave birth to a bouncing baby boy.

A couple of years later this same Chief married again (in this Sioux tribe they are polygamous). Once again he took his bride to their new wigwam and they celebrated on a bed with a buffalo skin cover. Three quarters of a year later she presented him with a little girl papoose.

Being a lusty man he wed for a third time. When they arrived at their new home she saw with wonder that he had provided her with a magnificent hippopotamus skin bed spread. Nine months later she proudly showed him his first set of twins.

Which only goes to prove that the squaw on the hippotamus is equal to the sum of the squaws on the other two hides...”

Richard Thomas

Where do you park your walking stick?

As we grow older many of us find that we need to use a walking stick. One problem with this is what to do with the stick when you sit down in a public place because they tend to slide and slip into other people's space. The problem is at its worst in restaurants, the table is too low to hang the stick and it tends to get pushed off if hung on the back of your chair. Any suitable wall or hat stand is always too far away from the table.



When visiting Normandy recently I found that “Le Hastings” restaurant in Cabourg provided the perfect solution.

Roy Atkins

Finney Press explosion

In the Summer 2013 issue, Bryan Howard asked about the cause of the Finney Press explosion. Since this was in the late 1960's, it is not surprising that various ageing memories have produced slightly different views of the event. I welcome further memories, comments and/ or corrections to the following:

Peter Stone has commented that he learned about the event from various people. He was also told a story about Terry Greenall who was passing close by when the explosion occurred, and was about to enter by the escape tunnel, when the pressmen came out at speed. It was possible that die face cutting was being tried out, and that contact between blades and die had generated sufficient heat to cause ignition (but this may refer to a fire which occurred during the operation of the 8 inch Tangye press cutter). He recalls George Hood telling him that the "Top Hat" was thrown out of the building. The "Top Hat" would have been part of the collection device for the press cut powder. This would corroborate the idea that it was indeed the press cutter that was being used when the accident happened. It seems likely that the roof over this press was of light construction whereas the remaining press had a concrete slab.

Steve Bell has a similar opinion: his view was that static electricity in the cut powder pipe was the cause. The large lid from the collecting hopper was blown through the roof (material?) and landed in the roadway outside P2 close to Roy Livermore who just happened to be passing. He also believed that Richard Wallace had developed innovative ways to reduce the static hazard within particle flows. There was a complex powder collection system installed in the 8 inch Tangye press bay which may have been the result of this development.

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Bryan asked also about production of casting powder. At ERDE, this usually involved pyro NC (12.6% N) and the use of a mixture of ether and ethanol. (ethyl acetate/alcohol was sometimes used). The dough (up to 25Kg) had to be extruded into a thin (~1mm) cord and then cut on a Melvin cutter which could be adjusted to take the precise diameter through rotating rollers linked by gears to a rotating disc cutter to obtain the required length. The cutting required skilled attention from a dedicated fitter (Fred Saunders or Johnny Ward), not least because the solvent wet extrusion would often expand as it left the die, and then shrink as solvent evaporated subsequently. It was essential to avoid slipping between the rollers, to obtain granules that would pack closely in the subsequent casting process. Some of the casting powder compositions were highly filled and some of the fillers were energetic which led to stiff doughs that were sometimes difficult to press.

Both the 3” rifle press and the Tangye press could be used, but the amount of dough being forced back past the ram sometimes exceeded the product. The second High Level Finney press – which is understood to be a twin to the one that had been damaged earlier- had a hot water jacket and had recently been fitted with a new ram head specially designed to self centre under pressure (float). That aided extrusion and prevented metal to metal contact between ram head and the cylinder. The press had 19 separate dies: 1 central and two concentric circles of 6 and 12 dies. A copper collection device known as “the organ Pipes” guided each strand into an array of copper baskets at the base. The baskets could be changed without stopping the press, and earlier baskets taken away for cutting. This device survived the demolition of South Site, and was seen lying outside H83 after the museum opened, but it disappeared one dark night along with the lead flashing from one of the buildings.

The casting process had to control the powder to liquid ratio and the dimensions of the powder were important – also the quality of the cut. Boost and sustain propellants were combined in a single cylinder by using two different casting powders with the same casting liquid. The burning rate of these double base propellants could often be modified

by the inclusion of lead salts to produce burning rate which varied less over a particular operating pressure and temperature range, but ballistic drift of this operating range was sometimes a concern. These topics deserve a separate item by others.

Dave Hewkin

The marvel of the Computer

Eye halve a spelling chequer
It came with my pea sea
It plainly marques four my revue
Miss steaks eye kin not sea

Eye strike a quay and type a work
And weight four it to say
Weather eye am wrong or Wright
It shows me strait a weigh

As soon as a mist ache is maid
It nose bee fore two long
And eye can put the error rite
Its rare lea ever wrong

Eye halve run this poem threw it
I am shore your pleased two no
Its letter perfect awl the weigh
My Chequer tolled me sew.

With acknowledgements to Mike Bragg
aka sauce unknown

Can You Solve This Puzzle

One man must say what colour hat he is wearing. If he gets it wrong all men will be shot. They must not speak to each other, turn around, take off their hat, look over or around the wall. They can only see the person in front of them. How do they do it?

Brain Teaser

How quickly can you find out what's unusual about this paragraph? It looks so ordinary, you'd think nothing was wrong with it at all and, in fact, nothing is but it is unusual.

Why? Study it, think about it and you may find out.

But you must do it without coaching. No doubt if you work at it for a bit it will dawn on you. Who knows until you try? So hop to it, try your skills and pray for luck. Par is about half an hour.

Michael Seymour

Recollections of Jack Powling

My Father wrote the attached for inclusion in 'Touchpaper' a few years ago.

For those who may remember him he has recently undergone a hip replacement and a cataract operation but is otherwise in good health for his age. He was 91 in August.

My Mother, Vera is also in good health. Both enjoy reading 'Touchpaper' and recalling bygone days!

Bob Powling

Prompted by Bryan Howard's kindly review of some of the activities in 'H10' and his appreciation of all our friends there at the time, I was tempted to add a 'swansong' of my own.

Looking back now, with reflective amusement on some of the 'more human' aspects of that time (and beyond) I have applied a shaky hand and failing memory to offer some more satirical recollections. If you consider that Touchpaper readers might also find a geriatric view revealing, feel free to edit and print as you will (at 86, I do not fear libel laws!).

There is no doubt that in the field of propulsion technology at the time there was a wealth of impressive scientists at ERDE and RPE and they had great freedom to pursue their ideas; perhaps more than the common purpose should have allowed. They developed a rugged individualism and were not immune to the public suspicion that egg-heads were prone to occasional 'pottyness'. Indeed, I remember a few but my long-suffering affliction, nominal aphasia (I have forgotten

now what that means), prevents me from recalling any particular names. Only one senior scientist, with a most descriptive name, publically declared (humorously) that he was actually certified as *compos mentis*.

The idiosyncrasies of the more senior staff come to mind more prominently of course, as their position demands. The Chief Superintendants / Directors of ERDE and RPE aside from their irrational, persistent rivalry occasionally revealed some bizarre features.

Not so the first of these gentlemen I encountered; popular and very well read (he pursued the newspapers in his office every morning) he berated the staff, in particular myself, for their poor literary skills. Another declared the propitious location of ERDE between Cambridge and Oxford (without deviating into London unfortunately) was a deserving claim for the “Little University of Waltham Abbey”! He was a clever academic, keen on scientific communication among the hierarchy. His communication with staff however, was impeded by his microscopic handwriting which no-one could read. His clever secretary could advise fortunately. Nevertheless I, unfortunately clearly received the message that I, being a ‘spare’ researcher (ex ICST London) should manage an Open Day exhibiting the work of ERDE to the public. It was a great success, though I say so myself but it was ‘slagged off’ of course by those not prominently engaged. One of the Director's later academic interests was in the ‘structure’ of water which he believed involved the memory in the liquid of the solutes it once contained. Obviously beyond my Ken but homeopathy came to mind.

A somewhat less engaging boss made a point of doing his homework in order to put juniors to a disadvantage. He attended scientific conferences in the more desirable locations and at one he consoled me on the obvious difficulty of presenting my specialisation and proceeded to expand on his linguistic knowledge on the country, especially Romanish.

One ‘super’ had claims to fame for demonstrating an irrepressible sense of slapstick humour. I believe he once went down on his hands

and knees in jolly supplication to visiting dignitaries. More maliciously, his staff said he was heard to jump off office cabinets – for reasons unspecified but hinted at.

Staff of another superintendant declared that he always ‘went down like a lead balloon’. But human nature (even amongst scientific thinkers!) is very unforgiving especially among the less privileged. But the workload at the top was possibly quite onerous and could explain the exhaustion that overtook them after lunch.

A very likeable, modest Director with sound practical understanding finally reminded me that it was time to do something more directly useful to the business at hand and sent me and some of my staff to the ‘South Site’ where real things happened. One of the real things was the problem of the smoke emitted from sight-guided A/T weapons. Before some useful advances were actually achieved, odd happenings occurred. We needed to see the smoke from propellants and their insulating coatings, so we requested a convenient static firing site. A bunch of us were to look at firings from behind a wall through a mirror. Not exactly ‘rocket science’, as they say! Nor was the thinking behind the choice of the preferred site; our inspection of the soil showed a cotton wool appearance here and there. Analysis revealed a substance akin to guncotton. It would have been very inefficient to ‘go up in smoke’ before the experiments were even started. It didn’t really bother the ‘local inhabitants’; neither did the beaker of a viscous brownish liquid left on the bench in their north site lab. The owner told me it was nitro-glycerine but perhaps he thought a little scare might do us good. Could be it was ‘only’ casting liquid with only a proportion of NG. Bravado was not entirely absent among the ‘ideas’ men; highly dangerous ingredients were proposed (and some tried) in both the liquid and solid propellant arenas. I will not mention any of them for fear of embarrassing colleagues – or getting thrown into gaol.

Actually my own most dangerous, or difficult, experiences were not related to our products at all, except when we were discussed by some exhibitionist, load-mouthed senior scientist in a train carriage. A member of the public complained to the establishment. I only escaped

being thrown into The Tower by being able to show that the ‘secrets’ had been openly published earlier.

The second was really only a danger to my reputation, such as it was. It reflects the frequent inability of serious thinkers to manage simple affairs (whelk stalls come to mind). To be brief, just ordering a bus. To my utmost embarrassment, I had to console a large group of ‘top brass’ in the international science world, while waiting for hours outside the police gate. The rest of the establishment staff I attempted to contact replied in the equivalent of the vernacular ‘not my fault, gov’.

For fear, this time of my ignorance of practical propellant disciplines, I got ‘ticked-off’ for declining a super-intendancy in solid propellants but I was forgiven and was made one of the brass at RPE Westcott. The research division there was not different. All the section heads resisted my collaborative activities and carried on just as usual. A serious failure on my part; it would not happen second time around, as they all say. The Directors revealed their idiosyncrasies: one, before my time, kept a large dog in his office. Another, to show he was the boss, told members of the management board he ‘didn’t care a fish’s tit’ about anything he disagreed with. When I was a little ‘bolshie’ about admin efficiency or something, he gave me the highly unpopular task of reviewing the inefficiencies of the whole establishment. You can guess the co-operation that I received. After he had issued the instruction he completely ignored the (very expensive) exercise except when HQ advised on improving efficiency at a later date, when he proudly acclaimed he had already done it! Still judged as ‘spare’ I was given something more effective to keep me quiet: UK rep on an international panel to organise propulsion research collaboration between USA, UK, Canada and Australia. Co-operation between the superintendents at both establishments was essential but as usual, minimal. It did, happily in some ways broaden my mind (and my behind on airplanes) and at least the ‘foreigners’ did not indicate any disappointment.

My unappealing cynicism tended to continue right to retirement. I declined official ceremonial and at the departmental farewell

gathering after a little refreshment I got my secretary to read a supposed draft of my speech, making alterations here and there. I chose a sandwich toaster and an electric meter as my departing gifts rather than the stag at bay! Somewhat disrespectful of the gathering I shamefully recall. I had however, given those whom I reported on, the chance to report on me officially. Most of them were too polite to say the truth I suppose but I actually wanted to know. One senior member I encountered after retirement did declare that I 'blotted my copybook' but he did not volunteer to say on which page.

All this supposedly amusing hearsay has become somewhat egocentric and it should behold me to mention my own frequent professional and personal gaffs and indiscretions but in character, I will plead the Fifth Amendment. Those who can identify any personalities can take revenge. They can take comfort that in my geriatric waking hours (i.e. during the night) many iniquities play on my mind.

Jack Powling
Dec 2008

Punography

I tried to catch some fog. I mist.

When chemists die they barium.

I know a guy who's addicted to brake fluid. He says he can stop at any time.

I'm reading a book about anti-gravity, I can't put it down.

They told me I had type A blood, but it was a type O.

Energiser Bunny arrested; charged with battery.

I didn't like my beard at first. Then it grew on me.

What does a clock do when it's hungry? It goes back four seconds.

Letters to Touchpaper

Dear Staff at the Mills,

It is with much appreciation that you recalled my birthday being 30th August. Your signed card and gifts gave me so much pleasure. As Lance Bourne wrote 'Are you really 28 years?'

Quite honestly I was never much of a wizard and juggling numbers, well, well!

Once again, thanks pals for being so thoughtful- you are the best.

Minnie Fenton.

Good News

I seem to recall that you requested good news to lighten the bit where obituaries are reported in Touchpaper. I have to announce the arrival of our fourth grandchild Florence Amelia born on the 2nd October weighing in at 6lb 11oz. Both baby and grandfather doing well. Apart from the broken arm that is (mine not the baby. And yes I had been drinking but only a pint).

If no one else has listed the South Site Buildings, as suggested by Steve Bell, I will have a go. I shall have to type it with my left hand only, and very slowly.

Peter Stone

I have a short poem, which for me summarises the nature reserve part of the Mills:

Solitude

I wandered through the wild, wild wood
where roam the fallow deer
with solitude I quietly stood
and felt all nature near.

Submitted by Michael Seymour - author
unknown.

Renewal of European Health Card.

I have recently renewed our EHIC cards online using europeanhealthcard.org.uk. It looked like an official site and I happily filled in names, address, NHS numbers, and old EHIC numbers. When the site requested £23.50 each for the new cards I assumed that the NHS were now charging for what had previously been free i.e. another stealth tax.

Five days later I received the new cards from the NHS with a covering letter; at the bottom it read “Renew your EHIC for free at www.nhs.uk/healthcareabroad.” I had been conned and did not like it. Returning to Google revealed that the first three sites listed are all official looking sites that charge just to forward the renewal to the NHS. Lower down the page were warnings that these sites are operating a scam!

Roy Atkins

Obituary

Les Grindrod

Jean Church tells us that Les Grindrod died in January 2013 aged 94.

Although he was in a reserved occupation during the war he served in the Forties in France due to a slow processing of his details by the administration.

In France he survived the sinking of the 'Lancastria' and returned to work at Waltham Abbey and for many years specialising in calorimetry.

If you are not familiar with the sinking of the 'Lancastria' there is a web site at:

<http://www.lancastria-association.org.uk/>

Details are also in an entry on the Wikipedia site.

Bryan Howard

Answers to puzzles

Music Quiz Answers

1	Black Sabbath	16	Judas Priest
2	Cliff Richard	17	Richard Marx
3	Guns and Roses	18	Shakespeare's Sister
4	Black Eyed Peas	19	Aztec Camera
5	Prince	20	Bewitched
6	Bangles	21	Madonna
7	Beautiful South	22	Deep Purple
8	Chubby Checker	23	10cc
9	Iron Maiden	24	New Order
10	Pet Shop Boys	25	Soft Cell
11	Radio Head	26	Chuck Berry
12	Cream	27	Atomic Kitten
13	Bad Manners	28	Buddy Holly
14	Simply Red	29	Sex Pistols
15	Back Street Boys	30	Lieutenant Pigeon

Men in Hats

One has to assume that the men know that there are two black hats and two white.

The man in the middle ducks down.

The man at the back can see one black and one white hat in front of him but does not know what colour his hat is and does not speak. The middle man then knows that his hat is white and answers.

Work at the South Site Guncotton Factory in WW2

Mrs. Elsie Farrell, nee Jupp

I recently had a very interesting interview with Mrs. Elsie Farrell, nee Jupp, of Harlow, now in her 91st. year, in which she described her experience working in the South Site Guncotton Factory from 1939.

Some of the flavour of how the rearmament programme affected lives is captured in her description of how her sister, answering a Government advert for munitions workers, went to what was called the labour exchange to apply and taking Elsie along, who was working as a clothing machinist. The sister was recruited and Elsie, wishing to be near her sister, was also then recruited.

As she was aged 18 she would not receive the full pay rate.

They lived in Clapton and journeyed to the factory via Waltham Cross, either by train from Lea Bridge Road station or 149 bus. A war workers badge was worn.

Security and safety routines had not changed and they were searched daily at the gates on arrival before changing their shoes and donning white material suits with tapes instead of buttons.

Three shifts were in operation at the factory – 6-2, 2-11, 11-6. The middle shift ending at 11 would have meant missing the last train from Waltham Cross to Lea Bridge Road and special permission was given by the military officer in charge to leave at 10-30. Elsie's parents worried about her safety in the darkened war time streets.

After stepping over the familiar red danger boards guncotton work began, supervised by male charge hands Jim and Len.

In Elsie's description this involved sieving dry guncotton, having teased it out to make sure no wet patches were present, and hand

pressing it. This does raise the point that dry guncotton would normally be considered dangerous. Can anyone familiar with the guncotton process in operation at that time throw further light on this ?

The cylinders were packed into 60lb. containers, which were then lifted into lorries. This arduous work was done entirely by the women and the charge hands kept the pressure up, to the extent that Elsie spent three days in hospital with sprained wrists.

As the Establishment approached termination of manufacturing work in 1943 staff were gradually transferred to other war work. Elsie went to a factory in Highbury to work on soldering components of 'walkie talkie' communication equipment.

Les Tucker

Royal Gunpowder Mills Books

Ian MacFarlane has now set up the system to enable purchase of the Mills Booklet and Reprint series online, with Amazon printing and despatching.

On the Mills website **www.royalgunpowdermills.com** – Click on **Online Shop, Books**

You will see details of all publications.

Events at the Royal Gunpowder Mills

For information visit the Web Site:

<http://www.royalgunpowdermills.com/whats-on-and-events/>



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