

Winter 2014

TOUCHPAPER

The Newsletter of the Royal Gunpowder Mills Friends Association

Mills Threatened by Holiday Camp Development

The Photographer

World War 1 1914-1918 series

Julie's Nature Column

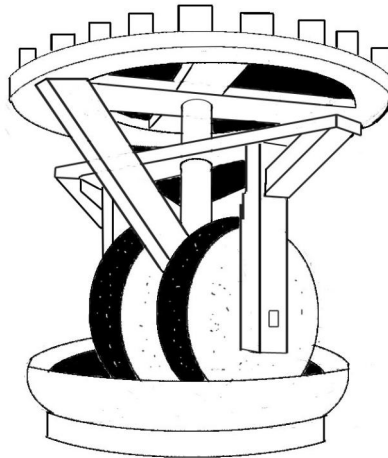
The Wonders of Alaska

Christmas 1988

Quiz

Good News

Letters



Winter 2014

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Deadline for the next issue is 20th February 2015

Chairman's Chat

Some of you will know, but others may not, that a company called PGL, which organises weeks away for children, is in negotiation with the RGPM Foundation Trust to lease part of our site. Elsewhere in this Issue John Cook reports on the current situation as we know it.

We had been hoping to complete painting the outside of the Green Hut before winter set in but the bad weather is catching up with us and we might not manage it.

On a more positive note visitor numbers have been increasing and on 7th and 8th November we had 2000 people to see the excellent fireworks displays. Also the Education Department has been doing very well and has been heavily booked this term. They have had children in virtually every day.

I hope you enjoy the article by Ann and myself on Alaska. It wasn't until we had spent some time there and travelled round of it that we realised how enormous the State is and that we were never going to see more than a small part of it.

With my very best wishes to you all for Christmas and the New Year.

John Wright

Editorial

First of all apologies to anyone who had problems with the last issue, I am still battling with Windows 8 to produce Touchpaper and hope this issue will be better.

Those of you on the email Touchpaper list will have had some news of developments at the Mills. Those with the paper version may still have heard rumours. John Cook has written an article on the next page on what we have learned so far, the map following this shows the impact on the main part of the site, also included in the PGL plans is the New Hill area. This leaves very little to open to the public.

Included with this issue are forms for next year's membership and the AGM/Social event for next year which will be on 8th May. The site should be open to visitors in 2015 but negotiations with PGL may result in PGL taking over the majority of the current visitor area in 2016. This coming season may be your last chance to visit so do make the most of it.

I have produced Touchpaper for four years and would welcome a change if someone is willing to take it on. I am grateful to all those who have contributed and I am sure they will continue the good work with a new editor.

Finally we wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Brian Clements

Mills Future Threatened By Holiday Camp Development

At a packed, and at times stormy, meeting at the Mills on 7th November 2014, the charitable Foundation responsible for the conservation of the Mills site, unveiled plans to lease Queens Mead and its surrounding buildings to children's adventure holiday provider, PGL. Volunteers and Friends heard that the operating company that runs the award winning 'Royal Gunpowder Mills' visitor attraction and the successful schools' education programme will be evicted from much of its existing accommodation. PGL's lease will include Building L168 housing the popular 'Mad Lab' and rockets exhibition, the Spinks Gallery, the recently refurbished 'Green Hut' accommodating the restored powder barge and, the site's 'jewel in the crown', the Grade 1 listed steam incorporating mill Building L157.

The Foundation will relinquish its responsibility for maintaining most of the site's listed buildings and thus, at a stroke, relieve itself of many of its future financial liabilities. While PGL will be required to keep these buildings in good repair, the future of the Mill's unique collection of historic exhibits is very uncertain. These will be displaced from the Queens Mead buildings even though there are no plans for their relocation. In practice, it will be very difficult to find a suitable alternative location for public display and interpretation. Almost all areas of the site to be retained by the Foundation are protected from development by a Scheduled Ancient Monument order. The wooded area to the north of Queens Mead is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and has no mains electricity or gas supply.

The Foundation is required, by its charitable objectives, to continue to ensure the site is open to the public. It would like to establish a new

visitor attraction and has asked volunteers to help develop plans. This may be more in hope than expectation. The operating company will lose almost all of its buildings including the Walton House offices, the workshops, stores, the shop and the recently refurbished café.

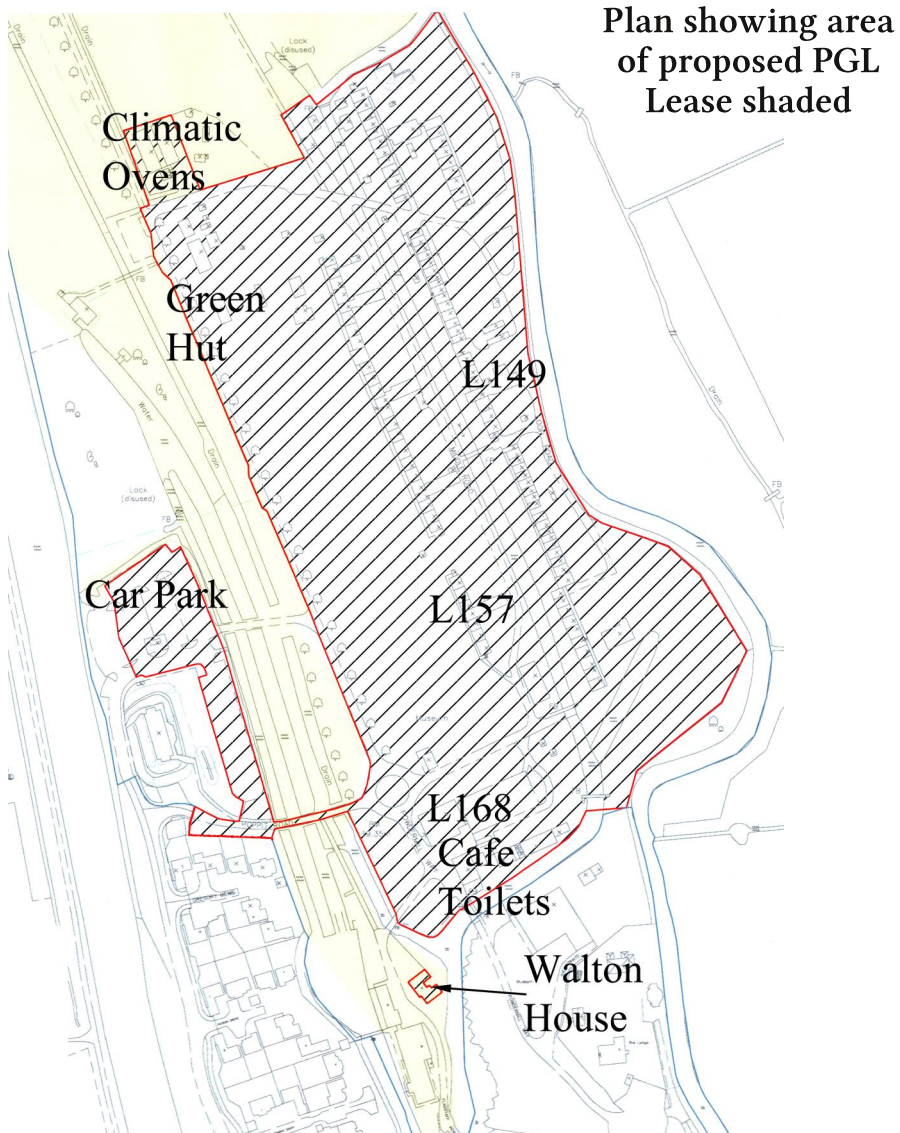
There is no doubt that the Foundation's financial situation is precarious. It was established with a legacy intended to provide dividend income and investment capital. Sadly its Trustees have been unable to demonstrate the vision and drive required to deliver the successful blend of commercial development and public access to a historic site achieved at, for example, the Royal Arsenal and Bentley Priory. Funds have been squandered on ill judged attempts, invariably employing expensive consultants, to evaluate commercial and visitor attraction development opportunities. While, in almost every year, the operating company has failed to ensure the visitor attraction pays its way.

Needless to say, there is much anger and opposition to the PGL plan. Volunteers, without whom there would be no visitor attraction, no education programme and no site maintenance, feel badly let down. The Foundation has failed to consult them until the PGL plans were well enough advanced to ensure little or no scope for change. Local residents are concerned about increased traffic although the scale of the proposed development has not yet been revealed. In the meantime, the site operating company and its employees face an uncertain future.

Many Friends will remember ambitious and imaginative development plans proclaimed at the initial open days. When the 'Royal Gunpowder Mills' welcomed the first paying visitors in 2001, it was evident that much needed to be done to generate the income required to protect the site's heritage for future generations. Now, it seems, there may be no enduring legacy from the huge amount of effort expended in the last 14 years by the operating company's dedicated workforce and a small army of volunteers of all ages.

Friends who would like to share their views may do so by writing to the editor at the postal or email addresses listed inside the front cover.

John Cook
WARGM Friends Association Treasurer

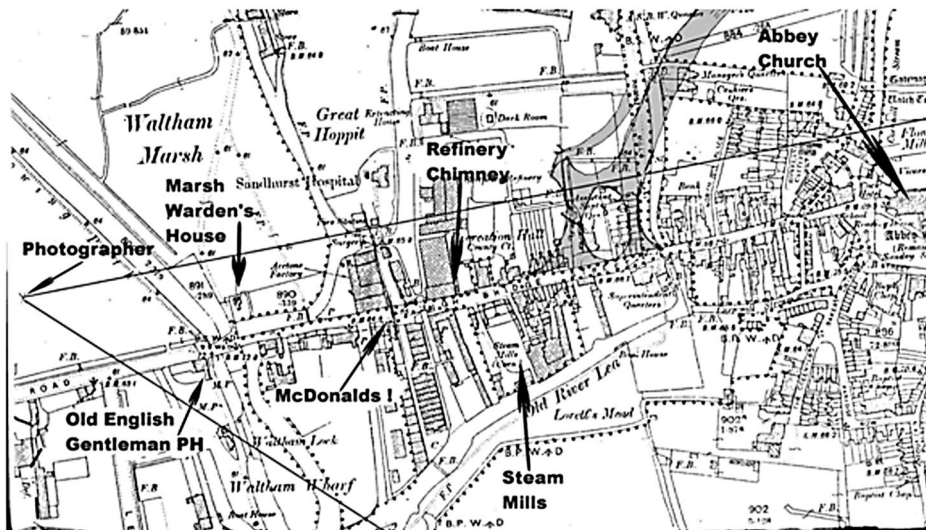


The Photographer

The photograph of the photographer photographed has fascinated me for a long time. This is partly because of its date (said to be 1896) and partly because of the architectural features now disappeared.



So I set about combining the photograph with an Ordnance Survey map of that time, duly updated to enable me to identify on the ground what the photograph shows.



Richard Thomas

World War 1 1914 – 1918 Series

1. Strong Stuff

In WW1 the messages directed at munitions workers, particularly the new women recruits, and the public at large were on occasion marked by a heady mixture of patriotic exhortation to greater effort in the fight against the foe and moral and religious fervour – to the point where it appears that the war aspect was grafted on to an already existing agenda.

The following poem, which was written by a founder member of the Labour Party, Sarah Crowhurst, conveys the flavour of this type of publication.

It starts off in fairly conventional, if to our taste grossly overblown, fashion :

England's Need

*Women of England may we be
Women worthy of that name ;
Women seeking Heavenly joys
Knowing naught of earthly pain*

*Women who grasp this glorious truth
That life's sacred path is ours,
Women who ne'er shall underrate
The value of God given powers*

*Women who live but souls to save,
All dear souls of friends or foes ;
Women who live to scatter bliss
In this world so full of woes*

It then takes a very different tack :

*God of all nations hear our cry
in the day of England's need
Grant that from all base desires
Every woman's heart be freed*

*If Thou wilt we know Thou canst
For our nation thus we pray
We repent, forgive the past
Take, oh take our sins away*

*Lord in future may we be
Women who show forth Thy power
By our lives, in words and deed
Trusting Thee from hour to hour*

*Thus we answer England's call
And the joy of Heaven shall win
Providing that by Thy power
We alone can conquer sin*

The poem sold well, costing one penny, with the proceeds going to providing comforts for the troops at the Front.

What the ladies thought of it is another matter.

Les Tucker

Julie's Nature Column

Things are constantly changing at the Mills with the different seasons. Now that winter isn't far away birds are migrating such as the Swallow and Reed Warbler. Swans and geese are constantly on the move and regularly fly over the Mills to different feeding grounds. Most cygnets have been left by their parents to fend for themselves and I have heard stories of the cygnets landing in all sorts of places on their first flight.

Dragonflies have been abundant at New Hill and along our waterways. They are one of the trickiest to photograph and I have to sneak up on them when they've landed. In the photo is a female Broad bodied chaser



The deer rutting season should come to an end soon and there are some very tired males on the site. Males taking part in the rut will lose up to a third of their bodyweight and have until December to try and regain more weight before their metabolism slows down. It's very important for the deer to burn little energy during the winter as once their fat reserves are used up they won't be able to put on any more weight until the spring. We have one young friendly deer who is not afraid to step out of the herd and as you can see in the photo he doesn't mind coming down to join us if a piece of carrot is on offer.



Apart from the deer most animals are free to come and go as they please yet there is so much wildlife that chooses to visit and stay. Our badgers have made the Mills their permanent home,

Muntjac deer insist on making a gap just big enough under our fences to visit and then there are foxes to that choose our site to have their young. Just the other morning as I arrived in the car park a fox was passing though.



The Mills looks very different in the winter once the vegetation has died back and I will be on the lookout for more photo opportunities as the wildlife can't hide so easily.

Julie Matthews
The Mills Nature Conservationist

The Wonders of Alaska

After a long flight from Heathrow via Iceland, lasting about 14 hours, and a time difference of 9 hours, we landed at Anchorage for the start of our land tour. The long daylight hours were lovely, June being the best time to be there. We just did not want to go to bed it was so light all night. Neither was it cold, we had sunshine and blue skies most of the time.

The first morning we saw the staggering sight of seaplanes, at least a hundred on the two arms of the Sound. Seaplanes were taking off and landing all the time we were having breakfast. The planes use floats in summer and skis in winter.

The highlights of the trip were many. A boat trip on the Prince William Sound, so devastated by the Exxon Valdez oil spill disaster in 1989, was fascinating. All traces of the spill have disappeared on the surface and we were able to enjoy the beauty of the Sound.



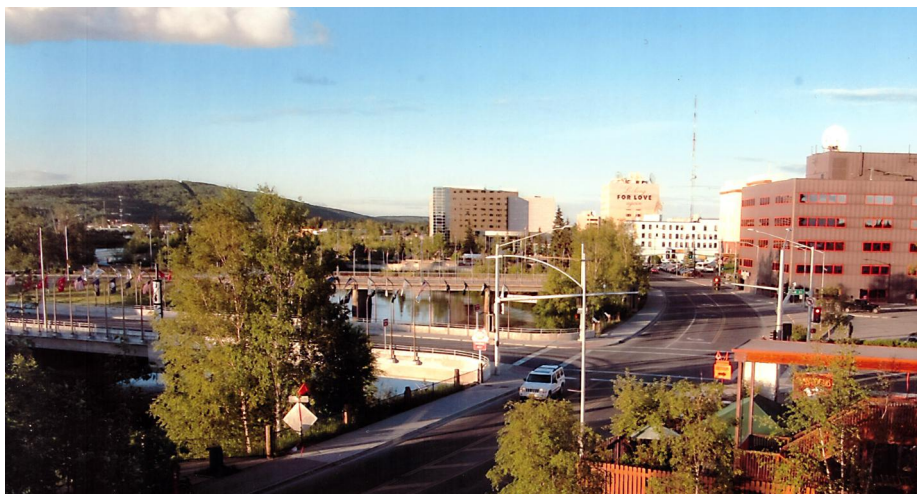
Surrounded by spectacular mountains and glaciers the waters were a good place for wildlife. We were fortunate to see humpback whales, bald eagles, kittiwakes, steller sea lions, porpoises and sea otters with paws out of the water to keep them warm! We also saw horned puffins.

Bald Eagle

The boat sailed close to the Columbia Glacier and we saw it calve, losing a large piece of ice into the water. The glacier is retreating. However the Meares Glacier next door is advancing and has never retreated.

The town of Valdez had earlier suffered yet another disaster. In 1964 an earthquake, 9.2 on the Richter scale, followed by a tsunami, resulted in the land dropping 2.2 metres and the town being devastated. It had to be rebuilt on solid bedrock 4 miles away.

We left the beauty of Prince William Sound and travelled to Fairbanks. For those of you who watch the Ice Road Truckers we saw their Carlisle Depot in the town.



Fairbanks at Midnight just before the June Solstice

From Fairbanks we went on a stern paddle wheeler cruise (like a Mississippi stern wheeler) on the River Chennai. On the river banks were desirable residences and the boat moored for us to watch specially bred dogs being trained for the sport of 'mushing'. We saw a team excitedly pulling a wheeled vehicle; in winter they will pull sledges. Next was a visit to a local village recreated by the Athabascan Indians. Their fur coats looked very glamorous and warm but we decided against living in one of their houses

A further wonderful day was a trip on a train in double-decker coaches which followed the River Nenana. (There is only one train line in Alaska.) There were amazing views of mountains and rivers as we ate a breakfast of delicious pancakes and Alaskan syrup.

A lot of rivers are glacial and bring down debris which is deposited on the river beds. As the waters recede in late spring and summer the river runs in many smaller streams called a braided river. You could probably leap across most if not all of these.

In the evening we went white water rafting which was great fun. We had to wear dry suits which were difficult to get into. Ann had help from a nice young man and I from an attractive young lady. Then we had to sign our lives away on their insurance forms before putting on life preservers. On an inflatable raft seven of us were rowed by a young lady for about 12 miles in all, getting quite wet in the process.

On another day the highlight was a visit to Denali National Park. As large as Uganda it is very strictly supervised by the Park Authorities.

A coach took us through forests of spruce trees to get to the tundra where saw lots of wild life including Dall sheep on the high slopes almost in the snow. We could see white dots which, if they moved, were sheep and, if not, they were patches of snow. also we saw moose, shy and very ugly animals, caribou (wild reindeer) snowshoe hares and a grizzly bear. There were bald eagles and golden eagles.



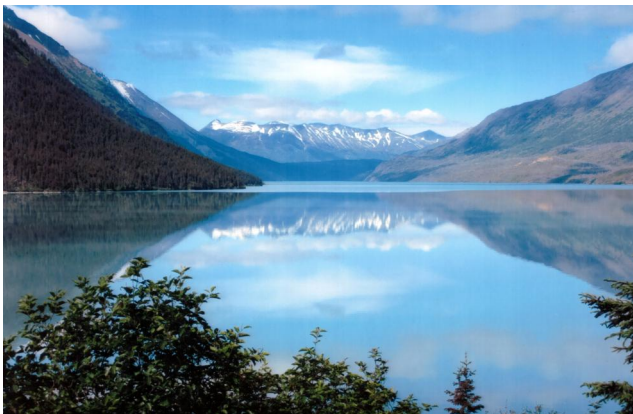
Dall Sheep



Moose in Denali Park

The Park does not interfere with nature. If a species declines in number it is left to its own devices and nature takes its course. Numbers level out eventually. There was only road into the Park but fit people could do trekking in certain areas.

A lot of time was spent travelling 1700 miles in the coach but only covering a small part of Alaska. The scenery was stunningly beautiful; mountains, glaciers, lakes, forests, rivers fjords and clear air made for some unforgettable views.



Mountain Scenery Hatcher's Pass

Alaska is USA's largest and richest state with its oil and mineral resources. The Alaska oil pipeline travels from Prudhoe Bay in the North to Valdez, some 800 miles, where it is loaded into tankers to be transported to refineries on the West Coast.



Trans Alaska pipeline, a short section above ground

There is no income tax, no sales tax and residents who have been in Alaska for 2 years or more receive about \$800 each year from the State to spend as they wish.

The State has a population of under 1 million of which 380,000 live in Anchorage. Juneau, the capital, is much smaller and surprisingly can only be reached by sea or air.

It was a fascinating visit, highly recommended.

Ann and John Wright

A Norman Paul Christmas Presentation Revived

Waltham Abbey



THE FINAL ACT

Christmas '88

The Creation

And in the beginning ...

(featuring the spirits of Establishments past)

CONJURING ACT NUMBER 1

Fearless Frank and Barry the Brilliant will re-enact their world famous trick — Sawing an Establishment in Half!

SPIRIT SONGS

Oh! look what they've done to poor Waltham
And what they have done to us too
They're splitting us up into fractions
They've cut poor old Waltham in two
Glue Back, Glue Back, Oh Glue back poor Waltham again again
Glue Back, Glue Back, Oh Glue, us together again

They say that we'll all feel much better
After a year or two
They say that our future looks rosy
And the moon's turned a nice shade of blue!

Glue Back, Glue Back, Oh Glue back poor Waltham again again
Glue Back, Glue Back, Oh Glue, us together again

CONJURING TRICK NUMBER 2

And now! The infamous "Rog" and the equally infamous "Trev" will perform their infamous "DOUBLE DISAPPEARING ACT"

SPIRIT MEDLEY

Congreve's body is a—turning in its grave
Congreve's body is a—turning in its grave
Congreve's body is a—turning in its grave
Cos they're closing Waltham down
Sorry, Sorry, It's the end now
Sorry, Sorry, It's the end now
Sorry, Sorry, It's the end now
Cos they're closing Waltham down

Pack up your beakers in the old tea chest
And smile, smile, smile
Load up the lorry now with all the rest
Smile boys that's the style
What's the use of worrying
It never was worthwhile
So! Pack up your beakers in the old tea chest
And smile, smile, smile.

Play the old pianner boy
We'll sing our final song
Sing it with the spirit that
has kept us going strong
Sing it as we used to sing it
Sing it loud and long
Closing the gates here at Waltham
Goodbye! Goodbye!
We know it all seems wrong
Goodbye! Goodbye!
We hear the final gong
The time has come for us to go
This is our final song
Closing the gates here at Waltham

The Creation

In the beginning was the plan
And then came the assumptions
And the assumptions were without form
And the plan was completely without substance
And the darkness was upon the faces of the workers.
And they spake unto their Section heads, saying:
 "It is a crock of shit and it stinketh."
And the Section heads went unto their Division Heads, and sayeth:
 "It is a pail of dung, and none may abide the odour thereof."
And the Division heads went unto their Group Head, and sayeth unto
 him:
 "It is a container of excrement, and it is very strong,
 such that none here may abide by it."
And the Group head went unto his Deputy Director, and sayeth unto
 him:
 "It is a vessel of fertiliser, and none may abide its strength."
And the Deputy Director went unto his Director, and sayeth:
 "It contains that which aids plant growth, and it is very strong."
And the Director went unto the Controller, and sayeth unto him:
 "It promoteth growth, and it is very powerful."
And the Controller went unto the Deputy Minister and sayeth unto
him: "This powerful new plan will actively promote the growth and
 efficiency of RARDE, and Fort Halstead in particular."
And the Deputy Minister looked upon the plan,
and saw that it was good, for he always believed his advisors.

And the plan became policy,
and they all found that in truth it was a crock of shit.
And the ghost of Waltham Abbey smiled, for he alone was left.

WWI quiz

1. Which two countries were the first to declare war in 1914?
2. Who was the British Prime Minister when Britain went to war?
3. In which country is Vimy Ridge, where many Canadians died in 1917?
4. What was the major sea battle of 1916?
5. What name was given to the communication sent from Germany to Mexico promising Texas if they entered the war on Germany's side?
6. Who was US President when the war broke out?
7. What was the area between the opposing trenches known as?
8. What was the nickname of the large gun deployed by Germany in Belgium in 1914?
9. How many enemy planes were shot down by the Red Baron?
10. The sinking of which ship was one of the reasons that the USA entered the war?
11. What nickname was given to US General John Pershing?
12. Which country joined the war for the Allied Powers in 1916?
13. Which was the first of the Central Powers to sign the Armistice?
14. Where was the German fleet scuttled in 1919?
15. Which British General commanded the troops at Gallipoli?
16. What relation was the assassinated Franz Ferdinand to Emperor Franz Josef?
17. What was the occupation of Edith Cavell, Shot by the Germans as a spy?
18. Who became British Prime Minister in 1916?
19. Why were the British troops known as Tommies?
20. The Lusitania was sunk off the coast of which country?

Good News

Silver Jubilee Retirees

On the 30th November 1989 six Royal Ordnance staff decided to take the option of early retirement. I am pleased to report that five have managed to survive 25 years of retirement, the one exception was Bill Smith who died in 2006.

Congratulations to Bob Brown, Chris Evans, David 'Kim' Henshaw, Bryan Howard and Alan Short. In beating the actuaries that predict ex government employees will only survive a few years after retiring. Ha! Ha!

Congratulations!

Pam and Geoff Colley will be celebrating their Diamond Wedding Anniversary on 1st January 2015.

Quiz Answers

1. Austro-Hungary & Serbia.
2. Asquith.
3. France.
4. Battle of Jutland.
5. The Zimmerman Telegraph.
6. Woodrow Wilson.
7. No Man's Land.
8. Big Bertha.
9. 80.
10. RMS Lusitania.
11. Black Jack.
12. Romania.
13. Bulgaria.
14. Scapa Flow.
15. Sir Ian Hamilton.
16. Nephew.
17. A Nurse.
18. David Lloyd- George.
19. Tommy Atkins was the name used as the example on the army joining forms.
20. Ireland.

Letters to Touchpaper

Glad to see images still enlivening the back cover of Touchpaper.

Two nit picking points on terminology in the last one :

1. Cordite drying truck

These hand propelled peaked roof trucks as in the Green Hut were used for movement of material e.g. cordite paste within the processing area and were distinct from the larger rounded roof cordite drying trucks used for transporting trays of cordite for drying by rail from the North Site to the South Site.

2. Wash Tub

Strictly speaking this is the wooden outer casing for a nitroglycerine wash tub, which would have been made of lead. The hoops appear to be of iron – surprising in the light of the usual requirement for all metal parts in the danger building to be non ferrous.

Les Tucker

The truck in the green hut has a rounded roof and is on road wheels. Similar trucks were used on South Site as drying trucks and were towed on roads, seen by Dave Hewkin.

The iron bands on the wooden tub were covered by lead but only scraps remained when we acquired it. Are you sure about the lead lining, there are grooves on the base inside and it may have been difficult to fit lead into these.

Ed

JOHN WARD

I was saddened to read in Touchpaper of the passing of John (Johnny) Ward. John was one of those larger than life characters that ERDE seemed particularly good at producing. As a mechanical fitter he was second to none. We were always pleased if it was his turn to set up the P718 cordite cutting machines, as he was so meticulous that we always got a superior product.

John had a fund of amusing anecdotes. He claimed that, when called up for National Service, he was in the same intake as one of the electricians (Bob Margo I think). They were asked what trade they would like to follow. John said he would like to be an electrician and the electrician said he would like to be a mechanical fitter. And that is how John came to be a fitter!

Another example of his sense of humour is illustrated by the following: if he was working alone in one of the more remote buildings his favourite trick was to hide if he heard someone approaching and then to leap out “Kato style” (from the Pink Panther). As you were recovering from the shock he would say “Always expect the unexpected”. He was in fact a Judo instructor and claimed to have amongst his pupils Linda Lusardi. She was at the time or shortly afterwards a Sun Page three girl. We were all very jealous. However I do recall, from conversations with John, that he was very devoted to his wife Shirley.

Peter Stone

Propellant Stability Work in L145 and H10

The very informative article on the above by John Rowley in the Autumn Touchpaper contained references to two images from the Archive image collection which appeared in the Listed Buildings book.

To complete the record, these were :



Fig. 108 WAI - 0140 -12
Gas Chromatography 1968



Fig.110 WAI - 0192 - 18
Solid Propellant gas analysis in
glass vacuum lines - John Rowley

Les Tucker

Friends Contribution to Home Front Legacy Project – 1914 – 1918

Further to the item in the Autumn 2014 Touchpaper on the above, Emily Glass, the Bristol University Co-ordinator of the pilot study for the project, has published a lengthy article on the project in the journal Current Archaeology, including reference, with image, to the 1915-1917 East flank cordite complex.

www.homefrontlegacy.org.uk

www.archaeology.co.uk

Les Tucker

Link to English Heritage First World War report

www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/home-front-1914-1918-and-its-legacies/Home_Front_Legacies.pdf



Quinan Stoves



Gunpowder Press Pumphouse and Traverse