

Summer 2018

TOUCHPAPER

The Newsletter of the Royal Gunpowder Mills Friends Association

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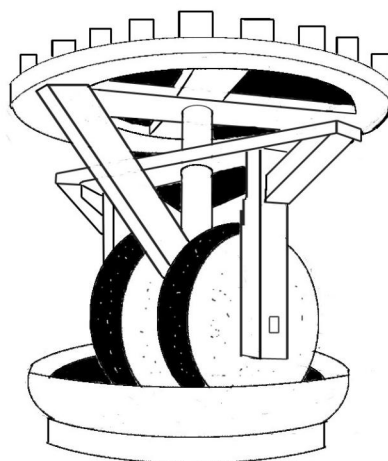
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AGM/Reunion 11 May 2018

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Terry Griffiths**

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Beatrice Hide
Pam Colley**



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Deadline for the next issue is 31st August 2018

Chairman's Chat

Particularly “down south” around Waltham Abbey we have had some glorious weather and I hope other parts of the country have had it as well.

Older members of the Committee have not all been as well as they wished in the last few months but we hope to be able to do rocket firings on Wednesday afternoons during the summer as in previous years. We enjoy doing them and the children enjoy watching them.

We hope that John Wilson will be running his trains on the 7¼ inch gauge track. The 2 feet 6 inch train should also be running on some days of the week. The connection between the two is at the Main Lab, L122, where we are currently renovating two old coaches as waiting rooms in case we have rain at the wrong time. Of course we all expect no rain when the trains are running!

We expect to be doing some painting on the cannons and on the V2 motor so for short periods the cannons will have wet paint on but not of course on your children.

We look forward to seeing some of you at the Mills during the summer and at half terms.

John Wright

Editorial

Once more thanks to our regular contributors we have a packed newsletter.

There are two items you should read carefully about data protection and the state/future of the site. I hope the rest of the issue is also of interest.

According to our records some members have still not renewed their subscriptions and those of you that are included in this group will find a renewal form enclosed or attached as appropriate. Anyone not renewing after this issue will be removed from our mailing lists and records. If you think our records are not correct please contact the Treasurer (note we have a change again, details inside the front cover).

Thanks to Ian McFarlane for his re-union photo, a service he has provided for some years now. Also to Julie Matthews for her usual high standard of nature photos and to Terry Griffiths for the VE weekend photos. An interesting detail on his shot of the JAP car is the cover on the right hand headlamp that restricts the light for wartime conditions.

We also have three obituaries; the sad fact is the Friends are an ever shrinking group.

Brian Clements

General Data Protection Regulations 2018



Most of you will be aware through missives that you will have received from various companies and organisations that a new regulation is in force (with effect from 25th May 2018) on the protection of personal data. In this context personal data is any information relating to an individual, whether it relates to his or her private, professional or public life. It can be anything from a name, a home address, a photo, an email address, bank details, posts on social networking websites, medical information, or a computer's IP address. This new regulation is in the form of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The GDPR is Europe's new framework for data protection laws. It replaces the previous data protection directive upon which UK legislation was based. The government has confirmed that the UK's decision to leave the EU will not affect the implementation of the GDPR. It applies to, amongst others, Registered Charities and that includes the Friends Association. It is the law of the land, so I am afraid that we must comply with it.

We do hold some personal data about you, for instance your name (and family members' names if you subscribe to family membership), address, telephone number and e-mail address. Additionally, in order for us to claim Gift Aid from HM Revenue and Customs we may ask you if you pay income tax. This enables us to claim 25p for every £1 received from subscriptions and donations.

The principal difference between the GDPR 2018 and previous Data Protection Act 1998 is that there is a requirement on us to make absolutely sure that we have your explicit consent for us to hold and use your personal information. Implied consent is not enough. Specifically we need you to 'opt in' if you wish to continue to hear from us. If you do not, we will be legally obliged to delete your personal information from our database and we will be unable to keep in touch with you. For our part we make four promises:

1. We will only hold your data with your agreement
2. We will keep your data safe and private
3. We will not provide your data to any third party without your consent
4. If you so wish, we will make it easy for you to opt out of receiving e-mails, letters and telephone calls at any time and to delete your records that we hold on file whenever you so wish

How will we put the 'opt in' into practice? When your membership becomes due for renewal you will see a change in the wording on the form. This will ask you specifically if you are content for us to hold and use your personal information for Friends Association business. You will be invited to sign to this effect. That will make us compliant with the law.

Geoff Hooper

Wetlands / Industrial Heritage

Walthamstow Wetlands / Coppermill

The Spring 2017 Touchpaper reported the opening of the Woodberry Wetlands in Hackney, based on an old Thames Water reservoir.

Walthamstow Wetlands

Another East London wetlands has opened to the public, partly funded with a contribution of £4,4million from the HLF – Walthamstow Wetlands and Nature Reserve. This is particularly notable - based on a complex of ten old reservoirs spanning 211 hectares hidden in the middle of a surrounding urban area it is one of the largest urban wetland reserves in Europe for wintering, migrating and breeding birds and the habitat harbours a wide range of flora and fauna. Additionally it has been possible to continue the working water supply function.

Coppermill

Apart from the attraction of the environmental conservation the Wetlands are of interest to the industrial archaeologist as they contain on the site, termed Coppermill, two industrial heritage buildings – the Coppermill Building at the original mill location and the Marine Engine House.

Coppermill Building

Using water diverted from the River Lea, there has been a mill on the site from the 11th century. In common with many other water mills, it passed through a number of uses – firstly corn grinding then paper rolling, gunpowder during the Civil War, leather production, and latterly as was the case with Waltham Abbey an ‘oyle mill’ in this case producing linseed oil from flax seed.

In 1808 the mill was purchased by the British Copper Company using it to roll copper ingots shipped from the smelting works in Swansea to the Thames, then by barge up the Lea and finally into the Coppermill Stream, producing copper sheets for general use and purposes such as the protection of ships’ hulls and acting as a mint stamping copper tokens used as substitute currency.

Copper rolling continued until 1859 when the mill and its waters were purchased by the East London Waterworks Company. In 1864 a tower in arcaded Italianate style was added to accommodate a Cornish Bull engine to facilitate reservoir construction by draining surrounding marshland. The building is Grade II Listed and refurbishment includes a viewing platform affording panoramic views.



**Coppermill
Building / Tower**

Marine Engine House

The grandly named Marine Engine House was constructed in 1894 to pump domestic water supplies to East London. In common with many other Victorian industrial buildings it was in a simplified Italianate style, with semi circular heads to door and window openings. It will house an education and learning centre with a permanent exhibition of the area's wildlife and heritage, a classroom and café.



Marine Engine House and Swift Tower

Swift Tower

A 24m tower has been built on the site of the previously demolished engine house chimney. Termed the Swift Tower it will contain 54 nesting boxes for swifts migrating from Africa for the summer breeding season and a bat roost. Swifts are superb fliers and can spend up to ten months of the year on the wing, including sleeping, coming off the wing only at breeding time. They tend to breed in colonies and it is hoped that the swift tower will form a colony to help preserve this interesting bird, whose numbers have been declining.



Swift in flight

Les Tucker

Episodes in the Life of a Government Scientist

Chapter 16: Fun with Newton's Pool

Brief reference has already been made to the underwater firing facility at Waltham Abbey called Newton's Pool (Chapter 3).

For the best part of three Centuries, the principal business of the Site was the manufacture of gun powder.

The River Lea flows along the western flank of the Establishment North Site. At its Eastern boundary, and at a considerably higher level, flows what is still known as the Cornmill Stream.

Between the two, was developed a network of canals. Some of the waterways are/were quite complex featuring three cast iron aqueducts.

Newton's Pool is a natural pool formed just below the Cornmill Stream by which it is fed. The pool overflows westwards to supply water to the aforementioned system of canals.

When the Site operated as a gunpowder factory, transport of the gun powder and its ingredients took place on the canals in powder boats pulled on towpaths by man or horse power. The canals remained the principal means of transport when cordite became the main product on the Site although a narrow gauge battery-powered electric railway was in operation from the early 1900s linking the factory buildings and storage magazines. The railway had ceased to operate before the Site became a Research Establishment in 1946.

Interest in the development of new, more powerful, explosives designed for use in underwater weapons was awakened during the 1960s when it was perceived that propellant technology might offer

explosives with enhanced underwater shock-wave impulse and energy over the output from more conventional secondary explosives. To pursue this line of research required some means of readily assessing the underwater performance of such materials on a 'moderate' scale on site. The performance of composite explosives, in which oxidants and fuels are present as separate chemical species, is dependent on factors like the particle size of the ingredients and it is also affected by the actual dimensions of the charge. There is usually a minimum size of charge above which the explosive parameters, such as detonation velocity, are no longer influenced by charge size and may be regarded as 'constant'. As a result of this, a minimum charge size of about 3.5Kg would be needed to be fired. In addition to this, sufficient depth of water would be needed so that shock reflections from the bottom of the pool wouldn't interfere with the measurement of pressure at meaningful distances from the charge.

In essence, these considerations meant that the pool would have to be about 6m in depth and 20m in diameter. In fact, the pool was rather on the shallow side but the firing of explosive charges on the bottom and the building of a dam at the exit end allowed these rough criteria to be met.

By 1967, the development of Newton's Pool as a serious firing facility was well underway. However, the Scientist-in-Charge didn't get on at all well with the Superintendent. The Superintendent was a tough and uncompromising individual who'd come up through the ranks and the Scientist-in-Charge took an almost fiendish delight in 'winding him up'. Newton's Pool was very dear to the Superintendent's heart and he regarded the facility as the 'show-piece' of his Department. He would visit Newton's Pool whenever he could.

On one occasion, the Superintendent witnessed a particularly dramatic firing. "How large was that charge?" he casually enquired of the Scientist-in-Charge. "14Kg..." was the reply. "Whaat!!" expostulated the Superintendent, "I told you not to exceed 4Kg!!"

The relationship between the two men continued to deteriorate and, for my sins, I was detailed to take charge of the facility and ‘sort things out’ – something of a poisoned chalice!

Over the next few months, Newton’s Pool and its environment were tidied up. The northern bank was provided with some hard-standing from which staff and visitors could observe the underwater explosions and a short wooden quay was built along the water’s edge against which was moored a rowing boat to provide access to the centre of the pool should the need arise. An old building adjacent to the pool was refurbished as a control room and laboratory and a smaller building was fitted out as a magazine.

It wasn’t long before the facility became a focus for visitors. The visitors never failed to be impressed when an underwater charge was fired to produce first, a dull thud as the shock wave was transmitted through the water to the land and, finally, an impressive plume of water rising twenty or thirty feet into the air.

Throughout all my years with explosives and propellants, I can confidently declare that when it comes to explosions we’re all children at heart. The most stern, elevated and distinguished visitors have all rubbed their hands with glee at the sight of an underwater explosion!

Principally as a public relations exercise, the Establishment Director arranged for a series of Open Days in the Summer of 1968. The first day was given over to ‘official’ guests and luminaries from Industry. The second day was open to the Public. The local press was full of headlines like, “Top Secret Establishment is Opened Up...” and “Secrets of Mystery Site to be Revealed...” A great deal of effort was devoted to preparing for these Open Days and, looking back on it all, they were a success in every way.

I invited my parents to attend the public Open Day and took the opportunity of showing them around. I think they had a better

understanding of why I'd become so fond of the place with its wide open spaces, natural beauty and pervading sense of history and, indeed, excitement. I proudly showed them the remote handling processing facility which I was responsible for wrecking a few years later (Chapter 3 refers).

An amusing incident on the second of the Open Days was the visit of the Press to Newton's Pool. A number of 'firings' were laid on for their benefit. One or two of their contingent were offensively disparaging about the whole business and when they arrived at Newton's Pool, they set up their cameras at the water's edge. They were given no hint of what to expect and, during the countdown to the underwater detonation, they had their attention firmly affixed to the viewfinders of their cameras. In view of their attitude, we none of us felt inclined to warn them of the consequences of setting up their cameras so close to the water's edge. There was a brisk South Westerly wind blowing and, following the explosion, a significant quantity of the water from the plume was blown over them. Furthermore, the wave generated in the pool swamped the quay and the bank and soaked their feet and bottoms of their trousers. To make matters worse for them, the water from the plume which rained down upon them contained a significant quantity of organic matter including rotting vegetation, dead minnows and other piscine residues. The day was warm and it wasn't long before those members of the Press began to stink. It was reported, that these odoriferous people were less than welcome in the canteen when they came to collect their free sandwich and a bun (or whatever it was)!

When I came to move on from duties at Newton's Pool, the 2IC responsible for the day-to-day running of the facility was imbued with what almost amounted to a vindictive mischievousness. As mentioned before, the Superintendent at the time regarded the facility as his 'baby' and at every opportunity would show it off to visitors. After a visitor had been primed by the Superintendent to expect the thud of the ground shock followed by the plume of water they would listen to the countdown over a Tannoy: Five, Four, Three...and then, 'Thud'! Every time, the 2IC would fire before the

countdown had ended. Every time, the Superintendent became incandescent with rage.....

Memories of Newton's Pool came back to haunt me in the days just before the Establishment closed in 1991. In the late 1960s, shortly after I'd 'moved on', a 5Kg spherical charge of a standard high explosive had been prepared for firing as a calibration shot for the underwater pressure gauges. The practice for underwater firings was to suspend the charges and gauges from a line stretched across the diameter of the Pool. On this occasion, the detonator fired but the charge did not. The detonator caused the line holding the charge to sever and the charge fell into the murky depths of the Pool. This incident gave rise to much concern at the time and one of the scientists, who fancied himself in a wet suit and a snorkel, sought to search the bed of the Pool. Despite several attempts, he found nothing.

As a last resort, the Superintendent ordered the Pool to be drained. A petrol-driven pump was duly hired from a local contractor, ingress of water from the Cornmill Stream was blocked and it was arranged so that the water would be pumped downstream of the dam.

The pump needed to be operated overnight and one of the junior staff was detailed to look after it and refuel it as and when necessary. In those days, there were no lights external to the control room and, at night, it was very dark. It later transpired that the poor chap left up there was afraid of the dark and, in addition, became readily 'spooked'. To divert his mind from thoughts of 'ghoulies and ghosties' he started to pass the time by tampering with the pump in torch-light. Apparently, he succeeded in stopping the pump altogether and consequently there was no change to the water level in the Pool by the next morning! Amidst much muttering and swearing from the Superintendent, the enterprise was continued the following day and night but with two people detailed to mind the pump.

There is, somewhere in the annals of the old Establishment, a picture of the Superintendent, wearing waders and standing in the mud in middle of the drained pool.

Needless to say, no explosive charge was found.

The whole episode was put on record for posterity and, more than twenty years later, as the closure date for the Site approached, I was asked by the Administrative Officer in charge of site clearance whether there was anything I could add to the saga before the Safety Office signed it off as 'safe and all clear of explosives'.

Of course, explosive charges continued to be fired in Newton's Pool, on and off, for many years and so it's unlikely that the errant charge would have survived in any case.

As a codicil to the history of Newton's Pool and the complex of waterways within the north of the Establishment it should be mentioned that the Water Warden would, on the purchase of a permit, allow members of staff who were bona-fide anglers to fish in the canals during weekends and 'high days and holidays' on the condition that such activities were conducted in the properly sporting manner practised by genuine freshwater fishermen.

However, one or two of the fishermen who had access to explosives during their workaday business would secrete away quantities of high explosive and detonators to be available 'out of hours' during their fishing expeditions.

A few of the more unscrupulous fellows would lay pieces of explosive or detonating cord a few centimetres beneath the surface of the water and 'set them off' with detonators. After each firing, a number of fish could be seen in the water floating belly-up awaiting collection by the 'cheating' fishermen!

Jim Burgess

Obituaries

Mary Gooding R.I.P.

Eric Baker reported Mary Gooding's peaceful death in hospital on April 21st.

She will be remembered by her neighbours in Quendon Drive although she subsequently moved to Wormley with her husband Ron who predeceased her by some years.

More recently she moved to Lincolnshire followed by her two daughters.

The Goodings and their neighbours, the Bakers, spent many happy holidays together with the Canary islands as a popular destination. Eric Baker has fond memories of those times and continued to visit Mary up to her final time in the local Boston hospital.

B C Howard 25/4/2018

Pam Colley 1934 - 2018



Pam was an only child born in Cheshunt on 7th November 1934 although she lived and grew up in Waltham Cross until she got married in 1955.

She attended Cheshunt Grammar school and when she left she began working as an administrator at ERDE, the Gunpowder Mill in Waltham Abbey which is where she was to meet the love of her life Geoff. He joined ERDE when he came out of the RAF and it was while he sat waiting for his

interview next to her desk that she caught his eye. The rest as they say is history. They were married 2 years later on 1st January 1955 in Holy Trinity Church, Waltham Cross.

She enjoyed meeting up every Friday with a few ex work colleagues from the Gunpowder Mills at The Crown. A larger crowd of them, fondly called 'The last of the summer wine', would meet once a month.

Pam's peaceful passing on 8th May in the home she loved after years of ill health was too soon for all those she has left behind

Our sympathy goes to Geoff and their family, especially Barbara and Martin.

The family send thanks to everyone who gave a donation going to the Alzheimer's Society.

Beatrice Hide 1933 – 2018



Beatrice was a humorous, cheerful, hard working lady. She helped in the café for several years and kept the volunteer's base clean and tidy on her weekly visits with David Manners. When she washed up the mugs were really clean.

She was great company and is sadly missed.

Our sympathy goes to David and Beatrice's family.

Daphne Clements

WARGM Site Future

I have been asked to provide an update regarding the Waltham Abbey Royal Gunpowder Mills. In less complex circumstances such a piece would be about events, new exhibitions, conservation activities and opportunities, and strategy and plans to do more. Instead, we find ourselves in continuing operational limbo: keeping a large site open and ticking without investment, welcoming in the public with hit-or-miss weather-dependent events instead of having a strong open-daily visitor offer. It is a situation that calls for great team spirit and a massive sense of humour – the fuel that keeps us going. Having a Friend’s office downstairs in Walton House stocked with computer antiques and bits of rocketry, peopled by cheerful scientists with tea, memories and new ideas on the go helps very much in this game of keeping shoulders strong.

Two years on from the Epping Forest District Council’s refusal of planning permission for the PGL scheme, and one year on from the withdrawal by the Foundation-PGL of their planning appeal, there is cause to hope that a fresh initiative for talks between the Foundation and the Company may come about. Much has already moved: the Company has developed proposals for the site but these await the necessary consultancy funds to develop a professional business plan, and meanwhile the Foundation has said that PGL are still interested in establishing a children’s activity centre but has reduced the size of its scheme.

The critical outcome of any commercial development scheme is income, to flow into the built and natural heritage of the site to slow decay, or conserve, or restore and bring back into purposeful usage, according to a management plan. This has been the ambition for the site for as long as it has been open. Sadly, buildings and nature do not wait for humans to make up their minds. Long-term limbo has caused a lot of structures to shed bits of themselves while nature happily went rampant in parts. A Woodland Management Plan has

guided the removal of invasive sycamores and Julie Matthews (Grounds and Conservation) and the volunteer conservation team have planted alder saplings raised from tiny site seedlings, and continue to keep nature in balance with endless strimming and pruning, so providing sweet lawns for deer to graze and views for the public on the landtrain tours. For buildings, Jeremy Cleall (Site Services) has been tackling decay where practical.

Now we have a new initiative coming: a Scheduled Monument Plan, which will professionally prioritise the 200+ structures in the protected part of the site, identifying the degree of conservation each should receive and costs of work, so guiding conservation work over the long term. This plan is made possible by the close collaboration of Natural England and Historic England, a joint venture that represents a powerful vote of faith for the future of the site.

So although we remain in 'limbo', we do keep moving. A further conservation step is an urgent scheme of works for the unique 1935 Quinan Stove which is being made possible by Historic England. Our Education Team do not just continue their amazing educational programme for local children but have asked for a programme of achieving accreditation, to strengthen their performance and schools offer. Without investment, we are pretty much trapped in the family events programme bequeathed by 'Secret Island' but the team continue to evolve what works and freshen up the offer. We still hope to launch new website and new programme of talks and tours and attract back the history, science and general visitor. We have built new databases of societies, groups, other historic sites and institutions ready to invite them back in. In reality, new events and happenings require resources, particularly to design, establish and grow them which are simply not available. However, we can pilot them, ready to launch properly in a good future that will come about if the Foundation and the Company can plot a path of joint decisions and actions.

Stella Morris

Julie's Nature Column

Early morning seems to be a great time to watch wildlife before the site gets busy with people or vehicles. Many birds are now searching non-stop for caterpillars, spiders and all sorts of insects to feed their chicks. All of our nest boxes are full and you can hear the chicks chirping inside calling for more food. Many have fledged now and you can hear them in the trees still calling for food. When all of the boxes are taken, Blue tits look for other crevices to find a suitable nest site. In my last report I mentioned that I bought a nest box for the Robins that nest in our outdoor stores. To my delight they have used the box and successfully had two broods. I walked into the stores the other day and a Robin fledgling flew out and hopped around for a bit before going out into the big wide world.

Our resident pair of swans has been around for quite a while now, but has not nested. They spend a lot of time on the bank resting or in the water preening.



I haven't heard much from the Kingfishers this year, but they are about. One flew past me the other week going towards the water behind the Press House.

I have let some areas grow wild to see what wild flowers develop. The ox-Eye daisies have gone mad, looks very pretty with so many. Lots of insects are visiting them too including the Common Blue butterfly. I have been keeping an eye out for Bee Orchids, but can't find any. Last year I found a Pyramid Orchid and have just noticed one starting to flower...only one again, but it's better than none.



I have been kept entertained recently by a family of young squirrels. I saw two racing around the base of a big tree and then one chasing a Blackbird like it was having some fun. The Blackbird didn't seem too bothered. Whilst watching these two baby squirrels play I suddenly saw a third head pop up. When it ventured out of the long grass I could see that it had quite a bit of fur missing, but other than that it seemed to be in quite good health. You can see the difference in the photo.



I've been up to New Hill a couple of times recently looking around the water's edge and lifting up boards and logs to see what's about. I saw two adult toads together and lots of tiny toadlets hopping all around them. I have noticed an increase in toads these last couple of years which is good news.



The deer are looking very smart with their shiny summer coats and their antlers are just starting to re-grow. This time of year they are quite relaxed and in the heat of the sun seek some shelter under the trees. The does will be having their fawns this month which means some of last year's young males will be joining the older group of males. The young males seem unsure of our activity at first but soon get used to people being nearby.



I'll be keeping my eyes open for more photo opportunities to share with you, the best photos are always the ones that I don't get because I haven't got my camera at hand!

Julie Matthews
Mills Nature Conservationist

Billy Dixon's Lucky Shot

In modern warfare when a sniper makes a great long range shot much is made of it in the media, and rightly so. However these shooters are using very state of the art modern rifles complete with very powerful scopes. Add to this a spotter equipped with a computer to give the shooter all the necessary information to adjust his scope.

Now rewind to the year 1874 and the Texas Panhandle to a collection of fifteen huts known as Adobe Walls. A group of buffalo hunters fourteen men and one women are under siege from 700 – 1000 Indians comprised of Cheyenne, Commanche and Kiowas who are determind to drive these hunters from their land and preserve their food source.

On the third day a young 22 year old scout borrowed a 50 -90 Sharps Buffalo rifle. For the uninitiated that is a .50 calibre bullet over 90 grains of black powder. On his third shot he took an Indian off his horse at a distance which was later verified by a U.S Cavalry surveyor as being 1,538 yards. The Indians were totally demoralised by this and made their retreat, the siege was over. All without a scope or a spotter computing wind speed and direction etc.

Four months later Billy was involved in another battle for which he received the Congressional Medal of Honour for gallantry. He lived a long life and died in 1931. Throughout his life he referred to his “lucky shot” and surely some luck played a part, but also a huge portion of marksmanship.

Russell Orchard

AGM/Reunion 11 May 2018

Although the weather was rather overcast we avoided any rain on the day.

Ron McEvoy was elected as our new Treasurer, unanimously. All other officers remained the same.

After lunch we assembled for the traditional group photograph taken by a very patient Ian McFarlane.

The Land Train transported the majority of the attendees to the 2' 6" railway's South Station where the passengers alighted and joined the train for a journey to the North Station. At this station the passengers rejoined the Land Train to complete a tour of the site.

Our thanks go to Grahame and Chris for providing the train ride and to John Alcock for driving the Land Train.

I hope everyone enjoyed their visit and catching up with 'old' friends.

Daphne Clements



VE Weekend Photos by Terry Griffiths



