

**Summer 2017**

# TOUCHPAPER

The Newsletter of the Royal Gunpowder Mills Friends Association

**Gunner John Cantwell DCM**

**Friends Association 2017 AGM/Reunion**

**Last of the Summer Wine April Meeting**

**The Silent War – Peter Hart**

**Locomotives of the RGM 1917-1950s**

**Had Trafalgar happened 200 years later...**

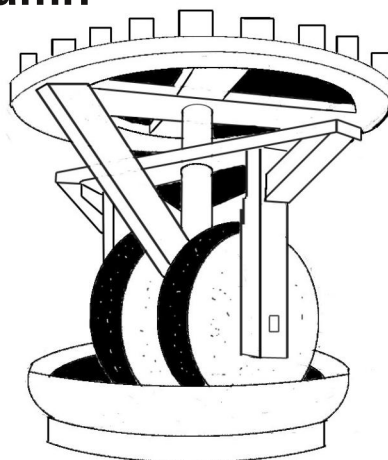
**Julie's Nature Column**

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**Obituary:**

**Gwen Meade**

**RGM Update**



**Summer 2017**

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**Deadline for the next issue is 18th August 2017**

## Chairman's Chat

It is either too cold or too hot, definitely the latter at the moment. I need a slave who can work in the hot weather, preferably without pay. In the absence of a suitable applicant I shall have to do it myself.

Many grandparents who live near the seaside will be coming into their own, having children to stay and giving their parents a bit of a break. Here's hoping that temperatures will not rise too far and give us all a bit of a break.

If you are not having a holiday in the hot sun abroad then please think about bringing children to the Powder Mills instead. They will be welcome here and maybe they will find something they have not seen before.

We hope to see some of you at any rate during the summer.

Some progress is being made about PGL but more needs to happen.

Best wishes,

*John Wright*

# Editorial

My apologies for the late delivery of this issue. Amongst other excuses we have builders in which has disrupted our routine, it has also been very hot recently and the brain is melting. The latter would not have been a problem if I had got on with my job earlier!

The delay is not all bad news as it has meant that before going to press we have had notice that PGL have withdrawn their appeal against EFDC's rejection of their planning application. We are still in doubt about the future and it is still necessary to find additional income to support the visitor attraction.

An update email from Stella Morris appears on the back page.

There are other plans being discussed and it may be possible to obtain funds to extend the visitor attraction instead of greatly reducing it. Only time will reveal the future!

Meanwhile the site is still open on Sundays and weekdays in the school holidays, see the website for details. It's a great place to bring the grand children and let them burn off some of the surplus energy.

*Brian Clements*

## **Gunner John Cantwell DCM Mills Hero of Rorke's Drift**

The protection of maritime trade routes, backed up in the steam era by a series of coaling stations and trading posts was a major British strategic preoccupation. One of, if not the, most important was the Cape route via South Africa to the rich markets and colonies of the East. Often settlement in the hinterland of the stations followed, giving rise ultimately to new colonies. In the case of South Africa this led to the founding of the colony of Natal and in the robust manner of Victorian foreign policy the annexation of the Transvaal.

This process of settlement often gave rise to tensions in relations with neighbouring territories and this was very evident in the case of Zululand which bordered on Natal along the Buffalo River. The Zulus were a warrior nation and had perpetrated a series of raids into British territory along the border. This reached a point where the military commander in South Africa, General Thesiger, soon to be Baron Chelmsford, and the administrator in South Africa, Bartle Frere, perceived that the Zulus were a military threat to the settlers in Natal and that pre-emptive military action was necessary. Not for the first time the Colonial Office found itself in the position of following with grave misgivings on the coat tails of policies already instigated by local action, rather than determining policy. On the initiative of Chelmsford and Bartle Frere, under the pretext of the rejection by Cetshwayo, King of the Zulus, of an ultimatum couched in terms which he could not possibly accept, on 11th. January 1879 a British force under the command of Chelmsford crossed the Buffalo River at Rorke's Drift into Zulu territory.



Frederick Augustus  
Thesiger 2nd Baron  
Chelmsford  
WAI 620 – 05



Cetshwayo  
WAI 620 – 04

Rorke's Drift, which had been a tiny settlement consisting of not much more than a trading post and missionary station including a hospital, had assumed strategic significance as a border crossing point and had developed into a military encampment. Much to their disgruntlement, 'B' Coy. of the 2nd. Battalion of the 24th. Regiment of Foot together with elements of the Royal Artillery, Royal Engineers and colonial forces were left behind to guard the settlement and the store of military equipment.



**Rorke's Drift In peaceful times WAI 620 - 08**

In the meantime Chelmsford made a fatal error in splitting his force, leaving 1800 men in a forward encampment in Zululand at Isandllwana. On 22nd. January 1879 some 20,000 Zulus attacked the encampment and annihilated almost all 1800 – the worst colonial defeat suffered by the Army. A handful of survivors escaped to warn the occupants of Rorke's Drift of the catastrophe and the virtual certainty that the Drift would come under attack. The two officers in command at the Drift were Lt. Bromhead, commanding 'B' Coy.



and Lt. Chard, commanding the Royal Engineers detachment. Chard was slightly senior to Bromhead in terms of service and therefore assumed command of the defence.



**Lt. John Rouse Merriott**  
**Chard VC**  
**WAI 620 - 07**

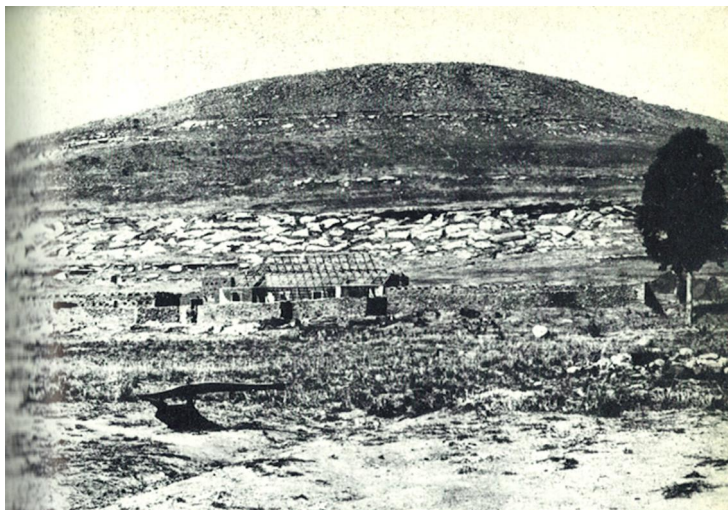


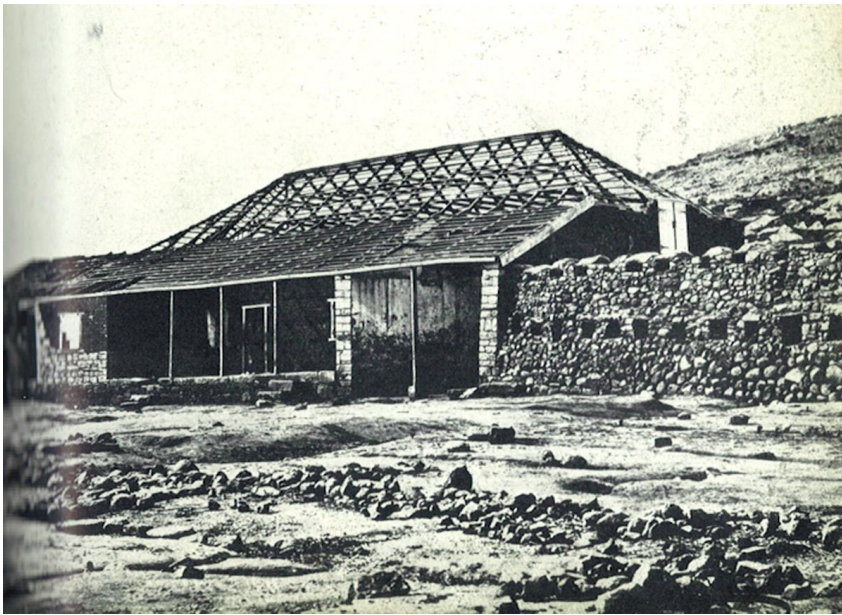
**Lt. Gonville S.**  
**Bromhead VC**  
**WAI 620 - 06**



Flight was out of the question as the Zulus would soon have caught up with any slow moving wagon train, with its burden of sick hospital patients. In any case the commanders would have been acutely aware that at least until Chelmsford could be contacted the Drift detachment was the only military presence standing between the helpless British settlers in Natal and a possible Zulu invasion – to stand and fight was the only option. In great haste sacks of mealie corn from the stores were used to construct a four foot high defensive wall round the camp perimeter and an inner defence about half the area of the outer perimeter was constructed from biscuit boxes. All the defenders could do then was to wait apprehensively for the Zulu attack – 150 defenders ranged against about 3000 Zulu. The first attack took place later in the day and there ensued successive attacks into the night and the early hours of the following morning, all repulsed in ferocious close quarters combat. The missionary's residence had been converted into a hospital and the defence of this building was particularly noteworthy, with the roof set on fire by the attackers. Miraculously in the midst of the carnage the defenders managed to carry the patients to the inner perimeter.

In the morning the exhausted defenders had reached the point of wondering whether the next attack would be their last stand when the Zulu silently withdrew.





**Rorke's Drift Mission station after the attack**  
**WAI 620 - 10**

The Defence of Rorke's Drift attracted wide international attention and was commemorated in several famous paintings. Its depiction by the painter Alphonse de Neuville was purchased for a large sum by the newly founded Art Gallery of New South Wales and 50,000 people paid to see it.

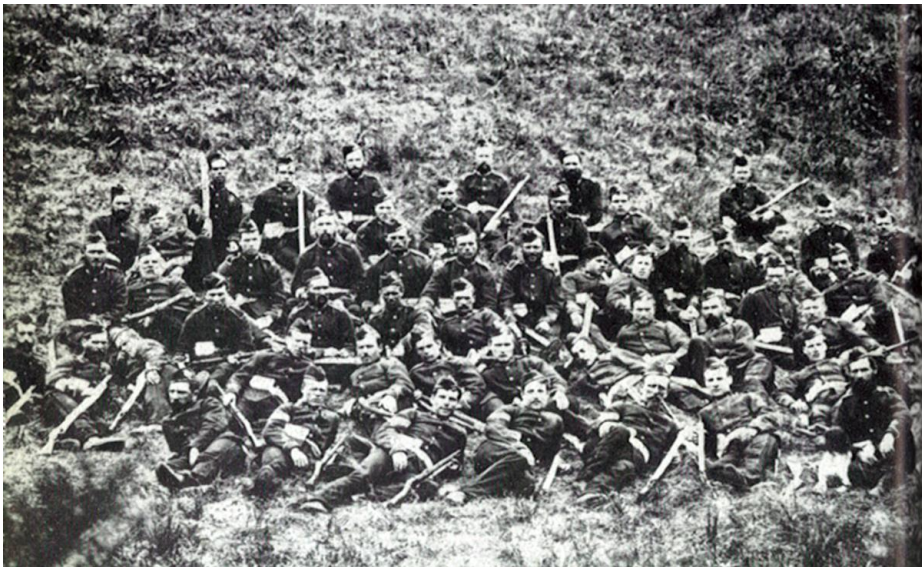
In the midst of the struggle, according to accounts there was one bizarre element – the dog Pip, who had been left behind at the Drift for safekeeping. Pip roamed free during the encounter and according to accounts participated in the entire action. The story is possibly apocryphal, but the painter clearly believed it and Pip appears in the photograph of 'B' Coy. taken after the attack.





The Defence of Rorke's Drift  
WAI 620 - 15

Alphonse de Neuville



The Survivors of ' B ' Coy. after the attack  
WAI 620 - 12

## Aftermath

There were however no fanfares for the defenders. For some reason the Army could not get supplies through to them for some time and they were left to face the winter rains with little shelter - the hospital and encampment tents had been burned to the ground and the storehouse roof had been taken off to prevent the Zulus setting fire to it. All medical supplies had been destroyed and food was inadequate. What had been sun baked earth turned to a sea of mud and uniforms rotted – the men were reduced to wearing empty mealie bags as clothing.

At Rorke's Drift supplies finally arrived and the 2nd. Battalion 24th. Regiment regrouped, later embarking for Gibraltar in September 1879.

The Defence of Rorke's Drift entered history as one of the great epic battles fought by the British Army, joining the list of defensive battles fought against seemingly impossible odds which had long been a speciality of the British Army. Eleven Victoria Crosses were awarded – to Lt. Chard, seven to 'B' Coy., including Lt. Bromhead, one to the Army Medical Department, one to the Commissariat and Transport Department and one to the Natal Native Contingent.

But what had any of this got to do with the Waltham Abbey Mills? The connection lies with Gnr. John Cantwell. Gnr. Cantwell had trained as an Artillery Wheeler – a vital role involving maintenance and repair of artillery wheels in the field, and was in charge of artillery stores at Rorke's Drift. He was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his part in the battle – presented to him by Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle.

John was medically discharged from the Army in 1887 and joined the Imperial Civil Service. He was quickly posted to the Engineering Department of the Waltham Abbey Gunpowder Mills. One could surmise that this was a fortunate posting for John. His mechanical training as a Wheeler would have been an asset and as a defender of Rorke's Drift and medal holder his status would have been enhanced. John's employment at the Mills lasted until 1892 when concern for his



**Gnr. John Cantwell  
DCM  
(Wheeler badge on  
sleeve)**

wife's health prompted a move to the warmer climate of South Africa, where he became a prison warder. Unfortunately he was attacked by a prisoner and died from his injuries in August 1900.

And there the story might have ended, buried in the dusty annals of colonial and regimental history. However there was a final very different twist. In the 1960's an article by the historical writer John Prebble prompted the production of the film Zulu depicting the battle, including memorable performances by Stanley Baker- Lt. Chard, James Booth as Pte. Hook VC- one of the defenders of the hospital and an aspiring young actor Michael Caine as Lt. Bromhead. The film was a popular success and it still appears in the TV schedules from time to time. It figured in a list by the eminent film critic Barry Norman of 50 Best British Films.

**Les Tucker**

# **Waltham Abbey Royal Gunpowder Mills Friends Association 2017 AGM/Reunion**

On a rather chilly day 32 members of the Friends Association met at the Waltham Abbey Royal Gunpowder Mills for the annual AGM followed by the reunion.

A number of questions were raised by the members regarding the situation with PGL. Len Stuart, Secretary, was able to give some answers but mainly we now await the Enquiry which is due to be held at Epping Town Hall on November 19th for a period of 6 days.

A new Treasurer, Richard Morrell, was elected who will work in tandem, for a while, with John Cook to ensure a smooth transition.

At 12.30 the Reunion attendees tucked into a tasty buffet. Later we assembled by the roundabout for the traditional group photograph, taken by Ian MacFarlane.

Following that some went to visit the archives with Len Stuart whilst Helen drove the Land Train around the site with some of the guests on board. Apparently several people offered anecdotes of the 'old days' adding to the tour.

By the time the tourists returned to the café to collect their belongings it was time to depart.

I hope everyone enjoyed their day.

**Daphne Clements**





Photo by Ian MacFarlane



## **Last of the Summer Wine April Meeting**

Two tables were needed to accommodate many of the usual attendees plus five new members. Martin Gough has recently joined the Friends and we hope that he'll continue to bring his wife to future meetings. Two more surprise visitors were Jeff Turner-Much and his partner Alex (she used to be Phylida). Finally we had Mike Bagley who opted to travel to Waltham Cross by train rather than motor bike. The main reason for these five new attendees was a remembrance of the life of Roy Carter (this is often in the form of a church service but a few pints in a local pub was thought to be more appropriate).

We missed Sheila Cooke who had to visit the dentist.

Also absent was John Vernon who has recently lost his wife; we would like to record our sympathy and look forward to seeing him in future.

**Bryan Howard**

# *Letters*

Dear Friends,

As a relatively new member of the Friends, I wonder if any of you could enlighten me as to how the Friends Association came about.

I have been told that Norman Paul, who ran a news letter at the Gunpowder Mills in the 1990's, became the first Chairman of the Friends and that as Chairman, this gave him and successive Chairmen (I suppose I should say Chairperson in these politically correct days) a seat on the Operating company Board, but why?

Any history of the Friends and our involvement with turning the Royal Gunpowder Mills into the visitor attraction we know and love would be much appreciated.

**John Wilson**

**Friend, Volunteer and operator of the Bangs Galore & Gunpowder Creek Railway.**

# **The Silent War – Peter Hart**

Back in the 1970's Peter Hart, Jim Sumner and Charlie Cleves shared a laboratory in L149. It was not a happy grouping. Jim Sumner was a perfect gentleman who would get on with anyone. He was also industrious. Charlie Cleves, on the other hand, was "economical with the application of his energies" and could be a bit of a bully, certainly if asked to do any work. Peter Hart was not one to be bullied and there started a "silent war", with neither speaking to the other, but feuding nonetheless. There was an unwritten rule at the time that practical jokes were OK so long as they did not disrupt work, but as Charlie never did any work, a few japes were regarded as fair game. The story has four parts:

## **The Telephone**

Charlie Cleves used to come into work at about ten o'clock and then ring up several of his golfing friends to tell them about his journey into work. He did so very loudly. Peter Hart dismantled his telephone and put a piece of Sellotape over the inside of the earpiece. The result was that Charlie could hardly hear his friends and therefore shouted even louder down the phone. Everyone in L149 knew about Charlie's journeys.

## **The Clock**

On the wall of the laboratory there was a large clock. Peter liked the clock to be dead on time. Charlie on the other hand liked it to be a quarter of an hour fast. This was presumably because his conscience felt better when he sloped off work at three o'clock. So the clock was adjusted back and forth on a regular basis by the two protagonists. Pete, being tall, moved the clock higher up the wall so that Charlie, being short, could not reach it. The latter got a step ladder. Charlie had a nervous habit of scratching his ear-lobes, so Peter covered the clock winder mechanism with red dye, with the inevitable consequences. The feud culminated when Peter made an ingenious

contraption that locked the clock to the wall, needing a special key to release it to get at the winder mechanism. The “tit for tat” came to an end when the Safety Officer (John Griffiths at the time) found Charlie up a step ladder with a hammer and chisel attacking the clock to get at the winder.

### **The Fish**

Thinking to liven things up a bit, Peter Hart procured a fish. He cut it into three parts. He put the head and the tail into a fridge, and left the middle section to go rotten. When a couple of weeks later it was really stinking, he put this middle bit under Charlie Cleves’ telephone and put the head, tail and a knife on Jim Sumner’s desk. The outcome was predictable.

### **The Balls**

Peter was a very ingenious and accomplished engineer. The laboratory at the back of L149 had a very high ceiling, nearly two stories high and the rafters were covered in dust and cobwebs. This made it an ideal place to hide a “gadget”. He constructed a very neat device comprising a solenoid, some springs and a tube. Upon receipt of an electrical impulse the device would dispense ball bearings one by one. He mounted the contraption in the rafters just over Charlie’s desk, carefully positioning it so that the balls would land on Charlie’s head. A thin wire ran from the device to Peter’s desk, where a battery activated the sequence. The ball bearings were about three eighths of an inch in diameter and were falling from a considerable height, so they must have been pretty painful on impact. Charlie never worked out where the balls were coming from or who the guilty party was, but Peter was a pretty good poker player and kept an absolutely straight face, so the finger of suspicion wrongly fell on to Jim Sumner.

I left ERDE in 1978 so I did not see the end of the “silent war”. If anyone can add any more anecdotes, it would be good to hear them.

**Geoff Hooper**

# **Locomotives of the Royal Gunpowder Mills from 1917 to the 1950s.**

Up until January 1917 all rolling stock was moved by manual labour, but with the demands of the First World War, locomotives were introduced to move explosives and propellants around the site, plus bring in raw materials from the standard gauge railway at the Royal Small Arms Factory which lay to the south of the Royal Gunpowder Mills.

Photo 1 shows how wagons were moved prior to 1917 and this photo dates from 1895.



Photo 2 shows the first type of loco, which is a Ruston Proctor of Lincoln, Petrol/Paraffin Loco with a single cylinder engine.

The photo shows the women who would be driving the engine under instruction. Petrol/Paraffin engines are started on Petrol, and once running are switched to Paraffin. The Chimney is a hopper for the cooling system. The first of this type were introduced on 30th January 1917 with 4 being purchased.



Photo 3 shows an Edison Battery powered loco, believed to have been built by the Automatic Transportation CO. OF Buffalo, USA. Only one of which was purchased.

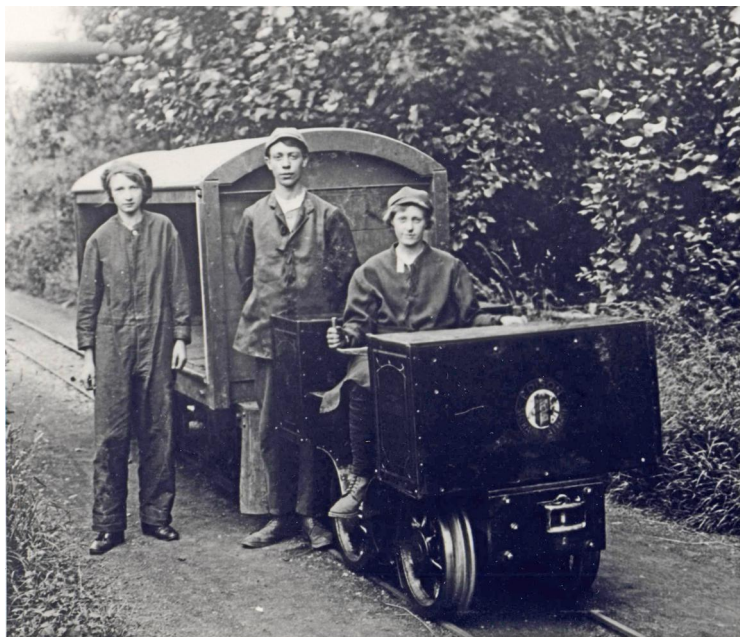
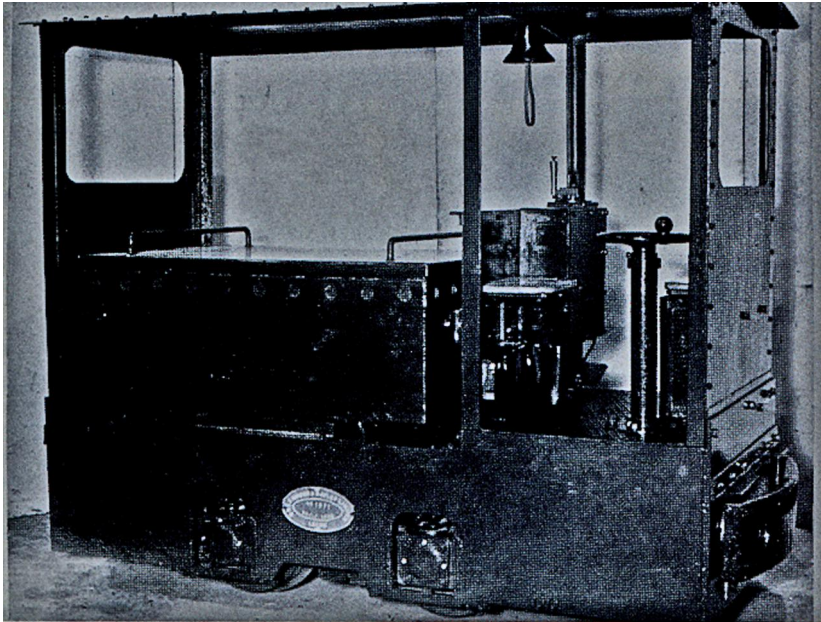




Photo 4 Shows a Battery Loco by Greenwood & Batley, Liverpool, at the works loco before delivery in 1940.



In total 17 Battery Electric locos were purchased, 2 on 30th July 1918, 5 purchased in 1937, 6 in 1940 and the final 4 in 1942.

All were built by British companies such as British Electric Vehicles of Southport, Wingrove & Rogers of Liverpool and of course Greenwood & Batley of Leeds.

**John Wilson**



# Had Trafalgar happened 200 years later...

21st October 2005

“Order the signal, Hardy.”

“Aye, aye sir.”

“Hold on, that’s not what I dictated to the signal officer. What’s the meaning of this?”

“Sorry sir?”

“England expects every person to do his duty. regardless of race, gender. sexual orient ation, religious persuasion or disability - What gobbledegook is this?”

“Admiralty policy, I’m afraid, sir. We’re an equal opportunities employer now. We had the devil’s own job getting ‘England’ past the censors, lest it be considered racist.”

“Gadzooks, Hardy. Hand me my pipe and tobacco.”

“Sorry sir. All naval vessels have been designated smoke-free working environments.”

“In that case, break open the rum ration. Let us splice the main brace to steel the men before battle.” . . .

“The rum ration has been abolished, Admiral. It’s part of the Governments policy on binge drinking.”

“Good heavens, Hardy. I suppose we’d better get on with it. Full speed ahead.”

“I think you’ll find that there’s a 4 knot speed limit in this stretch of water, sir.”

“Damn it man! We are on the eve of the greatest sea battle in history. We must advance with all dispatch. Report from the crow’s nest, please.”

“That won’t be possible. sir.”

“What?”

“Health and Safety have closed the crow’s nest, sir - no harness — and they said that the rope ladder doesn’t meet regulations. They won’t let anyone up there until a proper scaffolding can be erected.”

“Then get me the ship’s carpenter without delay, Hardy.”

“He’s busy knocking up a wheelchair access to the foc’sle Admiral.”

“Wheelchair access? I’ve never heard anything so absurd.”

“Health and Safety again, sir. We have to provide a barrier-free environment to meet the needs of the differently-abled.”

“Differently-abled? I’ve only one arm and one eye and I refuse even to hear mention of the word. I didn’t rise to the rank of admiral by playing the disability card.”

“Actually, sir, you did. The Royal Navy is under-represented in the areas of visual impairment and limb deficiency.”

“Whatever next? Give me full sail. The salt spray beckons.”

“A couple of problems there too, sir. Health and Safety won’t let the crew up the rigging without crash helmets. And they don’t want anyone breathing in too much salt - haven’t you seen the adverts?”

“I’ve never heard such infamy. Break out the cannon and tell the men to stand by to engage the enemy.”

“The men are a bit worried about shooting at anyone, Admiral.”

“What? This is mutiny.”

“It’s not that, sir. It’s just that they’re afraid of being charged with murder if they actually kill anyone. There’s a couple of legal aid

lawyers on board, watching everyone like hawks.”

“Then how are we to sink the Frenchies and the Spanish?”

“Actually, sir, we’re not.”

“We’re not?”

“No. sir. The Frenchies and the Spanish re our European partners now. According to the Common Fisheries Policy, we shouldn’t even be in this stretch of water. We could get hit with a claim for compensation.”

“But you must hate a Frenchman as you hate the devil.”

“I wouldn’t let the ship’s diversity co-ordinator hear you saying that sir. You’ll be up on a disciplinary.”

“You must consider every man an enemy who speaks ill of your King.”

“Not any more, sir. We must be inclusive in this multicultural age. Now put on your Kevlar vest; it’s the rules.”

“Don’t tell me - health and safety. Whatever happened to rum, sodomy and the lash?”

“As I explained, sir, rum is off the menu. And there’s a ban on corporal punishment.”

“What about sodomy?”

“Nothing specifically in the rules that I can see, sir.”

“In that case kiss me. Hardy!”

## It's Rocket Science Jim but not as we know it...

The Rocket Vault has just received five missiles from an anonymous kleptomaniac. Can you use the clues to help sort out the key facts that have become jumbled up in the Lidl bag-for-life in which they were delivered.

No option in any category is used more than once and any relation to any missile or company, whether alive or dead, is purely coincidental. Honest.

		missiles					company					max speed				
		Bassethound	Firestroke	Rapport	Sea Diaper	Skyslug	BAD Systems	Blockhead Martini	Hunter Sickly	Quiqxotiq	YUK-Macaroni	Mach 1.0	Mach 1.5	Mach 2.0	Mach 2.5	Mach 3.0
original unit cost	£100,000															
	£150,000															
	£200,000															
	£250,000															
	£300,000															
max speeds	Mach 1.0															
	Mach 1.5															
	Mach 2.0															
	Mach 2.5															
	Mach 3.0															
company	BAD Systems															
	Blockhead Martini															
	Hunter Sickly															
	Quiqxotiq															
	YUK-Macaroni															

1. The missile with a maximum speed of Mach 2.0 cost £100,000 more than the missile designed by BAD Systems.
2. Firestroke cost £150,000.
3. Bassethound cost £100,000 less than the missile with a maximum speed of Mach 3.0
4. Skylug doesn't have a maximum speed of Mach 1.0.
5. The £100,000 missile was designed by Hunter Sickly.
6. Rapport, the missile designed by Quiqxotiq and the missile designed by BAD Systems are 3 different missiles.
7. Skylug cost more than Sea Diaper.
8. Of Sea Diaper and Firestroke, one was designed by YUK-Macaroni and the other has a max speed of Mach 1.5.
9. The missile with a max speed of Mach 1.0, Bassethound and the missile designed by BAD Systems are 3 different missiles.
10. The Bassethound cost £50,000 less than the missile designed by Bad Systems.

**Richard Morrell**

# Obituary

## **Gwen Meade**

I learned of the death of Gwen at the June meeting of the Lowestoft branch of the Civil Service retirement Fellowship.

Gwen was married to Jack who worked in the North Site machine shop. They moved from Monkswood Avenue when Jack retired and relocated at Kirby Cane (near Beccles). Jack only survived the rigours of retirement for about 3 years.

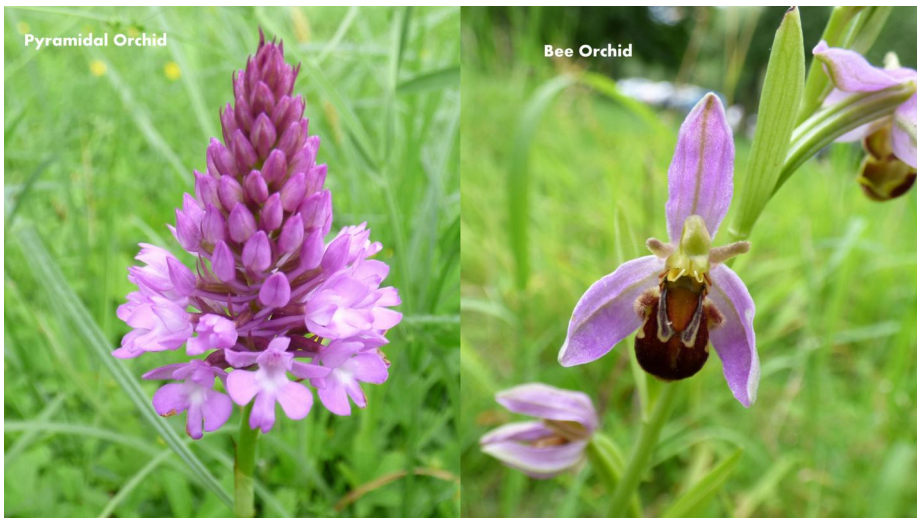
Gwen was treasurer of the residents association, if I recall correctly, when in Waltham Abbey and until recently she was a regular attendee at the Lowestoft group while she could be brought to meetings by car.

A donation of £5 from each of the members of the Lowestoft group raised more than £100 for the McMillan Nurses Charity.

**B C Howard**

## Julie's Nature Column

Well the good weather has arrived and the Mills is buzzing with wildlife. There seems to be lots of bumble bees which is great and several bees nests have been noticed. One just above a doorway, one in the ground and one which had to be removed by a beekeeper because they decided to nest under the wheel arch of the railway children's digger. The beekeeper took them several miles away to set up home somewhere new. Talking of bees, over the years there has been bee orchids growing in the car park. They disappeared for a few years, but to my surprise they reappeared the other week, only two, but it's a start. A week later i found a pyramid orchid in the same area, so we are going to keep this area wild and sow other wildflowers to compliment what's already there.





Watching wildlife in the evening has been enjoyable. Sometimes we're a bit spoilt as to what animal to watch first. The other evening a family of foxes were quite entertaining with two playful fox cubs. They can't sit still for long and it seems that everything is worth exploring or playing with. The cubs are about half grown and still depend on their parents. Other evening activities include the badgers of course, having glimpses of them when it's still light in the evening is a nice treat. I recently bought a bat detector and it's amazing to hear that they are all around the site. It's the perfect time of year for them with so many midges and moths on the menu.





The deer are in really good condition, antlers regrowing very fast and their coats looking shiny and new. This is the time of year when the Does have their fawns and I am hoping to catch the occasional glimpse soon. It will be some time before the does rejoin the males as they like to keep their fawns safe. In the meantime the males are quite entertaining because no one is in charge whilst their antlers are growing and the younger ones seem to get away with disrespecting the bigger males, but it won't be for long!

I hope to bring you some more interesting wildlife news next time around, but until then I hope you enjoy the little snippets so far.

**Julie Matthews**

**Mills nature conservationist**

# Update on the Royal Gunpowder Mills

A meeting was held 23 May 2017 between trustees of WARGM Company Limited ('Company') and WARGM Charitable Foundation Limited ('Foundation') at which the Company learned the following:

- The Foundation will not now proceed with the planning appeal.
- PGL have decided not to pursue this application or appeal.

The Foundation has stated that it is, in effect, starting again on development ideas, mindful of Council's reasons for refusal of the PGL scheme Jun 2016, and the costs of a public inquiry.

We learned that at present there are potential interested parties -

- A similar organisation has shown interest in a somewhat smaller scheme for RGM which would repair and reuse the Cordite Factory.
- PGL now believe they can create a viable smaller scheme.
- In October 2016 WARGM Company submitted to the Foundation an outline scheme for a business park in the 'East Flank' that would repair and reuse the Cordite Factory Buildings and enable retention of all space currently used for visitors. The Foundation have stated that they will now consider this.
- It has been suggested that a joint Foundation / Company working group should be formed to examine options.

Please do contact me if you have any questions.  
Best wishes,

**Stella Morris**  
**Chief Officer**

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