

Winter 2020

TOUCHPAPER

The Newsletter of the Royal Gunpowder Mills Friends Association
Registered Charity No. 1115237

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on Wednesday 2nd October 1991**

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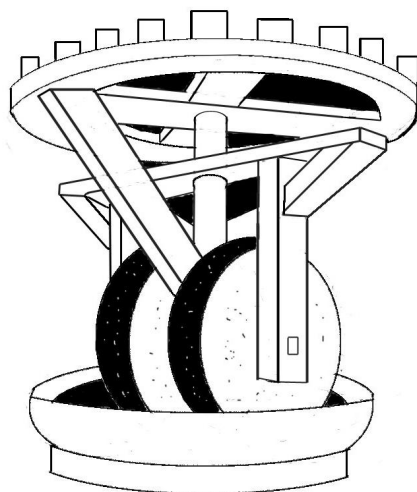
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Winter 2020

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Deadline for the next issue is 19th February 2021

Chairman's Chat

The continuation of the lockdown has resulted in little volunteer activity on site during the period since last newsletter. Your committee has also not been able to meet since most of us do not have access to Zoom and it's a bit difficult with social distancing in the Crown.

This also means that we have not had the opportunity to spend any of the bequest kindly left to us by David Hartley. As of this week we will be resuming volunteer tasks on-site (at least until the Covid rules change yet again). One of our first tasks is to build a fire exhibit in the tower of L168. You may remember we did have an exhibit many years ago but this was put in store since the room was required for the rocket vault and Professor Nitrate. One thing you may not know is that each day two hardy volunteers have been risking their sanity by driving the old jeep and doing a security check on the external fence. Over the last three weeks we have had to walk the track to the Grand Magazine since there was a good chance the jeep would end up in the canal.

Now as I write we have Travellers camped outside our main gates. No doubt we will get lots of help from the police?

You will be pleased to know that two of the railway volunteers who tested positive for the virus have now made a full recovery.

In November the longest serving member of staff, Ian Macfarlane, has moved on. He has been an invaluable asset to the Company over his sixteen years and we wish both him and his wife all the very best for the future.

The Board of the company has been extremely busy coping with many unforeseen events and trying to reduce the site expenditure to an absolute minimum. We also have been attempting to produce a budget for next year 2021 which has been quite frustrating since the goalposts keep changing.

Since the last Touchpaper the company has received an award from the Cultural Recovery Fund of £104,600. During the last few weeks the Trustees have been trying to decide how best to use this money. Inevitably I am sure the list will be much greater than the monies available.

One good piece of news is that the Foundation have agreed to pay for the large gates to be repaired properly. All of the companies that have viewed our existing system commented that it was unfit for purpose (we all knew that).

Another important piece of news is that we have been able to appoint a temporary manager to help us for the next three months. He is John Malone and he will have started by the time you read this newsletter working two days a week. He has considerable experience on sites such as ours and should be an invaluable part of the team.

All it now remains for me to do is wish you a good Christmas break and stay safe.

Dave Sims

Royal Visit by HRH Duke of Kent to Fort Halstead on Wednesday 2nd October 1991

In the Winter 2018 issue of Touchpaper I wrote a few words recording the thirtieth anniversary of the start of the process of closing down what was then RARDE Waltham Abbey and moving the work and the people down to Fort Halstead. I commented at the time that the folks at Waltham Abbey were for the most part not “totally spiritually committed” to the wisdom of uprooting and moving to Kent, likewise the folks at the Fort were not best pleased with the dust in the summer, mud in the winter, noise and disruption caused by the huge building programme needed to accommodate the Waltham Abbey tribe. Despite the many hurdles along the way, not least the blistering incompetence of the Project Managers – the Property Services Agency, it all came to fruition on 2nd October 1991, when the buildings were (nearly) completed and the Duke of Kent came to Fort Halstead to perform the ceremonial opening of the new buildings.



He was invited by Roger Warren, the Managing Director of the Military Division, to unveil a plaque to record the event.



The Duke then toured an exhibition and some of the facilities and was introduced to a number of the Waltham Abbey staff. Amongst these were Sally Westlake and, looking rather uncharacteristically deferential, Malcolm Stewart.





Looking far less phased by the grandeur of the occasion was Peter Honey, seen here with, on the left, Steve Pike, the Superintendent of the Energetic Materials Chemistry Division. Ian Carmichael is on the right of the picture.



John Chisholm was present at the ceremony; he had recently been appointed as the second Chief Executive of the Defence Research Agency, having taken over from Nigel Hughes.

The celebrations surrounding the opening of all these new facilities masked some fundamental changes that were to take place. A couple of weeks before the royal opening there had been the “day of the long knives” – Friday 13th September 1991, when John Chisholm called all the senior staff together at Farnborough and announced a massive shake-up of the way in which Research & Development would be managed in the future, and with it a deep cut in the management structure. It was to be the end of an era, with stormy waters ahead. Shortly thereafter a number of “luminaries” were to leave, including David Packer (Establishment Secretary), Brian Thompson (Chief Engineer), Colin Oxlee (Deputy Director), Neil Griffiths (my predecessor as Head of the Energetic Materials and Terminal Effects Department) and others.

Sadly I was not present at the royal event; I was away on the other side of the world in Australia at the time, chairing a TTCP meeting, so Neil Griffiths, featuring in a number of the pictures, was “master of ceremonies” for the day.

Geoff Hooper

Quiz on London Museums

1. Which museum specialises in 'stuffed' animals and musical instruments and owes its origin to tea?
2. Where is a pink room, due to Barbara Cartland, to be found with a bouncing bomb and a replica of the first aeroplane to fly in the UK?
3. What is to be found outside the building that is now the Imperial War Museum (but was originally Bedlam)?
4. Where can a water pump with a 100 inch bore be found?
5. Which collector filled his house with many items including Hogarth sketches and a Canaletto etc so he had to live next door?
6. Where can copies of the Dandy and Beano be found with Hogarth and other satirists sketches?
7. Which museum came from Dennys of Dumbarton and ended up near a Brunel masterpiece?
8. In which London district is the Fan museum?
9. Which museum had a famous past that could be described as 'fablest' (anagram)?
10. Which museum has so many large artefacts that it has had to acquire hanger space in the West Country?
11. Where is the skeleton of the 'Irish Giant' kept (said to be about 8 feet tall)?

12. Where is the Lord Mayor's coach kept when not in use?
13. Who lived in Apsley House which is now open to the public?
14. What exhibit can be found to the East of the Thames flood barrier?
15. Where can you check the time of your watch at one o'clock?

Bryan Howard

Membership Renewal

Renewal forms are enclosed/attached with this issue.

The membership year runs from 1st January to 31st December. Please do renew as soon as possible, returning forms and payment to the Treasurer at the address on the form. Any queries about membership should be addressed to the Treasurer.

Cheques will not be paid in before 1st January.

Last year we did not send out reminders and some members did not renew but we treated them as still members. If you do not want to remain a member please tell us.

Due to Covid restrictions we were unable to hold an AGM/Reunion in 2020, we hope to do better in 2021 but at present we cannot make plans and no booking forms are being sent out yet.

I hope we all have a good Christmas and hopefully a Happier New Year.

Brian Clements

Obituaries

Roy Atkins, 1930-2020.



Roy was born in Tottenham and evacuated to St Ives, Huntingdonshire between 1940 and 1943. He was educated at Huntingdon Grammar School (best known pupil is Oliver Cromwell) and Tottenham County School. He joined the ISRG at ERDE as an Assistant Scientific straight from school in August 1948. He spent 18 months National Service in the Royal Air Force from March 1949.

After square bashing at Bridgenorth he was stationed at RAF Yatesbury, initially as a trainee Air Wireless Mechanic then as an instructor on the wireless installations in Lancasters and Mosquitos.

In 1967 he left ISRG and spent his remaining years at Waltham Abbey and Fort Halstead in the Adhesion and Rheology section of P2. Before joining the section he did not know what rheology was and after ISRG he found A & R to be somewhat mundane. He had to return to the Northern Poly to get a LRIC in adhesives chemistry and technology. Things looked up when he became a rep on MoD, BS and NATO standardisation committees and enjoyed the time attending meetings in Washington, Quebec, Delft, The Hague, St Etienne and Bourges.

Sue and Roy were married in 1968 and their son, Stephen, was born in 1970. Stephen had Downes Syndrome so Sue and Roy became involved with Royal and Local Mencap organisations. Sue started by helping at the Grove Cottage Nursery and Roy became a helper at Bishop's Stortford Gateway Club (for people over 16 with a learning disability). Later they became Leaders of the Club, Roy did his stint as chairman of Bishop's Stortford Mencap, became a member of the Gateway's Regional and National Executive committees and Royal Mencap's National Council. After retiring from MoD Roy worked as a volunteer in Mencap's London office until he reached Mencap's upper age limit of 70. Stephen died in 2010.

Roy has been on TV many times, he appears as a white blur behind the western goal in shots of the famous Stanley Mathews (1953, Bolton v Blackpool) FA Cup Final at Wembley. Scenes from this historic match can be watched on:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=NgPfwYqhmA0.

Roy Atkins (February 2013)

Roy wrote his own obituary as he wanted it to be accurate!

He omitted to say that he audited the Friends accounts every year from its founding until 2012. [Ed.]

Geoff Turner-Much

8 November 1951 to 15 August 2020



Geoff was born in Aberdeen and moved to Birmingham at an early age, returning briefly to Scotland to study chemistry at Stirling University.

Geoff's working life started in 1975 at ERDE/PERME in Waltham Abbey where he worked, on South Site, in Dr Dave Tisley's P2 Rocket Motor section, working on propellants for ejector seats amongst other things. His work was absorbed into Royal Ordnance which was later privatised, being sold to British Aerospace. His was

relocated, during site closure, from Waltham Abbey to Royal Ordnance's Summerfield production facility in the West Midlands. Summerfield is now part of Roxel, an Anglo-French Group.

Geoff could be a man of few words unless talking about one of his favourite subjects. This included music, boats, tides, knots, and malt whisky where, on these occasions he opened up and enjoyed great conversation. He relished good food and wine and especially enjoyed his visits to France in pursuit of culinary delights, folk music and history.

Geoff had a hinterland outside of his work; he was a man of many talents. Geoff was a very gifted musician and world class drummer taking several pipe bands to successive world championships while

being equally happy to give an impromptu virtuoso performance when invited to sit in and play by local jazz bands. As a teenager in Canada he had a lesson or so from Joe Morello, Dave Brubeck's great jazz drummer. "Well do I remember one particular occasion", recalled "Togs" Torry, "when Geoff traded drumming techniques with the accomplished French percussionist Pierre Moerlen who was Mike Oldfield's (of "Tubular bells" fame) percussionist of choice, who at the time was preparing for his world tour; and while I feel that Geoff could easily have assumed a lucrative role as a rock drummer, his natural modesty and reserve stood in the way of him being a Keith Moon counterpart!"

Geoff played a variety of instruments including the violin, accordion, piano, ukulele, Irish whistle and even the recorder, and would often play traditional Irish fiddle at the weekend for an ever appreciative audience in the saloon bar at Mick Murphy's "Angel Inn" Waltham Abbey. It was his interest in the violin that took him to evening classes to learn how to make them. He also had an interest in the Gaelic. It is true to say that he hid his light under a bushel.

Martin Gough recalls: "My first encounter with Geoff was in the late-1970s on a boating holiday on the Llangollen branch Shropshire Union Canal and over Thomas Telford's famous Pontcysyllte aqueduct, a World Heritage Site. This voyage had been organised by Roy Carter of P1 Section. Amongst the crew was the redoubtable Robert "Togs" Torry, NP Section. This holiday was an excuse for a water-born pub crawl: the itinerary was arranged around extended calls at various canalside hostelries, lunchtimes and evenings. In retrospect, the brewing industry was supported above and beyond the call of duty on that holiday. Geoff did not let the side down. The most entertaining part of the holiday was when we unsuccessfully attempted to navigate through Grindley Brook staircase locks. However, we were successful in spectacularly flooding the site. We were soon rescued by the irate lockkeeper. Geoff was an entirely innocent party for it was Carter who was the boat's Captain".

Canal boating was one of Geoff's passions and some years ago Geoff bought his own narrow boat which he moored at a marina in Harefield on the Grand Union canal. It rapidly became a centre of fun for friends with trips planned with the aid of Pearson's Canal Guide and CAMRA's Good Beer Guide. Geoff was very good at teaching youngsters how to steer the boat and he was very careful to avoid mistakes in boat management and lock usage. Unfortunately, after a while, his mother's declining health limited the number and duration of trips. After this his health problems began.

In April 2002 Geoff and Alixe eventually got round to getting married and they enjoyed a very happy life together thereafter.

Geoff will be remembered fondly for his friendliness, and as a kind and cheery soul. He was a man who carried a twinkle in his eye. He will be sadly missed by everyone who knew him.

Contributions from Alixe Bainbridge-Spring, Robert "Togs" Torry, Mike Bagley and Martin Gough.

Geoffrey Colley 1931 – 2020



Geoff was born in Wakefield, West Yorkshire on 20th September 1931; the son of a coal miner and the second of three brothers. He attended Rothwell Grammar school, and completed his national service (1949-51) in the RAF as an Air Wireless mechanic stationed at RAF Watton, near Thetford, Norfolk.

After his national service, he travelled to Waltham Abbey (ERDE) with a formal job offer, but no starting date, so eager to escape the mines he just turned up. He was given an interview and offered a job straightaway. He was found lodgings with Mrs Wright, who wouldn't allow him to have a piece of cheese with his fruit cake (the Yorkshire way) or to have both cheese and jam in the same sandwich.

It was while he sat waiting for his interview he met Pam. They were married on 1st January 1955 in Holy Trinity Church, Waltham Cross. They began married life living with Pam's parents before moving to Monkswood Avenue, Waltham Abbey, and from there they moved into The Cobbins.

Geoff and Pam had two children, Martin was born in 1956 and Barbara in 1958. Geoff was a very proud Granddad to Rosanna and Emily. He spoilt them thoroughly and was always happy to entertain them; joining in with whatever activity they wanted.

Geoff and Pam loved to travel around the USA. Las Vegas was their favourite destination, and one year they went there three times. Over the years they stayed in many of the more prestigious hotels on the strip and saw countless stars in their shows. Their last holiday was in 2005.

Geoff loved books and TV programmes about space exploration. He was especially taken with the moon landing, watching the first landing live and following the rest with keen interest.

Geoff's health has been of concern for just over 5 years, after having a stroke which left him with difficulties articulating his thoughts. Geoff's peaceful passing on 5th September in Colchester General Hospital was too soon for all those he has left behind.

Donations, if desired, in memory of Geoff will go to The British Heart Foundation.

These can be made c/o Lesley Barlow and Family, Clacton Funeral Service Ltd, 98, Station Road, Clacton-on-Sea, Essex, CO15 6AA or via the weblink: geoffreycolley.muchloved.com

Barbara Colley

Geoff started in E branch working for Donald Hodge. When H67 was completed Geoff moved there with Dr Hodge and was working on closed vessel firings. Eventually Geoff moved to South Site to be in charge of P2 Proof Stand. He stayed with MoD and finally retired from South Site without moving to Fort Halstead.

Geoff was one of the original members of LSW when we met at the Owl on Lippits Hill!

I shall remember Geoff as a really nice person to work with. Our best wishes go to Barbara and Martin in their loss.

B Howard.

Professor John Field FRS, OBE. Former Deputy Head of the Cavendish Laboratory and Fellow Magdalene College, Cambridge



It is with deep regret that we have to report the death of Professor John E. Field on the 21st October 2020. This was following a short, non-Covid related illness. John will be sadly missed by his family and numerous colleagues in the academic, industrial and wider research community. He was much liked and respected by folks at Waltham Abbey as he did a huge amount of good for the Energetic Materials

community during a period when it was under really serious threat. He was influential in persuading Ministers that our cause was worth fighting, and he managed to secure a sound research and development base for many years.

Geoff Hooper

Letters

Request for information about K10

Brian Clements kindly circulated a request by me for historic information about “K10”. Bearing in mind that this referred to work at Waltham Abbey thirty years ago I was not expecting too much. In fact I received over a dozen responses which were very helpful and have enabled the right people to make contact with each other on the matter. I am very grateful for all your inputs; it shows the power of the Friends Association!

Geoff Hooper

New River and its springs

Further to the informative articles and correspondence from Richard Thomas, John Wilson and MC Black on the New River –
Touchpapers Spring, Summer, Autumn 2020:

Amwell - secondary source

Poem to Emma

Who was Emma ?

She must have been of some importance to merit a carved stone.

Whoever wrote the words clearly thought drinkers at the spring were not sufficiently grateful for its blessings.

As far as I can decipher, the wording on the stone reads :-

*AMWELL Perpetual be thy Stream
Never the spring be less,
Which thousands drink who never dream
Where flows the boon they bless
Too often this ungrateful man
Blind and unconscious lives
Enjoys kind Heaven's indulgent plan
Nor thinks of him who gives-*

PS

It is all a very pleasant setting. Having found spiritual refreshment at the church John mentions in his last lines and maybe taken heed of the stone's stern admonishment, travellers could cross the lane and enjoy secular refreshment at the inviting George IV .



George IV Great Amwell

Les Tucker

Friends Association

Trawling through old papers I came across the document below. It is apparent that Norman envisaged a more “hands off” Friends Association than has turned out to be the case “.... Possibility of special day visits to the Museum site should be explored” and “....consider a reduced entrance fee to the Museum for Association Members”. But I like the idea of a reduced subscription for senior citizens!

Geoff Hooper

‘WALTHAM ABBEY ROYAL GUNPOWDER MUSEUM • FRIENDS ASSOCIATION’

PROPOSAL

Aims

To bring together people sharing a common interest in the Waltham Abbey Royal Gunpowder Museum Site. Such interest may include historical, archaeological, social and technical matters associated with the site.

To promote the development of the Museum site and, where possible, to render assistance in the development and running of the Museum.

Eligibility

Any person having a special interest in the Waltham Abbey Museum Site and/or an interest in the history of explosives production may join the Association.

Details of persons registered with the Association will be held on a database which will be registered under the Data Protection Act.

Finance

The Association should be run on a self supporting basis but will require the financial backing of the Operating Company as a contingency measure.

An initial annual subscription of £7 per head is recommended.

Consideration should be given to a joint/family subscription of £10 and a reduced subscription for senior citizens.

Organisation

No formal committee is envisaged but such officers may be appointed, by the Chairman, as may be deemed necessary. The Chairman shall report directly to the Operating Company and shall be responsible to the Company for the running of the Association.

Newsletter

A quarterly Newsletter will be published and circulated to all members of the Association. An A5 printed format is recommended and the cost of this should be met through the annual subscription. Initial enquiries indicate that annual costs (printing, envelopes, postage) amount to approximately £6 per head. There is already in existence an ad hoc organisation and newsletter, with a circulation of just under 400, consisting mainly of ex.- employees of the RGPF and Waltham Abbey Research Establishments. This body of people will form the initial core of the Association.

Special Events

A self financing annual reunion of members will be held and the possibility of special day visits to the Museum site should be explored.

Working Parties

From time to time the services of Association Members may be available to assist in the work of the Museum.

Other Benefits to Association Members

The Operating Company may wish to consider a reduced entrance fee to the Museum for Association Members.

Norman Paul 19th February 1998

Museum Quiz Answers

1. Horniman museum SE London (Horniman's Tea)
2. Brooklands (Ex Vickers Barnes Wallace, Barbara Cartland was a racing driver and insisted on a ladies room in pink.)
3. Two 15" guns from HMS Warspite.
4. Kew Steam museum.
5. Sir John Soames Lincoln's fields Holborn.
6. Cartoon museum, Great Russell Street (near the main British Museum).
7. 'Cutty Sark' in a dock near Brunel foot tunnel in Greenwich.
8. Fan museum is at Greenwich.
9. HMS Belfast (Anagram fablest).
10. Science museum.
11. Hunterian museum, Lincoln's fields.
12. Museum of London.
13. Apsley House was home of General Wellington (next to Hyde Park corner).
14. A Russian submarine.
15. Greenwich Observatory, ball falls at one PM for traditional synchronisation of ships clocks.

December Miscellany

As with previous December Miscellanies, as a break from gunpowder and this time also Covid this Miscellany is a completely random collection of non gunpowder bits and pieces encountered during the year.

Winter Snow Scene

At a passing glance this looks like a rather artificial snow scene created for a film by spreading a huge white net over the ground.

However what it is actually doing is collecting the fruits of alder buckthorn, one of the three main woods used for gunpowder charcoal.

In this later case the seeds will be used for sapling production for a major environmental tree planting scheme.



Collection Net

Cow Mouthed Playpen

In their day the Limehouse Basin docks were a major interchange point for moving cargo from sea going vessels into narrow boats for the trip to the Midlands etc.

As well as the narrow boats there was a considerable amount of work done by much larger barges around 300 tons. To facilitate loading these barges were 'swim headed' – sloping large opening bows. This gave rise to the boatmen's nickname for them - 'cow mouthed'.

At night after work had ceased these barges were left empty moored at the dockside. Also in the Basin were those narrow boats which had to wait overnight. Many of them had families with need for secure play facilities.

The cavernous empty holds of the barges offered a perfect solution. The children were lowered in to the holds and access removed, leaving them in a spacious secure environment, without the possibility of straying.



**Limehouse Basin
19thC**

Big Thumper

In 1909 H A Humphrey unveiled a highly innovative large capacity fluidyne water pump design based on an internal combustion engine, coal or wood gas fuelled, with the piston the liquid being pumped.

At that time large infrastructure projects were being undertaken throughout the Empire, including irrigation and drainage and the Humphrey pump attracted considerable attention.

In 1923 two Humphrey pumps were installed at Cordogla in South Australia to pump water for an irrigation project. Each pump had a capacity of 36,000,000 gallons per day.

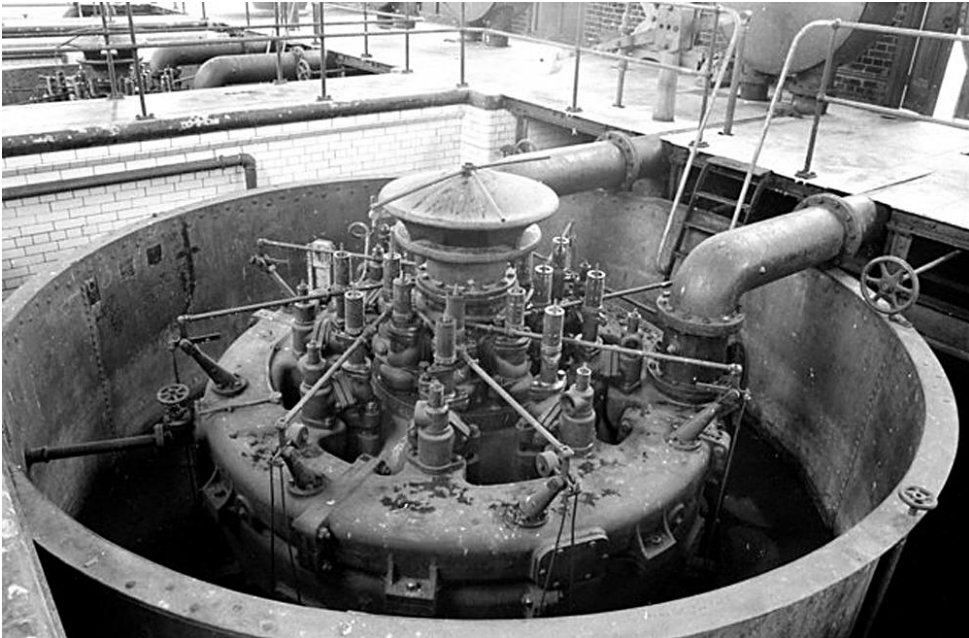
In operation the pumps made a steady thumping noise and became known as Big Thumper.

Arising from this the legend arose that the i c engine was fueled by gunpowder.

The Cordogla pumps ran until 1965.

At the King George V Reservoir in Chingford four Humphrey pumps were installed in 1912, each with a capacity of 40,000,000 gallons per day.

They ran until the 1970's when they were replaced by electric pumps. I believe three of the Humphrey's remain in situ at Chingford.

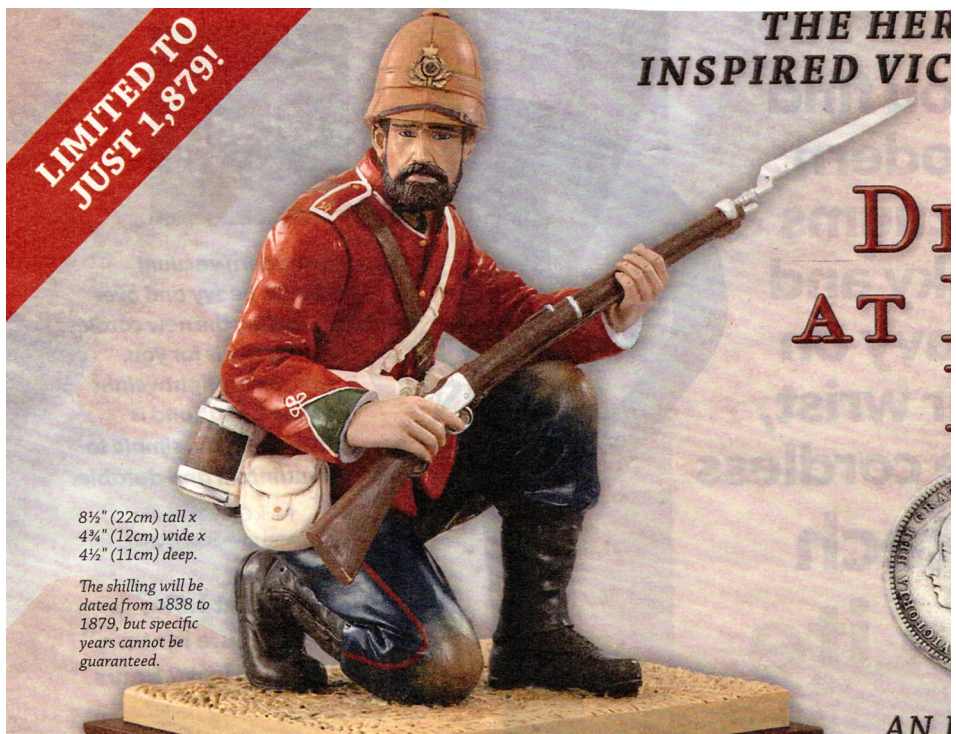


Humphrey Pump at Chingford

Rorke's Drift Revisited

Having previously written about the epic defense of Rorke's Drift (Touchpaper Summer 2017), I was intrigued recently to see that a well known manufacturer of 'collectables' was offering a limited edition of hand painted ceramic figures of a British infantryman at the time of the battle - why now and why the very odd number of figures on offer - 1879.

Then I realized 1879 was the year of the battle.



British infantryman 1870's (No khaki then)

It is interesting that the marketing people at the manufacturer considered that Rorke's Drift was still sufficiently embedded in the British public consciousness to justify an offering.

Les Tucker

Julie's Nature Column

Moving through into Autumn has been quite mild. There have been a few bumble bees out in November which I'm sure is quite late in the year for them. During mild weather the grass will still grow slowly which benefits the deer although grass is less nutritional this time of year. Sugar content in grass is at it's highest in the spring and the deer will graze on the grass and produce big round tummies. Some other foods that they turn to are tree leaves, preferring ash and willow, but also sycamore if a branch drops down. Deer are also partial to a bit of Ivy, bramble and even nip off the tops of stinging nettles. The rut is now over, but the males still seem to enjoy using their antlers to mess about with our litter bins and just recently the zip wire swing seat. Most times when I spot the deer they seem to disappear, but here is a photo of one who was very obliging for the camera, happy to pose during the rut season.



It's been another good year for Green Woodpeckers. Numbers were down a few years ago, but they seem to be abundant this year. I always find it a bit tricky getting a photo of one as they seem to



take off from the ground and that's when I spot them, a bit too late. They spend time on the ground feeding on ants. I did manage to get a photo of one clinging to a building, not sure what the attraction was on the bricks though or perhaps it thought it was camouflaged!

The Buzzards are not around quite so much, I still manage see one on occasions and the other day a Red Kite flew over me quite low. This photo of the Buzzard amused me, it was so busy watching a Heron that it didn't notice me behind it. It's sitting on top of our wildlife tower. I had to make a noise to make it look round.



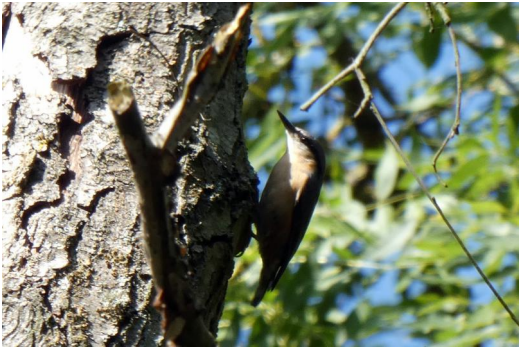
I still see a fox now and again. This one in the photo was busy



concentrating on a possible vole or mouse that it could hear in the long grass. It pounced a couple of times without success. Whilst it was concentrating so hard it gave me an opportunity to get a bit closer. I put my hood up and kept my camera to my face in the hope that it wouldn't

recognise me as a person. I stood as still as a statue and once or twice the fox stared at me trying to make out what I was. You can see in the photo the curious look on its face.

The arrival of winter visiting birds is here and so are the flocks of Siskins and Goldfinches mixed together. I will try to get some photos of them soon, something that I'm not so successful at due to them being so high up in the trees. I seem to be more successful with the larger birds like the Heron sitting there still and not flitting about like the



smaller birds. I did manage to spot a Nuthatch in the woodland at New Hill, it's the first time I've seen one at the Mills even though I knew we had them. Nuthatches are the only UK bird that can climb down a tree trunk head first. It often pays off to stand still, listen and watch for a while. This is not my best photo, but

still my first one of a Nuthatch.

I will be looking out for some more stories to bring you in the next edition and hopefully some good photos too.

Julie Matthews

Mills Nature Conservationist