

Winter 2021

TOUCHPAPER

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

Waltham Abbey Special Collection

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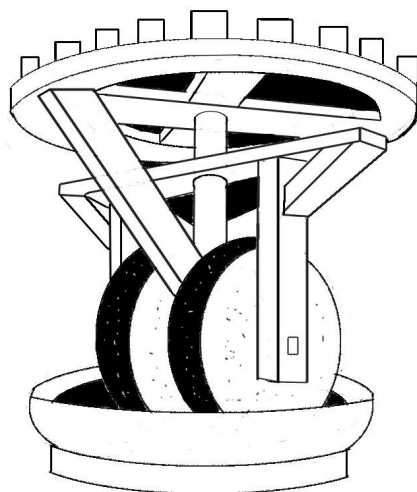
Japanese Railway Model

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Chris Humphrey

Julie's Nature Column



Winter 2021

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Deadline for the next issue is 25th February 2022

Chairman's Chat

Much of our Archive is now online, including photographs and videos for which we own the copyright. They can be accessed here:- www.wargm.org/archive_viewer/

Documentaries produced by TV companies are indexed but are not available online. They can be viewed on site by prior arrangement. The online archive consists of some 30 sections including architectural drawings, artefacts, north and south site photos, QuickMatch, oral history compiled by Ron Treadgold and videos of burn out of buildings. Find out more about the archive at :- www.royalgunpowdermills.com/archive.

We have recently received from Jim Buswell three archive boxes of documents, brochures, photos and videos relating to work at the Mills and Westcott. These are currently being scanned and will eventually be available via our website.

Westcott are also interested in exhibiting some of our rocket collection as part of a renewed Government interest in space. Their new National Space Strategy mentions Westcott as the site of a new National Space Propulsion Test Facility. www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-space-strategy

And finally, have a happy and Omicron free Christmas!

Len Stuart

Editorial

This issue is being prepared a little later than normal but I hope it will be finished, printed and posted in time to beat the Christmas deadline.

We had a very good service from Images of Chase Side Enfield, our printers for many years but did not realise just how good they were. Unfortunately Covid forced them to give up their shop and stop printing booklets. The last few issues were printed at Waltham Cross but I always had arguments about pricing, and not a quick service. This issue will be produced by another printer; Dr MC Black obtained quotes which were much more in line with Images prices.

You will find renewal forms for 2022 with this issue and note changing in prices, membership classes have been simplified.

Les Tucker's piece ends with a reference to an old letter from Bryan Howard, he intended it to be reproduced as an end piece.

Unfortunately although the Archives are largely online now, see Chairman's Chat, Touchpaper issues are not available yet; the Committee have yet to decide which issues will be online and to give formal permission. This should happen early in the new year.

Once more when I finally started this issue I panicked about lack of material, I chased my regular supporters and then had too much; this is good as I have a start on the Spring issue. In times long gone there used to be many letters and short pieces. It would be nice if some of our readers would make a New Year's resolution to contribute at least a short note about anything they like.

Sadly once more we have two obituaries, we are losing old Friends (and friends) and not replacing them, member numbers are dropping steadily.

To those left we wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Brian Clements

Waltham Abbey Special Collection

Back in 1991 we were approaching the closure of the Royal Armament Research and Development Establishment (RARDE) North Site and moving the work programme and most of the people down to Fort Halstead in Kent. Prior to that for many years Malcolm McLaren had been compiling the Waltham Abbey Special Collection. This comprised some two thousand items, such as historical artefact, books, records, maps etc. This was before the era of mass computer use so everything was catalogued by means of a card index held in the Library. The collection included a few large items such as mill-stones used in the powder mills, a couple of cannon, a railway wagon used to transport explosives, a powder barge, etc. Malcolm's work on all of this was very important; he was convinced that, had he not built up the collection, most if not all of it would have gone to the scrapheap. I am sure that he was right in that regard.

It should be remembered that at that time we had no idea what would happen to the RARDE site once we had vacated it, and the idea of turning it into a heritage site was several years downstream.

Over the three years up to site closure there has been a steady lobby from the local community and some of the staff not destined to move to Kent, that at least some this collection should remain in the district as part of the heritage of the town of Waltham Abbey. Until 1991, however, this lobbying had not been matched by a capability to manage and store the material in a way that would ensure its long-term survival. That situation then changed, and the local Museum Officer Kate Carver had obtained the storage capacity to house the collection, with the exception of the large outdoor items.

On the other hand many of those staff destined to move down to Fort Halstead felt that at least the bulk of the collection should go to Fort Halstead as part of the history of RARDE, of which of course the Waltham Abbey site was part, along with Chertsey, Christchurch, Kirkcudbright and Westcott. Both lobbies were equally vociferous. In the end the proposal was to divide the material into categories as follows:

Technical Records were a collection which was of national importance insofar that nowhere else has the material been brought together. Descriptions of the site's activities, manufacturing processes and research work come into this category. The technical records lent themselves to the "scientifically minded" rather than the casual museum visitor, and so these items would most logically go to Fort Halstead. Anything that had a security implication fell into this category.

Parochial Records were material with a basically Waltham Abbey-only interest, including site records, ownership records, press cuttings, local photographs, group photographs of workers and social aspects of work. Such material would most logically reside in the Waltham Abbey area under the custody of the Epping Forest District Museum.

Artefacts and Display Items ranged from actual processing equipment (NG burettes, guncotton drying racks) craft implements (leatherworkers and blacksmiths' tools) to the original council road sign for Powdermill Lane. Here the possible division was less clear-cut, but there was more than sufficient material to enable a sensible display of town-related matters to be retained in the Waltham Abbey Museum. Technology-related matters would be held at Fort Halstead. The local museum did not in any case have the facilities to house the larger items, and most of these would be good display material to be placed outside new buildings being constructed at the Fort for the ex-Waltham Abbey staff or elsewhere on that site.

There was some public records material destined for the Public Record Office, and this went ahead in the same way as if the site were continuing operations.

In the end, after long deliberation, and much hard work by Malcolm McLaren, it was agreed that the suggested division of assets between Epping Forest District Museum and Fort Halstead was a sensible one, and that took place.

I confess that the passage of thirty years had dulled my memory of the details of all of this until our former IT Manager Ian Macfarlane recently sent me a file with all the related correspondence in it. A handover ceremony had been held at King Harold School in Waltham Abbey in June 1991 as shown in the picture below. Malcolm McLaren is on the left, next to Kate Carver – the curator of the Waltham Abbey Museum in Sun Street. She is receiving the collection, including the model of a powder barge, from me. On the right is Hilary Brown, the Head of Administration at the site.



The rest, as they say, is history. When it became clear that the Ministry of Defence land and buildings were to become a heritage site, the assets began gradually coming back from the Town Museum Repository and from Fort Halstead and the archive work of Les Tucker, Richard Thomas and others began.

Geoff Hooper

Waltham Abbey Royal Gunpowder Mills Friends Association Membership for 2022

The rising cost of postage, stationery and printing has caused the Committee to look at our membership pricing. Clearly, we now need to increase the cost to members who elect to have a paper copy of Touchpaper. However, we have decided to reduce the cost to members who choose to have an electronic version. It also has been decided to remove the extra cost for family membership as only one Touchpaper is provided to a family or single member.

The new prices will be:-

Family or single member with mailed Touchpaper £10

Family or single member with electronic Touchpaper £5

Obviously, this change will impact on our income but we will review the situation, in committee, in 12 months.

The effects of the Lockdowns and restrictions have meant that we have been unable to hold our annual AGM/Reunion for 2 years. We hope that we will be able to host this event in 2022 but who knows?

The committee are very grateful for all the support we have had from our members during these difficult times and would be happy to welcome any to join us on the committee.

Daphne Clements

Touchpaper online

The Waltham Abbey Gunpowder Mills Friend's Association Committee have discussed the possibility of putting Touchpaper, prior to and including December 2019, online as part of the move to increase our profile on the RGM's website (currently only issue 1 is available). It is proposed that only members would receive the current and most recent issues in either mailed copy or the electronic version as per the annual renewal form.

Daphne Clements

Duke of Gloucester Visits Waltham Abbey

In his “Chairman’s Chat” Len Stuart has referred to the very considerable amount of archive material that is now available on-line through https://www.wargm.org/archive_viewer/. Amongst these archives are photographic records of two visits by the Duke of Gloucester to the site. The context of these images is explained below.

The Duke of Gloucester was no stranger to Waltham Abbey and in particular to the Establishment. His first visit was on 5th October 1978. The rather grainy images below show him in the left hand picture shaking hands with Gordon Adams, then Principal Superintendent at Waltham Abbey with Frank Panton, Director of PERME (Waltham Abbey and Westcott) on the right. The picture on the right shows Frank Panton escorting the Duke out of Walton House.



The Duke's second, and perhaps more significant, visit to the Establishment was to open the site as a heritage visitor attraction in 2001. Here he presided over the re-opening of the site at a ceremony held in what is now the café. He unveiled a plaque to mark the opening of the Royal Gunpowder Mills and also the Archive and Study Centre on 16th May 2001.



The opening had been slightly delayed because of Foot and Mouth disease, but happily this enabled all the building works to be completed before the Duke arrived. He was introduced to many of those involved in the re-opening of the site, also many former employees. These included (left picture) Frank Panton, the former Director of the site and Malcolm McLaren (right picture), the site librarian and archivist.



The Duke then met up with members of the Operating Company who were taking on the responsibility of running the site as a heritage visitor attraction. These included John Bowles (back to the camera left hand picture) and Trevor Knapp (right hand picture), both of whom were Chairs of the Company for various periods.



I appear to be in several of the pictures with an impish grin on my face; not sure why? Anyway the day went off very well; everyone was well refreshed before the party was over and it started an era that is well documented in Touchpaper and elsewhere.

Geoff Hooper

Who, What, Where, Why

Do You Know?

- 1 Who Invented Margarine and why?
- 2 What is Stainless Steel?
- 3 Who proposed Nitro-glycerine for Heart conditions?
- 4 Who Invented the first ball bearing to run in a grooved track?
- 5 Who built the first Glider and who flew it?
- 6 What is the longest flight by a passenger airliner?

December Miscellany

As with previous years for the Winter issue, this is a random selection of topics, including some non gunpowder, encountered during the year.

Safety

Confined Spaces

Explosive manufacture is intrinsically hazardous, but there is an element of hazard in many other industries:

Maintenance work has to be done inside gas holder columns and there is an ever present risk of the workers getting into some difficulty inside the confined space of the column and they have to be extracted fast. To cover this danger a dedicated Rescue car is kept on site. The word RESCUE can be seen in large letters on the car bonnet.

Based on information from Bob Carr GLIAS.



Gas works Rescue Car
Rescue in bold letters
on car bonnet

The Mills Canal System – Helpful Instructions

In 1878-9 a lock was built to connect the existing channel serving the Blank Cutting House and the canal connecting with the incorporating mills on Queens Mead, thus connecting the upper and lower levels of the canal system.

In his book on the waterways of the Mills Richard Thomas says:

It seems that the men who built the lock did not assume that the Mills boatmen knew about lock operation ; carved into the granite coping stones by the paddle gear at the top and bottom of the lock are the words “IN“ and “OUT”!



The IN and OUT Stones





**The 1878-9 lock in its
heyday WAI-0404-18
In, Out in stones at
base of paddle gear**

Dereliction



Late 1990's view to the north

Final collapse

The 1878-9 Lock is a perfect example of the impracticability of preservation of what would have been a very rare example of a working lock in a waterways system itself of significant historic importance, leading to ultimate final decay – a painful sight to any passing volunteer waterways history / preservation enthusiast

However they can draw comfort that across the country the Waterway Recovery Group, (WRG) part of the Inland Waterways Association, is restoring to life, in an annual series of residential weekly volunteer work camps, locks in similar and even worse state. This is part of the huge effort by official organisations and volunteers to restore the national canal system, a vital part of our industrial heritage, now a leisure asset but in the 18th century a vital transport element in the fusion of different developments without which the Industrial Revolution would never have happened, or at least in the form we know.

On an experimental basis, WRG are also offering weekly camps for whole families. Was Waltham Abbey considered for one, pre Covid?



Waterway Recovery Group restoring lock wall on River Waveney

Photo 'Navvies' Oct-Nov 2021, the Newsletter of WRG

And on a practical note:-



Headless waterways historian skilfully demonstrating the hazards of waterway investigation

A Nice Day Out in Wiltshire

Generally people regard Wiltshire as a place to whiz through on the way to the West Country, with the inhabitants still in smocks making pickled walnuts for Christmas, but in fact there is a lot of industrial archaeology to occupy a nice day out in the county:

The move to Swindon – The National Collections Centre

When the Post Office Savings Bank HQ vacated Blythe House in Hammersmith it was occupied first by Euston Films then in the 1970's became the Joint Museums Repository for collections from the Science Museum, V&A and the British Museum. They were given notice to leave with target of 2021 for the move out. At some speed teams of curators, conservators and photographers were recruited to undertake the mammoth task of identification, bar coding, photographing before the move out of the Science Museum material to what is now the National Collections Centre at

Woughton near Swindon, planned to house over 300,000 historical objects from the Science Museum Group and the Science Museum Library.

This is one for the future. The first objects were moved in June 2021, and full public accessibility is planned for 2024.

Firepower The Royal Artillery Museum Larkhill

One could then move across to the Royal Artillery Museum at Larkhill, planned to take the contents of Firepower, the Artillery Museum at Woolwich. Plans have been delayed and there is only limited access or possibly closure at the present time.

Stonehenge



Not forgetting this venerable piece of industrial archaeology.

In WW1 the commanding officer of a nearby Flying Corps pilots school put in a request to demolish the stones on the grounds that they were a distraction to flying.

After interminable wrangling the Government ordered in 2020 the building of a 2km road tunnel on the A303 near the monument to reduce congestion and reduce impact. Opposing groups took the opposite view and after a judicial review in the High Court the Government Order was quashed.

Also, the associated stone circle at Avebury should not be missed.



Stone Circle Avebury

Salisbury

Finally a stroll around Salisbury, tea and home.



Touch Bases - Bryan

And Now it Can be Told

In the early 1990's Touchpaper had a section named Touch Bases, devoted to letters from staff who had moved to other establishments or remained at Waltham Abbey. Bryan Howard was a prolific contributor and wrote one in June 1993 with the above title.

Les Tucker

(If you are lucky enough to have kept an old copy you can read it. Ed.)

Japanese Railway Model

In lockdown I built my first new layout for 20 years. It is N gauge (2mm/ft) with a 4 track main line and a branch line terminus and measures 5' 6" x 3' 6". The scenery includes a temple, park, Zen garden and 60 cherry blossom trees with Mount Fuji in the background as shown in the photographs. Most of the details came via Google and items were purchased on ebay from Japan, China and even Poland. It was on display at my club's open day in October and is booked for our annual February exhibition (Covid permitting).

I also have other layouts which have been on display at various exhibitions, including one of the Powdermills which has featured in a previous Touchpaper and was on site for several years.

At the same time I carried on with my day job sorting and selling donated model railway items for our local hospice. I had a record year - £13,000, including £8k from a London legacy which took my grand total to over £100,000.

Tony Barratt



A Shinkansen (bullet train) and a preserved steam excursion passing a cherry blossom park. In the background is a branch line terminus and Mount Fuji



A car carrier train passing a Zen garden, a temple and a parade



Details of the parade with a brass band and a portable shrine carried by 16 men



Picnics under the cherry blossom trees

Who, What, Where, Why

Answers

1 *Who Invented Margarine and why?*

French Chemist Eugene Michel Chevreul made a butter alternative called Margaric in 1813. It was re-invented by French Chemist Hippolyte Mege Mouriés and patented 1869 at the request of Napoleon III, as a cheap replacement for butter for the French Army and the poor and was called Margarine.

2 *What is Stainless Steel?*

It's an alloy of steel and at least 10.5% chromium depending on the grade, of which there are many.

3 *Who proposed Nitro-glycerine for Heart conditions?*

Constantine Hering developed it in 1847, but as a general cure all. 1879 Murrell W writes in the Lancet relating to the use of Nitro-glycerine for the treatment of Angina.

4 *Who invented the first ball bearing to run in a grooved track?*

Philip Vaughan Welsh Ironmaster of Carmarthen patented in 1794 a ball bearing that ran in a groove on an axle.

5 *Who built the first Glider and who flew it?*

In 1853, British engineer George Cayley built the first glider to carry his terrified servant across a valley. It's not recorded if the servant survived the experience.

6 *What is the longest flight by a passenger airliner?*

The longest flight in 2020 was a Qantas flight, nonstop from Brisbane to Chicago in April a distance of 8,916 Miles.

A Boeing 787-9 flew non-stop from Tahiti to Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport, a distance of 9,765 miles.

John Wilson

Obituaries

Chris Evans 1931 - 2021 Tributes



We have been informed by his daughter of the passing away of Chris Evans on 23rd October 2021 at the age of 90. Chris was one of the “Gang of Four” who retired on the same day – 30th November 1989 – St Andrews day. The other three were Bryan Howard, Bob Brown and Kim Henshaw.

Chris joined ERDE Waltham Abbey in 1962, having moved from Tube Investments where he had worked on “whiskers” in a research group headed by Jim Gordon. With him came a team including Noel (Polly) Parratt, Ron Gooding and Mike Dyne. He and the team moved into L157 on the North Site, a process which took about six months to complete. It saw the creation of a new Materials 2 Branch within ERDE.

During the latter years of his career Chris took an active role in assisting Dave Tisley in facilitating the closure of the Royal Ordnance part of the establishment and the relocation of folks to other establishments. He also organised a Royal Ordnance Retirement Course at Theobalds House on 12th to 13th June 1989, where this photograph of him was taken (bottom row far right).



Chris also did sterling work in making sure that historic artefacts were preserved. On being approached by the Museum of Army Transport at Beverley for a narrow gauge railway wagon that they wished to acquire from Waltham Abbey, he signed a very courteous letter (declining their request) with the words “General Factotum/Historic Items – Project Closure Team”. That summarised his modesty.

Geoff Hooper

I got to know Chris well from 1987 onwards. He was assigned to the Closure Team to represent the needs and interests of P1 Branch with whose work I was less familiar. He was a highly intelligent, competent and reliable workmate: additionally, he was discreet and had a high degree of empathy with the people we were having to make redundant. His advice was invariably sound and to the point. He was also a pleasant companion on the various trips that we had to do to the five receiving sites. If he had a fault it was that he was not a great self-publicist, he got satisfaction from "facilitating" and helping things to happen rather than claiming credit. Overall, he was a gentleman and a gentle man. His death makes the world a slightly less pleasant place. I have fond memories of our time working together.

Dave Tisley

Christopher William Humphrey (1946 - 2021)



Chris Humphrey was born on 22nd August 1946, in Hackney, East London. He was a very talented professional electrician who was prepared to work long hours to get the job done; He retired after 51 years dedicated service. However, Chris always found time for his family and he was a stalwart supporter of the Royal Gunpowder

Mills from 2002 until his untimely death on 21st October this year, aged 75 years.

On Tuesday 9th November, at the Traditional Chapel, City of London Crematorium, sixteen fellow railway volunteers joined Will and Mike Humphrey (Chris' sons) and their families and friends to celebrate the life of our Chris. Mike told us that Chris always looked forward to spending time with his friends at the railway, especially since losing his wife Elaine, who predeceased him last year. The poem 'Last Journey' by Timothy Coote was considered most poignant.

Chris was a founder member of the 'Gunpowder Railway' and was always there with a friendly smile and a warm welcome to all – he will be sadly missed! As a tribute to the memory of Chris it has been decided to re-name his beloved Hunslet locomotive – 'Chris H'. A date for the naming ceremony is to be announced.

Raymond Rowe

Julie's Nature Column

Some of the wildlife activity has quietened down since the colder weather has arrived. Young birds that fledged their nests will hopefully survive their first winter. A lot of birds fluff up their feathers in the cold weather, this keeps them warm as air gets trapped between the layers which helps to keep them insulated. They quite often have the appearance of looking like they've swallowed a tennis ball as you can see from this Robin.



Our usual winter flocks of Siskins have arrived mixed with Goldfinches and Chaffinches. I love watching the flocks go from tree to tree to feed on the Alder cone seeds. Whilst they are feeding in the trees many of the seeds fall to the ground and you can hear them land on the leaves. It sounds like it's raining, but it not, very strange as you can't even see the seeds falling.

The rut season is over once again for the deer. Some of the big males look very tired. They will be busy concentrating on regaining some body weight now to help them through the winter months. In a couple of weeks' time we will have their haylage delivered. Haylage is a bit different from regular hay. It is cut earlier and then wrapped in several layers of polythene. This keeps it from drying out and therefore keeps hold of its nutrients, it is also more digestible than hay. Haylage is a much better quality of feed. This deer in the photo has obvious signs of taking part in the rut, he does not have any injuries, but just some fur missing on his neck.



Ring-Necked Parakeets are around the Mills on a daily basis. This seems to be more so in the winter than any other months. I haven't seen more than about 6 in flight together, but I do think that the numbers are increasing slowly. Here's a group hanging out in one of the Alders. I saw a squirrel try to chase one out of a tree the other day. It was quite amusing, the parakeet didn't seem bothered at all and would just hop out of reach each time.



Talking of squirrels we've had quite a friendly one around Walton House recently. I haven't seen it for a while, but it did stay around for a few weeks waiting for some peanuts. I would come outside to find it waiting patiently, perched on something different every time.



I haven't done an evening wildlife watch for ages, but I can tell that the badgers are still very active. You can see where they forage for worms all along the roads edge, shovelling scoops of soil to dig them up. Earthworms make up a large part of the badger's diet, about 80% in fact. They will also eat berries, nuts and fruit and are partial to some carrion too. When it snows I often look out for badger paw prints, they look like a mini bear print.

During the winter badgers may stay in the Setts for several days if it gets too cold, but they do not hibernate for all of the winter. This time of year they are quite likely to be out as soon as it gets dark. Here's one from a few years ago with its fox and muntjac friends eating deer food.



I will be looking out for some more photo opportunities to share with you all again soon.

Julie Matthews

Mills Nature Conservationist