

**Spring 2016**

# TOUCHPAPER

The Newsletter of the Royal Gunpowder Mills Friends Association

**Industrial Preservation - PGL**

**PGL Update**

**A Personal Experience of Explosives**

**I am a Seenager. (Senior teenager)**

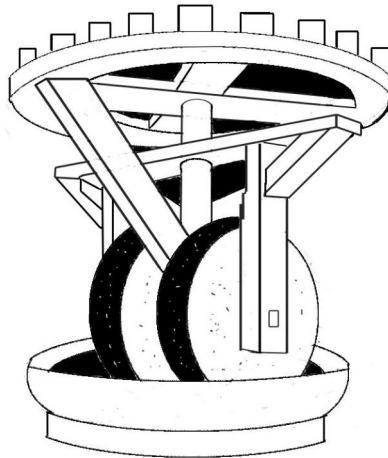
**Home Schooling**

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**Spring 2016**

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**Deadline for the next issue is 20th May 2016**

## Chairman's Chat

There is not much information about the PGL planning application which was submitted in early January to Epping Forest District Council apart from what is on the council web site. The number is EPF/3028/15 and if you haven't already objected please do so now. We believe the application will be dealt with in March or April.

The Mills will be open 25th March to 10th April over Easter. Parts of the site and many of the exhibits are having a spring clean in preparation. The rocket vault has had a clean and polish. The two cannons near the entrance to the main exhibition have had their barrels removed in order to build new carriages to replace the old ones which had a lot of rot in them. The new carriages will be made from a more weather resistant timber. The large black Stonechat motor and the propellant truck next to it alongside the board walk will also get a coat of paint. If we have time the rocket launcher on the roundabout will be lowered, washed and repainted before being re-erected.

We are always looking for new members of the Friends so if you know anyone who might be interested please mention it to them. There will be membership application forms in the cafe.

Looking forward to seeing some of you during the season.

Best wishes to you all.

*John Wright*

# Editorial

Welcome to the first issue of 2016, I hope you all find something of interest in it.

My apologies for the faint, barely readable text in the last issue which was intended to be italics. It looked good on my machine but then I had the required font installed. I had forgotten to press the button to tell the program to export the font along with the text!

We have another article from Les Tucker that briefly mentions PGL, there is more to be read in a piece by Len Stuart. As we go to press we are still awaiting news of the decision on the planning application. Our thanks to all those who have put in comments or objections to the EFDC planning authority.

On page 22 there is a brief notice of the Friends AGM and social event. Please attend if you are able we always like to meet our old friends and you may even find someone interesting to talk to. Remember this is your opportunity to have your say about the way the Association is run. A booking form for the Social event accompanies this issue of Touchpaper. For those who have not renewed you will find a renewal form, please return before you forget.

Those of you who have both email and paper copies will notice a slight difference as links to web sites are not included in the paper version. If you pay for a paper copy and would also like the email version just send me an email and I will add you to my circulation list. Advantages of the email version are the colour photos and the ability to search for text. Please note all membership queries or paper copy problems should be addressed to the Treasurer.

*Brian Clements*

# INDUSTRIAL PRESERVATION PGL

Everybody has been closely involved with the PGL controversy, either as observer or actively in the endeavour to increase public awareness of the issues involved and latterly in framing objections. The time might be opportune to stand back for a moment for a few thoughts on the overall subject of industrial preservation. (the term conservation seems interchangeable with preservation)

Official modernist sentiment in the 1960's reflected the view that the existence of the old in any form – architectural, industrial and so on, was an affront to the new dynamic Britain and anything which was perceived as standing in the way of progress - white hot technology, tower blocks, new towns, new roads etc., should be swept away, resulting in an orgy of destruction, irrespective of quality.

An infamous example was the demolition in 1961, as part of a station renewal project, of the monumental Doric arch which formed the entrance to Euston Station, completed in 1838, and the dumping of the pillars and stones in the Prescott Flood Relief Channel on the River Lea. The arch was an iconic symbol of the new age in which the railways along with the canals would transport the raw materials and finished product fundamental to the industrial development of the nation and in the case of the railways by making available mass travel opportunity at economic cost prompt a social revolution and further promote economic development. The planners could scarcely have found a more inflammatory opportunity to express contempt for preservation of the finer built aspects of the nation's past. Matters were not helped by a rumour that the demolition contractor had used some of the stones in building a villa for himself in Bromley.

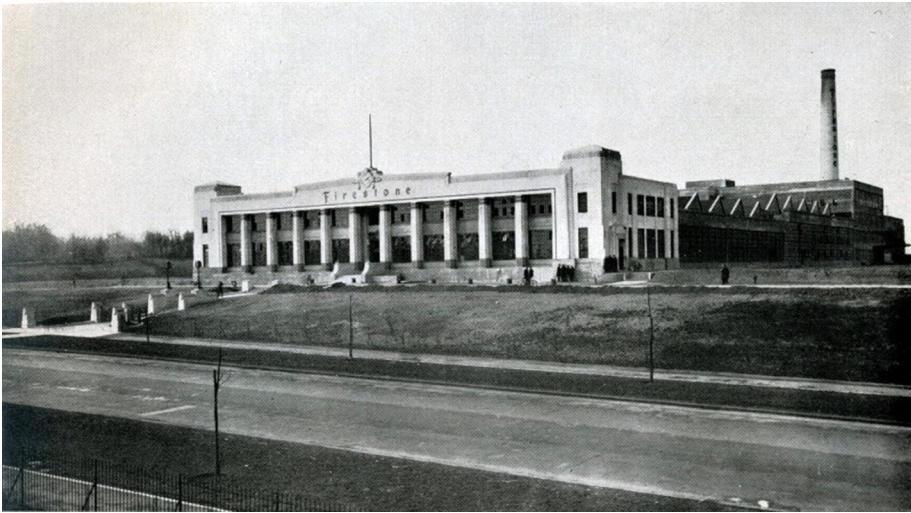
*The arch, completed in 1838, was the first great building of the railway age, the largest Grecian Doric gateway ever made and a building of great beauty. Its destruction was an act of barbarism*

*Dan Cruickshank - architectural historian*



## **The Euston Arch**

Unfortunately many more examples were to follow. A particularly shameful instance was the demolition twenty years later of the 1930's Firestone Tyre factory on the Great West Road, a fine example of industrial art deco. By this time the earlier 20th century had become part of industrial history. The developers had become aware that a preservation order was imminent and over the course of a weekend before the planning office returned to work after a bank holiday called in the demolition crews to totally demolish the factory.



## The Firestone Factory

However, in certain quarters there had been a growing feeling of unease at what was going on and various often very small groups or in some cases one man began to form in an endeavour to stem the tide of destruction and if possible preserve threatened buildings of historic merit. A precursor even earlier in 1946 was the founding of the Inland Waterways Association IWA with Robert Aickman Chairman, Charles Hadfield Vice – Chairman and LTC Rolt Honorary Secretary – dedicated to promoting and preserving the future of the inland waterways and the boating people – ‘living heritage’. Hadfield became a distinguished canal historian and Rolt an influential writer on technological, railway and canal history and vintage car garage owner.

At that time the three officers virtually comprised the entire





LTC Rolt at the wheel of a 1903 Humber 1933



LTC Rolt on board his narrow boat Cressy



membership. However the Association attracted a steadily growing membership and went on to become what is today an influential organisation supporting the preservation of the inland waterways and local canal societies and under whose aegis volunteer groups, particularly the Waterways Recovery Group WRG have restored and are restoring a significant part of the canal system,

The IWA could be viewed as the first expression of the industrial preservation movement and ultimately the restoration of the inland waterways to world heritage status its greatest achievement.

Thus by the time the Euston demolition plans were revealed a growing diffuse groundswell of opinion existed which had become increasingly restive at the destruction which was happening. What it needed was an event which would provoke a feeling of national outrage to the extent that it generated wide press comment and brought industrial preservation into the general public consciousness. Euston proved to be the spark. The efforts of the Euston preservationists did not succeed, but the experience provided a template for the future battles which lay ahead.

In parallel with this the need for a structured approach to the study of the buildings involved and the industrial processes carried on in them had become apparent and what had come to be called industrial archaeology entered the academic consciousness. One of its early manifestations was the founding by R A (Angus) Buchanan in 1964 of the Centre for the History of Technology at the University of Bath. He was later to play a pivotal role in the establishing of the Waltham Abbey Royal Gunpowder Mills Charitable Foundation – see below.

The battle lines of the industrial preservation movement were by now drawn, the spectrum ranging from the pull it all down demolitionists - preserving the past is a waste of time and stands in the way of economic progress, through to the preserve it all preservationists - the past is a fundamental part of a nation's identity, and to this day this tension remains.

Now the industrial preservation movement has reached a stage where what has come to be called adaptive re-use has become a keynote – the preservation of industrial structures by preservation of the external form and fabric together with if possible some surviving machinery to give an indication of the original function of the building combined with sympathetic conversion to a new use – apartments, offices, retail, small work units , museum, community and heritage centre and so on.

The Bankside Power Station conversion to the Tate Modern is a striking example of adaptive re-use.



**Bankside Power Station / Tate Modern**

Town gas works have long been redundant and few would mourn their passing, whilst forgetting what an important contribution they made to the community. A few gasholders still survive the demolition man. Demonstrating how far industrial preservation has come as an expression of cultural identity, in a way which would have been inconceivable even ten years ago the developer of part of the Kings Cross / St. Pancras site is constructing circular shape buildings within the remarkable St. Pancras triple gasholders guide frames (the so

called Kings Cross triplets). Further, a park is being created within another guide frame – Gasholder Park.

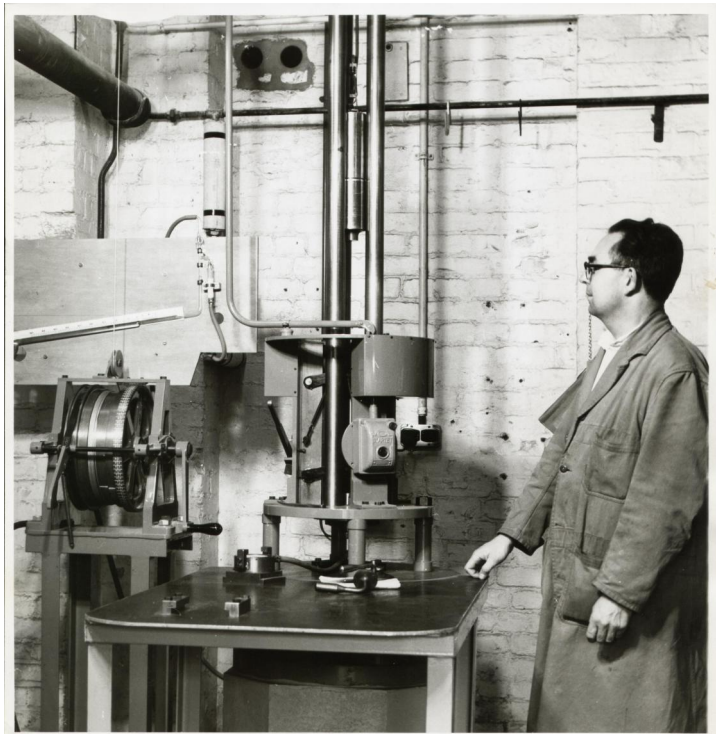


**Apartments within the Kings Cross triplets**



**Gasholder Park**

The post war Mills change of use from industrial production to research and development could be seen as adaptive re-use long before the term was thought of. The 1944 Ministry proposal to re-use the Mills in this way went to Dr, G. Rotter Director of Research at the Armament Research Department for comment. It is illuminating to see that his comments opened with the phrase 'Waltham Abbey has tradition'. Was he a sub conscious early industrial preservationist by adaptive re-use?



**A Rotter Impact Machine  
Standard safety test for explosives devised by Dr. Rotter**



When it was decided to de-commission the Waltham Abbey research centre in 1991 and transfer its work to other centres the MoD planned to decontaminate the site and sell it for housing and light industrial use. This came to the attention of the Gunpowder Mills Study Group, led by Prof. Alan Crocker. later the Gunpowder and Explosives History Group led by Dr. Brenda Buchanan, The Group determined that if possible such a historic site should be fully surveyed and recorded. Fortuitously Dr. Buchanan's husband Angus was a Royal Commissioner and was able to pass the request to what was then the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England and a full survey was done. Ultimately arising from this the MoD agreed to pass part of the site to a Charitable Foundation who would, with the benefit of an endowment, open and operate the site as a visitor centre for the benefit of the community, and preserve its buildings which together represented a unique survival of a most important national technology, hitherto totally barred from the public gaze.

After extensive decontamination the Royal Gunpowder Mills heritage centre opened in 2001.

By 2015 it had become clear that in spite of sterling effort by staff and a large number of volunteers the centre was not producing enough revenue to cover the cost of maintenance of the historic listed buildings and running the site and the Trustees decided that the only way forward would be to lease a large part of the site to the commercial firm PGL who would refurbish listed buildings and create a children's holiday camp, with further building.

Hypothetically the PGL proposal could be called adaptive re-use. However there is a world of difference between acceptable re-use, where for example an empty spinning mill is converted to apartments, with appropriate preservation of the external fabric, and the PGL model for the Mills which involves total loss to the community of an existing heritage asset of significant local and national importance, since once the takeover was complete the area taken over, including the finest range of explosives production buildings surviving in Europe, would become fenced off private property and public access would be barred. Further, the proposal does not include any provision

for a viable visitor centre to accommodate the vital activities which would be displaced.

Expert weighty objections to the PGL scheme have been submitted to the planning authority covering a wide range of issues, including the above.

**Les Tucker**

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## **PGL update**

After many delays, on the 4th of January PGL plans started to appear on the council website. After three days some 270 files had been uploaded. The majority were plans of buildings, maps of the site showing new buildings, drainage, road layouts, and outdoor activity apparatus such as abseiling towers, zip wires and lakes. A few were text documents, some over 100 pages, from various consultants, detailing contamination issues, wildlife surveys - herons, bats, newts, etc.

While PGL had been preparing these plans over a period of more than two years, we were to be given just three weeks to lodge our objections and comments under recent government legislation to speed up the planning process. However, the council did not put up notices on our gates for another two weeks, so we ended up with five weeks, which had previously been the case for large scale plans.

The Friends committee had already retained the services of a planning consultant who explained the rules of planning applications. We therefore decided to concentrate our objections on the loss of visitor attraction facilities and the failure of the Foundation to offer

realistic alternatives. In addition we included an alternative plan that would allow an expanded visitor attraction to exist alongside the PGL activities.

According to the PGL plans put to the council we would lose the mad lab and rocket vault, the cafe and toilet block along with the adjoining volunteer base and workshop plus the artefact store. We would also lose the Spinks gallery, while access to our grade I gunpowder mill with its replica mill and views of the underground mechanisms would only be available to escorted parties by agreement with PGL.

Our alternative plan would seek to retain these areas and extend across the Bailey bridge by the Spinks gallery to the first cordite press house on the eastern flank for a development to show the post war scientific work of the site for which lottery funding has been promised. It would also call for a new road to take the PGL coach traffic through the overflow car park, joining Long Walk at the Main Lab.

The PGL plans call for the burn out and demolition of the entire eastern flank world war one cordite factory with new accommodation blocks being built on the foundations of the old buildings. A number of other buildings would also be demolished. PGL would have exclusive use of the remaining mill buildings to the east of Queens Mead which would be refurbished with a lottery grant.

The above is by way of a summary. Our full objection and alternative plan is available by e-mail from [len.stuart@iee.org](mailto:len.stuart@iee.org) or on written application to the secretary. Be aware that this is a technical planning document and should be read in conjunction with the council Local Plan available on the Epping Forest District Council website along with the PGL planning application EPF/3028/15 from the same source.

**Len Stuart**



## Links below for Plans:

### Local Plan

<http://194.75.250.205/index.php/home/file-store/category/168-current-policy>

### PGL Plans

<http://plan1.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/Northgate/PlanningExplorer/Generic/StdDetails.aspx?PT=Planning%20Applications%20On-Line&TYPE=PL/PlanningPK.xml&PARAM0=580940&XSLT=/Northgate/PlanningExplorer/SiteFiles/Skins/EppingForest/xslt/PL/PLDetails.xslt&FT=Planning%20Application%20Details&PUBLIC=Y&XMLSIDE=/Northgate/PlanningExplorer/SiteFiles/Skins/EppingForest/Menus/PL.xml&DAURI=PLANNING>

or a more compact version:

[tinyurl.com/h4ec2jy](http://tinyurl.com/h4ec2jy)

# A Personal Experience of Explosives

In the mid 1960's having been released from two years penal servitude with the Royal Signals at Catterick Camp, having been in the very last intake of National Servicemen, I sought employment with The London Electric Wire Company in Leyton. In the Purchasing Department for three years I was asked one day to collect a box from Goods Inwards and transport it to the Enamelling Department. It was huge site probably almost as big as the Mills, so the department was a good distance away down the site.

The man in charge of Goods Inwards cautioned me to walk very slowly, don't under any circumstances drop the box as the contents were delicate and very valuable. I set off on my long walk, and about mid way began to wonder why on this normally bustling site there was not a living soul to be seen.

Arriving at my destination I placed the box on the storekeepers counter to which he said "You arrived in one piece then?" I replied "Of course" and he said "Do you know what you were carrying?" "No" I replied and he proceeded to prise the lid off the the small wooden box, to reveal a small glass bottle embedded deep in sawdust. "That is pure Nitro Glycerine" he advised. It seems they used it in the enamelling process. Needless to say Health & Safety did not exist in those days.

Some years later I had moved on to Chamberlain Industries also in Leyton, they manufactured hydraulic equipment. One Monday morning soon after arrival the fire alarm went off and we had to abandon the building. It turned out the Chief Accountant had arrived in his office to find safe breaking equipment next to the safe, but more importantly four sticks of badly sweating dynamite, the heating having been on all weekend. We then had to await the arrival of the Bomb Squad, who removed it to Leyton Marshes and carried out a controlled explosion..

Sadly neither of those two industries exist today, but it had certainly been a lot safer at Catterick Camp, there the only danger had been the odd psycho. Drill Sergeant and my colour blind self being in a Signals Regiment.

Russ Orchard

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## **I am a Seenager. (Senior teenager)**

I have everything that I wanted as a teenager, only 60 years later.

I don't have to go to school or work.

I get an allowance every month.

I have my own pad.

I don't have a curfew.

I have a driver's license and my own car.

I have ID that gets me into bars and the wine store. I like the wine store best.

The people I hang around with are not scared of getting pregnant, they aren't scared of anything, they have been blessed to live this long, why be scared

And I don't have acne.

Life is Good! Also, you will feel much more intelligent after reading

this, if you are a Seenager.

Brains of older people are slow because they know so much. People do not decline mentally with age, it just takes them longer to recall facts because they have more information in their brains, scientists believe this also makes you hard of hearing as it puts pressure on your inner ear.

Much like a computer struggles as the hard drive gets full, so too, do humans take longer to access information when their brains are full.

Researchers say this slowing down process is not the same as cognitive decline. The human brain works slower in old age, said Dr. Michael Ramscar, but only because we have stored more information over time. The brains of older people do not get weak. On the contrary, they simply know more.

Also, older people often go to another room to get something and when they get there, they stand there wondering what they came for. It is NOT a memory problem, it is nature's way of making older people do more exercise.

SO THERE!!

I have more friends I should send this to, but right now I can't remember their names. So, please forward this to your friends; they may be my friends, too.

**Beryl Barratt**

## **Most of our generation of 55+ were HOME SCHOOLED in many ways**

1. My mother taught me TO APPRECIATE A JOB WELL DONE.

"If you're going to kill each other, do it outside. I just finished cleaning."

2. My mother taught me RELIGION.

"You better pray that will come out of the carpet."

3. My father taught me about TIME TRAVEL.

"If you don't straighten up, I'm going to knock you into the middle of next week!"

4. My father taught me LOGIC.

" Because I said so, that's why ."

5. My mother taught me MORE LOGIC .

"If you fall out of that swing and break your neck, you're not going to the store with me."

6. My mother taught me FORESIGHT.

"Make sure you wear clean underwear, in case you're in an accident."

7. My father taught me IRONY.

"Keep crying, and I'll give you something to cry about."

8. My mother taught me about the science of OSMOSIS.

"Shut your mouth and eat your supper."

9. My mother taught me about CONTORTIONISM.

"Just you look at that dirt on the back of your neck!"

10. My mother taught me about STAMINA.

"You'll sit there until all that spinach is gone."

11. My mother taught me about WEATHER.

"This room of yours looks as if a tornado went through it."

12. My mother taught me about HYPOCRISY.

"If I told you once, I've told you a million times, don't exaggerate!"

13. My father taught me the CIRCLE OF LIFE.

"I brought you into this world, and I can take you out..."

14. My mother taught me about BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION .

"Stop acting like your father!"

15. My mother taught me about ENVY.

"There are millions of less fortunate children in this world who don't have wonderful parents like you do."

16. My mother taught me about ANTICIPATION.

“Just wait until we get home.”

17. My mother taught me about RECEIVING.

“You are going to get it from your father when you get home!”

18 . My mother taught me MEDICAL SCIENCE.

“If you don't stop crossing your eyes, they are going to get stuck that way.”

19. My mother taught me ESP .

“Put your sweater on; don't you think I know when you are cold?”

20. My father taught me HUMOR.

“When that lawn mower cuts off your toes, don't come running to me.”

21. My mother taught me HOW TO BECOME AN ADULT.

“If you don't eat your vegetables, you'll never grow up.”

22. My mother taught me GENETICS.

“You're just like your father.”

23. My mother taught me about my ROOTS.

“Shut that door behind you. Do you think you were born in a barn?”

24. My mother taught me WISDOM.

“When you get to be my age, you'll understand.”



25. My father taught me about JUSTICE .

“One day you’ll have kids, and I hope they turn out just like you!”

This should only be sent to the over 50 crowd because the younger ones would not believe we truly were told these “EXACT” words by our parents...

**Beryl Barratt**

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## **Tales from the South Site**

Recently I met Eric Baker and he reminded me of some of the more amusing things that happened on South Site.

Near to the eastern boundary was an abandoned octagonal water tower that had housed an office and laboratory at one time. As it was semi-derelict the fire brigade decided to use it to practice entering a smoke filled building. They managed to set fire to it and had to call out the fire station engine to put it out!

On another occasion Eric was passing N502 when he saw smoke issuing from the building which was supposed to be flame free. It seems that a cast charge was bonded to a metal plate with paraffin wax (what the purpose of this was is not known). It was decided to separate the charge from the plate by melting the wax using a gas burner, it seemed like a good idea at the time.

In spite of the smoke Eric knew that things were under control when he heard Vic Clifford telling the staff not to worry as he’d arranged for them to have tea in P704.

Eric's tales reminded me of the time that two visitors came into P742 to service our balances. They were glad to be out of the P1 building where they had been working as brown fumes were issuing from a plastic bag.

Within a short time Dave Bullock in P743 saw flames coming from the P1 building. He rushed into the fire station next door to be told that the rest of the fire brigade were in the surgery having a first aid lecture. The fire chief was well bandaged so that by the time the fire engine got to the fire the best that could be done was to save the rest of the building.

Although the bay was burned out a box of K-rounds had survived intact! (A valuable lesson on the safe storage of propellants.)

**B C Howard**

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## **WARGMFA AGM/Reunion**

The AGM/Reunion will be held on Friday 13th May 2016 in the café.

10:30 Tea/coffee will be available

11:00 AGM

12:00 Reunion/Social

12:30 Lunch served

Price £8.50 for lunch, please return booking forms as soon as possible.

# Obituary

## **Gordon Bromberger 1931 - 9th December 2015**



My acquaintance with Gordon began during the period I worked at ERDE Waltham Abbey from January 1954 to the Summer of 1955.

I was hired as an approx. 17 year old Scientific Assistant to work in Dr. Hodge's Propellant and Cordite Pressure and Burning-Rate Department on the North Site of the ERDE. Our Labs were close to the waterway. Gordon was then an Assistant Scientific Officer and I reported directly to him.

In those days our equipment included a Vented Vessel and a Strand Burner. Both were used for measuring different types of burning rates of the materials tested in them. One of our aims with the vented Vessel for example was to keep burning rates constant for the doped cordites and solid propellants tested in them.

The Group also had extensive laboratories that enabled us to analyze materials, perform wet-chemistry, photographic labs. Explosives Storage areas, Electronic and Machine shops.

Other staff besides Dr. Hodge, included: Robert Pape, Les Grindrod, Geoff Colley, Ernie Cooke, Bernard Parker, Jack Pontin, and Eric Braithwaite.

Gordon was a perfect supervisor. He was well educated and studying for his B.Sc. at Northern Polytechnic and totally knowledgeable about ALL the technical areas within the group. He was always polite and good humored with everyone and completely understood the need for care, safety and correct scientific attitudes in the work place. He never put anyone under needless pressure or under unreasonable expectations. He always discussed the projects that we were working with and his interpretation of results.

Gordon also spent much time helping me with my part-time/day release. As one can easily appreciate, such help and consideration from a work-boss left a lasting impression of gratitude with me. I left the ERDE during autumn 1955 to continue Full-Time studies and Emigrated to the USA in 1967. What a marvellous environment to begin a working career in science.

We always stayed in touch from then on however.

I express my deepest sympathy and lasting gratitude to his beloved family.

**Dr. Gerald B. Ansell – Los Alamos, NM USA.**

Gordon was later transferred to Analytical Chemistry and after a long stay in Main Lab moved to P2 South Site. He filled 'Blue Water' motors in N550. He eventually moved back to North Site when South Site was privatised and worked in L153. He retired in 1990 before the site closed. He is credited with naming the end of the month meetings with the title of "Last of the Summer Wine". He was a keen collector of stamps and post cards of airships etc. He was a regular attendee at the AGM/ reunion events but unfortunately missed the last two in 2014, 2015.

## Some Images for PGL







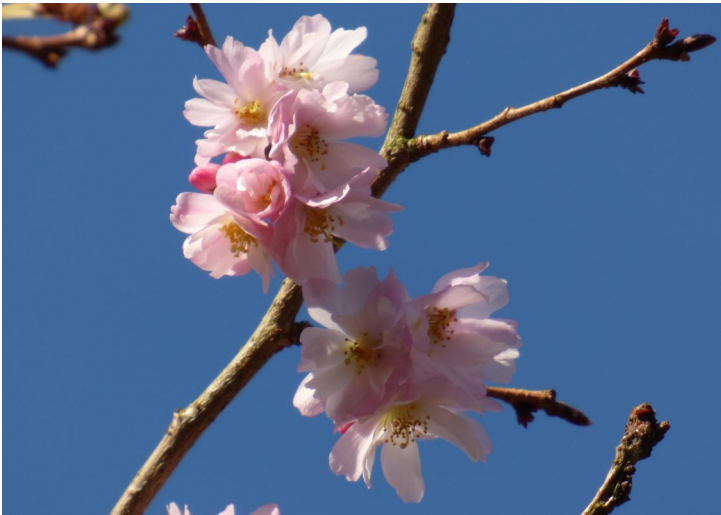
All photos by Lynne Lenard, taken in 2004 when the automatic sluice gates on the flood relief channel by 83B failed.

Two more on back cover.

My thanks to John Wilson for supplying them.      Ed.

## Julie's Nature Column

Spring has arrived early this year and the Mills daffodil display is almost in full bloom. Some recent mornings have been frosty and you can see the effects on the daffs making them wilt, but by afternoon they're upright again. Many birds have been singing out their territory songs already, getting confused by the mild winter and no doubt pairing up and finding suitable nesting places. One of my favourite trees has been blooming for most of the winter. I took this photo of it at the end of January.



The herd of deer are waiting for the grass to start growing, with most areas too short to graze, haylage and a special dry food is supplied to keep them going. Carrots and apples are always welcome and a call from me brings them over to see what I've got.





Every winter we make a point of feeding the birds. A mix of seed, fat and coconut provides a good feast for them and our weekly volunteers from Voluntary Action Epping Forest help with the task of making the mix and the feeders. Once the feeders are hung up it doesn't take long for the birds to arrive and Hoppit Road becomes a hive of activity with plenty of photo opportunities.



Even a Robin is keen to try it out.

One deer that is quite secretive is the Muntjac. If they see anyone they quickly run for cover or freeze like a statue in the hope that they haven't been seen. This one in the photo was running for some food that was put out for our Fallow deer until it realised that someone was nearby...me...and then it froze with a pose!



I'm looking forward to some sunny, warmer weather and the thought of the wildlife having a better time when food is more abundant. In the meantime I'll take pleasure in feeding the deer and the birds and generally keeping an eye on the wildlife.

**Julie Matthews**

**Nature conservationist Royal Gunpowder Mills**



