TOUCHPAPER

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

Fifty Years Ago – the Legacy of Flixborough

A Grand Day Out

Further Cycling Tales

Julie's Nature Column

Waltham Abbey on TV

Reunion 28th June 2024

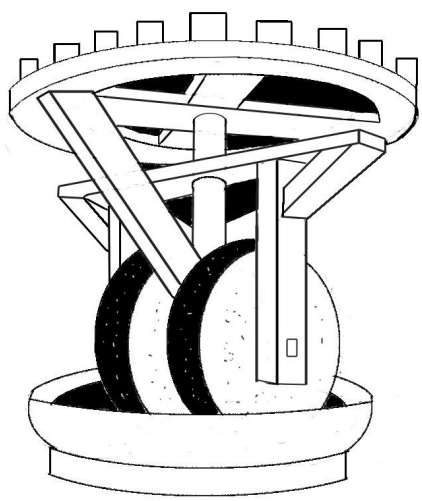
John Wilson Railway Update

Obituaries

Dr Mike Healey OBE

Kathleen Sheilagh Owens

John Vernon



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Deadline for the next issue is November 29 2024

Editorial

Hopefully you will find something of interest in this issue with contributions from the usual suspects and a welcome return of Julie's Nature Column.

There is no Chairman's Chat; the Chairman has thought it's time to dispense entirely with the familiar 'Chairman's Chat' format. He has written an article which I have held over until the next issue and has said he is willing to write other pieces in future, but no 'old style' chat.

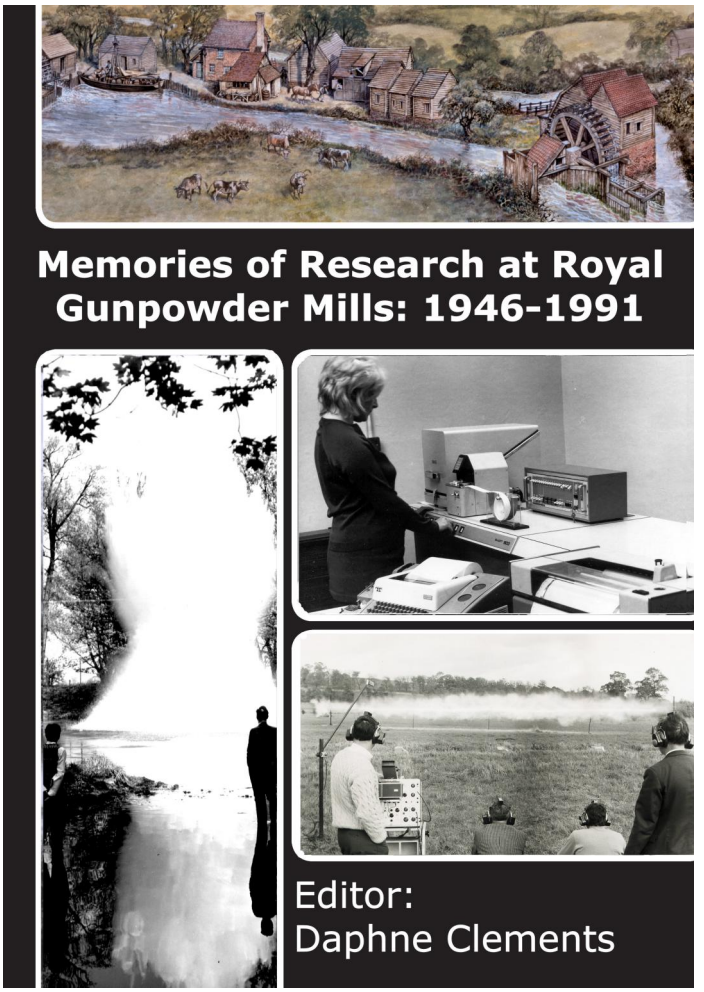
Unfortunately, we also have three obituaries; the number of Friends members continues to drop.

Those who have both printed and email versions will have noticed that the last email copy had a light blue background to the TOUCHPAPER heading. In early days of Touchpaper the cover was light blue ('light blue touchpaper'); when our printers were changed it would have been very expensive to continue with the coloured cover, but colour is no extra cost in emails. The web address lightbluetouchpaper.org is used for a weblog by the University of Cambridge Computer Laboratory Security Group. I confess to being inclined to experiment where possible, hence in the email version links have appeared on the cover and inside in text (unfortunately these only seem to work correctly when the PDFs are viewed in single page mode) and now a coloured background.

Amongst the news within this issue are reports on the reunion, John Wilson railway and notice of a new book we are working on, and again our thanks are due to Grant Privett for guiding it through the process of getting approval to publish.

Brian Clements

New Book News



Another book in the Royal Gunpowder Mills series is cuurently being prepared for publication.

The content has been approved; so ,hopefully, the process should be completed soon.

It will then be available for purchase from Amazon.

Fifty Years Ago – the Legacy of Flixborough

LEA VALLEY mercury

The Lea Valley Mercury ran an article on 18th October 1974 about the Explosives Research and Development Establishment. It was titled **"Sssh! This is Top Secret"**. The reason was that a few months earlier there had been a major disaster at Flixborough. This was an explosion at a chemical plant close to the village of Flixborough, North Lincolnshire on Saturday, 1st June 1974. This was probably the most serious industrial accident since the Second World War.





It killed 28 people and seriously injured 36 out of a total of 72 people on site at the time. The plant was making caprolactam which was a precursor for the production of nylon and was made from cyclohexanone It was a failure of that plant that led to the disaster. A major leak of liquid from the reactor circuit caused the rapid formation of a large cloud of flammable hydrocarbon. When this met an ignition source (probably a furnace at a nearby hydrogen production plant) there was a massive fuel-air explosion.

Why was this of interest to us? Well, questions were raised in the House of Commons by John Biggs-Davison, then MP for Epping Forest, about the safety of the Explosives Research and Development Establishment following the Flixborough disaster and the possibility of it being repeated in Waltham Abbey.

Accordingly the establishment “threw open its doors” to a delegation from the Town Council to prove just how safe we were and to dispel any lingering fears that Flixborough could happen in Waltham Abbey. The reporter from the Lea Valley Mercury noted that the Explosives Research and Development Establishment at Waltham Abbey had an accident record that many large industrial firms would have envied.

In the previous year they had very few reportable accidents on their premises. These were accidents at work which resulted in the injured person needing more than three days’ sick leave. Of these, two were employees who fell off their bicycles, a further two were men tripping over their own feet, and another one was one of the Ministry of Defence police officers who slipped over on wet grass while on patrol and dislocated a shoulder.

The reporter noted that for a “top secret” Ministry of Defence establishment dealing with explosives and propellants this was not bad going. He was told that they had not had an accident with explosives “for years”.

He said that the Establishment had done a very slick and professional job in telling the story to the Councillors and the press. It included lunch after an introductory talk, another talk on safety aspects with a film, a tour of inspection, then tea and questions.



This picture shows the Councillors on that tour of inspection..

The reporter noted, however, that he was none the wiser about what we did in the establishment. What he was sure of was that Flixborough could not happen there. How did he know that – well, because he had been told so!

The reporter noted that “The establishment, in all seriousness, does appear to take more than adequate safety precautions for the operations that are carried out there”. But the tour of inspection of some of the buildings meant nothing to him. He noted that every building has a safety limit on the amount of explosive or propellant and the number of men that can operate in them. But he went on to say that everything at the establishment – at least what he was allowed to see – appeared to be innocuous enough. It was certainly difficult to relate it to any potential danger. In fact, he said, that the establishment, with its trees, grass banks and verges, resembled more a nature reserve then a “top secret” research centre.

He was told that ERDE was a research establishment and not an explosives factory; it had not been so since WW2. ”everything possible is done to eliminate any chance of accidental explosion. All equipment and processes are continuously monitored by a full-time safety team, and no material is handled in more than tiny laboratory amounts until its properties are fully known and all potential hazards assessed”.

Mr Vernon (Griff) Griffiths, the ERDE’s Chief Safety Officer, summed up the matter. He said… “The scale of operations at Flixborough was such that in total there were 18,000 tons of material there. These materials were not explosives, and it is only under certain conditions that you can get an explosion”. …”If we could guarantee getting those results we would not have to work on research into high explosives”.

So it looks as though fifty years ago in 1974 a pretty successful PR exercise had been conducted to allay the concerns of our then MP John Biggs-Davison and the Town Councillors. It remains for readers to form their own opinions as to the accuracy of what “Griff” said about the way in which work was conducted back then.

Geoff Hooper

A Grand Day Out

I have previously made the point that I did not get many trips out when I was at Waltham Abbey. So, you can imagine my joy when I was offered the chance to put my name forward for a trip to Salisbury Plain to view the Royal Artillery Firepower Demonstration. "Come and marvel at the Modern Army's amazing Firepower" it said. Or words to that effect. Okay, maybe it is a bit of an exaggeration. I put my name down for it and waited anxiously to see if my application had been accepted. And a short time later I was ecstatic when I was offered a place. When I checked to find out who else was going from the Abbey, I was a bit puzzled to find that I was alone. Never mind I thought, places are probably limited. And just after Christmas probably people are catching up after the break.

On the appointed day I got the train to Salisbury Railway Station. The train had a group of very distinctive people on it. They were all a bit odd I thought in a way that was difficult to define. Strangely when I got off the train so did they. My instructions were to board a bus that would be waiting. A bit worryingly there was no bus. And even more concerning these strange characters were all milling around and waiting there too. After a delay that seemed endless, but was probably no more than ten minutes, an old battered bus arrived and we all got on. After a short while of listening to the conversation it emerged that my fellow passengers were from a place called Fort Halstead. At that time, I was vaguely aware that it was an MoD site which carried out research on guns* but I knew nothing else. I made a mental note to keep away from there.**

As we travelled away from the town and into the countryside, the roads became a narrow track that had been made by a snow plough. There were snow drifts of about a metre high each side. The gentleman who seemed to be looking after us at the front of the bus explained that severe weather was often experienced on Salisbury Plain. Having always lived in Essex I had never seen such deep snow. I was starting to get a bit concerned, as I only had my dad's old motorbike jacket on and it was getting very cold on the bus. Never mind I thought, at least I shall be in a warm observation building when we get there.

We arrived at Larkhill and debussed. The first item on the agenda was an exhibition of equipment. One that particularly interested me was Blowpipe. This was a man portable anti-aircraft missile. It used a Waltham Abey propellant and was assembled at Bishopton. As I got closer to inspect it on the table, I disturbed the green cloth on which it was placed. A Sergeant Major, who seemed to be responsible for the display, walked over gave me a very hard look and carefully replaced the cloth.

Next, we were taken to the venue for the firing demonstration. To my consternation there was no warm building but a large earth pyramid with wood seats built into it. I was seated low down near the front. As a punishment for my misdemeanour with the green cloth I was seated with the Fort Halstead contingent. Never mind I thought at least I am at the front. The top brass, including some foreign Army Officers, to whom I presumed we were trying to sell equipment, were at the top of the pyramid. I thought to myself that the Army certainly look after their grass roots support staff like me. The first thing that happened was a large lorry towing a gun came down a track which was in the centre of the front face of the pyramid. Half way down the whole thing skidded broadside on. I expected it to all roll over, but no it righted itself and reached the bottom pointing in the right direction. Was it planned or just a near disastrous accident? I shall never know.

Next two Jaguar ground support aircraft flew over us and fired their cannon at the location of the pretend enemy. There was an obvious premature explosion some 20 metres in front of one of the aircraft. This caused an excited flutter of chatter amongst the Fort Halstead contingent. Then the Artillery guns started firing. As everyone knows cordite is smokeless. Well, everything is relative. Within seconds I was enveloped in a thick cloud of smoke and could see nothing.*** I cannot remember too much of what followed. There was trick where they fired one shell at high trajectory and then another at a low trajectory such that both shells landed simultaneously at the same spot. Our compere said that the role of the Artillery was to destroy the morale of the enemy and his will to fight. I thought that this was an odd euphemism to avoid the awful truth.

A black rubber motorcycle jacket might be very waterproof, but at below zero temperatures it offers very little thermal insulation. I got colder and colder and shivered more violently, and for longer and longer, after each shot as the performance went on. Finally, it was all over and we were directed to the mess for lunch. I was probably suffering from hypothermia by now.

As I went into the mess, I was faced with a very long table with a seemingly endless row of glasses each containing, so I was told, a Gin and Tonic.**** Being working class I regarded Gin as a lady's drink. The fact that the Fort Halstead people were happily drinking it did not give me any confidence that it was something a normal man might do. However, due to my hypothermia and in the absence of large dog with a barrel of Brandy, I thought any alcohol would be worth a try. My first sip was a revelation; much like a religious conversion. And I have never looked back. Due to the hypothermia, I cannot remember much else of the lunch or the trip home. But I returned home a much wiser man. Firstly, I learnt that, if there was no competition for a place on a trip out, there will be a very good reason for it. Secondly, I learnt that a G&T was a wonderful drink.

*I only knew this because my Section Leader at the time (Dr Colin Lawson) told me that his brother worked there. He had a story that, during WWII, his brother had devised a modification to the anti aircraft gun to increase the rate of fire. Some group called the Ordnance Board buried it under sand for six months and because it would not work afterwards did not adopt it for Service use. What idiots I thought.

**Pity I did not stick to it. But then many ex-Fort employees are probably of the same opinion.

NB For those who do not know I ended up in both the afore mentioned organisations.

***I have come to think that there is a trade off between smoke and flash. News Bulletin film of Russian guns seem to show them with a large flash but virtually no smoke. Our guns seemed to put up with some smoke for the elimination of flash. If it was not for the logistical problems, I suggest, it would be advantageous to have separate ammunition of each type for day and for night use.

**** The Gin and Tonic has an interesting history. It was first devised as a way for soldiers in the British Army in India to take their Quinine (a bitter tasting treatment used for the prevention of Malaria).

Peter Stone

Further Cycling Tales

Shortly after joining Royal Ordnance on South Site, I was introduced to a novelty, the use of bicycles as a means of workplace transport. This was something I had never encountered in any of the places I had worked or visited before.

Indeed, almost all employees had their own cycles and I was given my personal bike. The reason for bike use was that on explosives sites building were scattered for safety reasons and cycling was quicker than walking. Waltham Abbey had two explosives' sites and travel by bike, between the two sites, was convenient. Bike use was popular.

We inherited many ex-army bikes which had been built to enable a rifle carried along the crossbar. I heard tales of South Site's Industrial employees having slow bike races, travelling at almost stall speed, the winner being the one who came last. I suspect this was an apocryphal story although I did see some people riding extremely slowly.

Not all bikes were maintained properly and those who fail to do that suffer the consequences. I recall an episode involving an ex-Waltham Abbey colleague, a keen cyclist, who took his decrepit old work bike with him to Fort Halstead. On the day of our departmental Christmas lunch, he had steadfastly refused many generous offers of lifts in cars. He was absolutely determined to ride his old wreck of a bike, come Hell or high water, because that was what he did, ride bikes.

Our friend had set out, on his old bone shaker, long before anyone else. Bike riding was the wrong description for he was later seen pushing his bicycle along the main road. The bike's chain had come off and he had a most miserable look on his face. Clearly, he was not a happy bunny. He was in plain sight of his passing colleagues and I had visions of his colleagues giving him a cheery wave as they drove past him. Maybe some made ribald comments? That would have been in keeping with our collective humour. He, of course, arrived sometime after all of us. Understandably, this incident was not allowed to pass without further comment and he was asked if his exertions was the reason they are known as pushbikes. No answer came the stern reply.

Martin Gough

Obituaries

Dr Mike Healey OBE



Mike joined ERDE 12 September 1966 with a PhD from the University of Birmingham as an old-style SO.

He worked for Richard Wallace on gun propellants and cartridge cases for 1 year and then for Jack Powling on Combustion Section for 2 years. In 1970 he transferred to Les Phillips on Polaris Main Motor Service Life and worked on various studies of long-term stability of propellants.

In 1976 he transferred to Royal Ordnance P1 on Waltham Abbey's South Site to take over from John Gooding on his retirement. Mike took over responsibilities for conducting Ordnance Board Trials plus the responsibility for the research programme on both Cast and Extruded Double Base propellants.

He was later transferred back from Royal Ordnance to MoD on 31 Dec 1984 and took over Paul Collins section on Primary explosives. He moved to Fort Halstead in 1986 as Head of the Combined Section (Primary Explosives, Detonators and Fuses).

In 1986 he joined the Operational Analysis Branch as Project Officer Divisional War Game and studied Air Ground Interactions on the Battlefield. He then moved onto MOD Main Building in 1989 to join D Science Land as Desk Officer for Battlefield Aviation in support of the Attack Helicopter purchase.

In 1993 they decided to set up a series of Research Technology Packages and as the only man in Main Building who could write the chemical formulae of NG and RDX on paper he was appointed customer for TP6 as it was known.

In 2000 he negotiated an early retirement deal and was sent to the palace to receive an OBE. He worked as a self-employed consultant for the Defence Scientific Advisory council for a time and then finally retired from it all in Dec 2006.

Prior to his wife's demise, Mike devoted his days to helping his wife cope with the house and seeing how many holidays he can squeeze out of his pension. He did the Moscow to St Petersburg waterways cruise and was fascinated, after studying WW3 in 86/87, to walk across Red Square as a carefree tourist.

Mike had lost touch with his former colleagues and it was some time after his death in2024 that we learned indirectly of his sad passing.

People found Mike a sociable, friendly and likeable person and excellent company. He gained great respect from his former work colleagues and will be remembered fondly.

An appreciation of Dr Mike Healey's work by Professor Adam S Cummings

I got to know Mike when he took over the desk officer job for the energetic materials research programme. He was enthusiastic, knowledgeable and approached the job with humour and thoroughness. He saw himself as more than just a customer but as a partner with those engaged in the research. Therefore, he took an active part in technical discussions and planning. It also meant that he saw the importance of working with industry and with international partners so that he was often one of the team attending review meetings overseas. This had unintended consequences, such as being stuck in Paris because of a strike – his comment that this was how you knew you were getting old – stuck in Paris on expenses and all we wanted to do was get home!! It also meant that despite his health limitations he enjoyed the social side of the meetings – in fact possibly getting more done that way. Yet there were problems – taking cheese home from Gramat and opening the locker at Heathrow to fill the aircraft with the smell! I do not think that cheese was ever eaten but made its way straight into the bin!

A good friend and a good scientist who was valued by those who worked with him. His impact on the UK programme was immense and needs to be recalled.

Dr Mike Healey – A memory from Ted O'Day

In the middle of 1985, Mike came back to MOD from RO and took over as Section Leader of the Initiating Explosives section. He was always juggling money to make his books balance.
Coming up to Christmas, things were more worrying than usual as his wife had booked a Christmas break in Madeira. How to pay was another matter! Anyway, my office was next to Mike's. I came in one morning to be greeted by the yell, "Ted, get in here".

Instant thought, what have I done? I went into his office to be greeted by Mike with his paper open at the shares page and his Times portfolio card in his mit. The Times portfolio was a sort of bingo thing based on share prices with a prize of £2K a day. 'Check this' he says, giving me his card which I proceeded to do and found he had won. Claim time was from 10.00am. He didn't want to seem keen so he waited till about a second after 10 o'clock before phoning. Sure enough, confirmation he had a winning card and to call back after 3.00 pm to see whether there were any other winning cards. Bob Cook, Les Bates and myself were very encouraging with advice like it is obviously a day with a mistake and there will be thousands of winners! Anyhow, needless to say, Mike was like a cat on hot bricks all day, and at about 3.00 pm, plus a second, he was on the phone. Lucky fellow was the only winner and he was £2K richer. Madeira payment problem solved! However, in his celebrations he also offered to pay our approaching Christmas lunch drinks bill! So, Bob, Les, Mike, Barry Ransley and myself went to the Abbey Taverna for lunch. Needless to say, with an offer like we had, the drinks bill exceeded the food bill by a fair margin! The £5 note and the belly dancer is another story!!

Dr Mike Healey – Reminiscences by Martin Gough

I initially knew of Mike indirectly through his work with my colleagues, in Building X59, at Fort Halstead where Mike was always greeted warmly when he visited us. I later got to know Mike better when he joined us for our Fort Halstead lunchtime reunions in the Opera Bar of the Chandos Pub, in St Martin's Lane. His presence was most welcome at these get-togethers. Mike drank wine and would not touch beer as he said that he literally didn't have the guts for it.

Mike was known to have a smile upon his face when grumbling about one thing or another – humour may be expressed in many ways. It was at one of our reunions that, with a huge smile upon his face, Mike introduced us to an obscure Greek derived word, callipygous, meaning beautiful buttocks. I won't go into the context.

As with most people who have worked a long while in MOD, I knew many people who knew him well. It was Roy Carter who was amongst the first to allude to Mike's trait of being exceedingly canny with his money. Others followed and I learned that Mike's wife's propensity to spend money challenged Mike's ability to earn it, hence his need for prudence in money matters.

Mike was awarded a prestigious OBE for his work. His sponsor was Professor John Field FRS, supported by Dr Geoff Hooper. With a huge smile upon his face, Mike complained, like billy-o, about the cost of attending Buckingham Palace to receive his award. Mike likened it to a white elephant and quoted, almost verbatim, from Brewsters Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, "…a possession that is of little use and is costly to maintain. The allusion is to the story of a King of Siam who used to make a present of a white elephant to courtiers he wished to ruin."

On a personal note, I needed another car and "Honest Ted" O'Day knew that Mike wished to sell his Vauxhall Astra. Ted put me in touch with Mike and a deal was done at the market rate. The Astra had some 30,000 miles on the clock and I commuted from Hertford to Fort Halstead and added over 200,000 miles to the car's mileage before I sold it to Ted. Upon learning of the car's longevity, Mike commented that he had sold it to me too cheaply. It was a wonderful story that amused me greatly.

Kathleen Sheilagh Owens
4/11/1930 – 26/5/2024



Sheilagh was the second of five children of John and Kitty Owens, born in 1930. John came to Waltham Abbey in 1947 to work at ERDE. The family lived in a flat in the annexe of the Sandhurst Hospital before later moving to Monkswood Avenue.

As a girl, Sheilagh enjoyed playing badminton in Hoppit Hall. She wrote a short article about this which was published in Touchpaper (Spring 2013).

After a very varied and interesting working life Sheilagh joined the Friends and became a valued member of the committee. She was very enthusiastic and convinced that anything was possible with enough “manpower”. It was her suggestion to re-house the Powder Boat in the Green Hut. The Powder Boat had been partially renovated by a number of the Friends including, Sheilagh, Dave Sims and Bryan Howard whilst it was situated in L168 (where the rocket vault now resides). When management decided to clear L168 the Powder Boat was moved to the canal side of L153 and housed in a large tent. After some very high winds the tent was damaged and we were very fearful of the future for the Powder Boat, which is unique.

Sheilagh came up with the suggestion that we should re-house it in the Green Hut, originally used as a clean lab in 1940 and later for several other purposes.

Renovating the building was quite a task. It required cleaning and redecorating. The majority of the small panes of glass in the windows were broken or damaged so we needed to replace them, Sheilagh assisted with this work. Eventually, the work was completed and the day of the move arrived. The south end of the hut was removed and the Powder Boat was carried by two large machines, majestically across Queens Mead. A wonderful sight. With precision, the Powder Boat was inserted into the Green Hut and the end panel rebuilt. The team was rewarded with a glass of Fizz for a job well done!

Sheilagh lived on a boat on the River Ouse for a few years and invited a group of the Friends to travel with her from the moorings to the boat yard for maintenance work. It was a lovely summer's day, slowly motoring down the river admiring the countryside. Going through a lock was interesting. Eventually, we arrived at our destination and then repaired to the pub for lunch.

Sheilagh had been a Wren and then moved to the diplomatic service travelling to many different countries in the course of her working life. On VE days at the Mills she wore her WRENS uniform with pride.

She was a lot of fun and always up for a challenge, we miss her.

Daphne Clements

John Vernon
16/7/1929 - 14/7/2024



It is with sadness that we have to report that John Vernon died on Sunday 14th July just two days short of his 95th birthday. He was born on 16th July 1929 in Liverpool. He went to University there, gaining an Honours degree and a PhD. He started work at the Explosives Research and Development Establishment (ERDE) in 1953. His work covered adhesion and rheology, propellants and finally ISRG. The nature of his work in the latter stages of his career is such that it is still covered by the Official Secrets Act; suffice it to say that it was of national and international importance to the extent that he received a CBE and also a letter of appreciation from the United States government. After retirement in 1989 he maintained an active liaison with former colleagues and was an enthusiastic supporter of the Friends Association; indeed he features in a good number of Touchpaper pictures of the Association's AGM and annual Reunion up to 2018. He lived for many years in Epping until he moved to the Braintree area to be near his daughter Elaine. His final years were in the New Deanery Care Home, Braintree. His funeral service was at All Saints Church, Theydon Garnon on Tuesday 13th August at 2pm. It was well attended by friends and colleagues.

Geoff Hooper

Julie's Nature Column

I'm back with a few wildlife stories hoping to hold your interest for a few minutes. Every year our resident swans hatch their cygnets, such devoted parents they are too. This year was slightly different, after hatching 8 cygnets and sadly losing one, the 7 remaining ones did really well. After several weeks of travelling back and forth to the Mills on a daily basis returning to their favourite spot to rest up, I noticed that the number of cygnets had risen to 10. I checked the tag on the female swan in case it was a different pair of swans, but no it was our pair.
After resting the swans went about their travels again and came back later in the day with 12 cygnets. After scratching my head a few times, I contacted our swan rescue lady to explain what I was seeing. She told me that when swans have a dispute with another pair the cygnets can get confused and huddle together resulting in a larger group of cygnets. This seems to be the case and the 12 cygnets continue to thrive.
Here they are when there was just 8



I recently went to check our overflow car park and I spotted a muntjac. I watched it for a while as it was busy grazing and then I noticed a magpie land on it. This didn't seem to bother the muntjac in the slightest. In fact, the magpie was providing a service by checking its ears and antlers. I expect the magpie was after any bugs, but as I watched, the muntjac stood still like a statue thoroughly enjoying this service.
Here is one of the photos that I took, quite a funny sight to see.



Herons still frequent our canals hoping for a tasty nibble in the water, but one in particular has taken to laying down on a ledge just like a duck would. In all my years I have never seen a visiting heron do this and it does look rather odd. There is nothing wrong with it that I can see and it's very capable of standing up and taking flight.

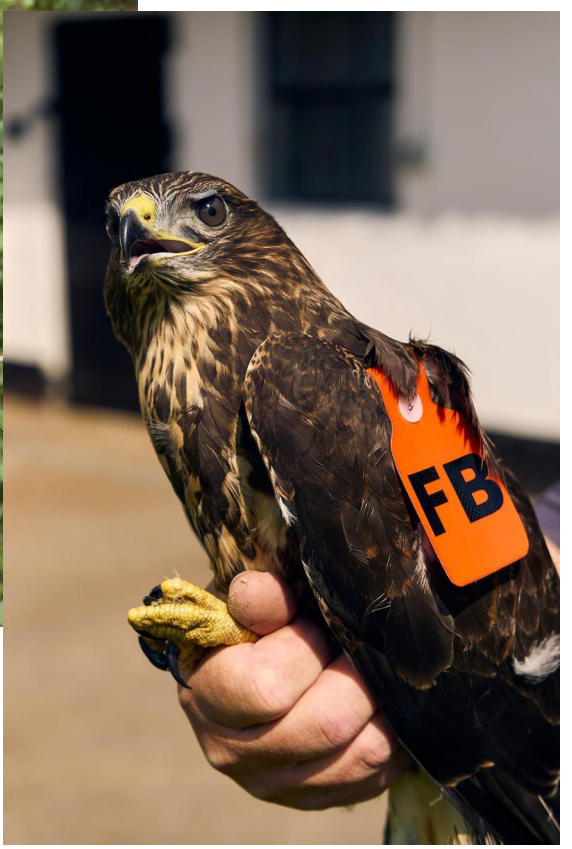


Otters are still visiting regularly. There have been 3 adult size otters visiting together earlier in the year and then mostly single otters. I have lots of video footage and hope to continue to do so. Some of the visits have been in daylight, early in the morning and late in the evening just before it gets dark.



I recently came across a young buzzard on the ground on the edge of the woodland. I made a phone call and sent photos to an expert and it turns out that this young buzzard had fallen from the nest. It was too young to fly and we couldn't climb the tree. We had it collected and taken to a sanctuary in Suffolk. After several weeks of care, it was tagged and finally released back into the wild. I do love a success story. Here you can see the difference in the photos.





Lastly let's not forget our lovely fallow deer. They will be shedding the velvet on their antlers soon. They are looking very healthy and rather large from all of their summer grazing. I think the one at the front of this photo will be the main challenger when the rut starts later in the year.



Well, that's all for now.

Julie Matthews,
Mills Conservationist

Contents

Waltham Abbey on TV

Readers who view the BBC weather forecasts will know that they frequently show pictures supplied by “weather-watchers” that illustrate the weather of the day. These are sent in by viewers from all over the country and there have been some excellent ones. On 15th April 2024 the picture below was shown, stating it to be of Waltham Abbey.



Undoubtedly it is an attractive picture, but where in Waltham Abbey? This had me puzzled for a while. My first thought was that it was the Cornmill Stream, but I could not relate it to the apparently derelict building on the right hand side of the picture. Also it looks too overgrown to be a flowing stream, which is very much the case for the Cornmill Stream. . The clue lies in the background of the picture, which shows a brick wall with a small entrance in it just by the right hand tree. This leads through to the Darby Drive car park to the north of Sun Street. So the location is within the Abbey Gardens, which are bounded by Darby Drive to the South and the town centre bypass (Abbey View) to the North.



The photographer was on a footbridge over a truncated waterway close to the Rose Gardens. He was looking due south. Mystery solved!

Geoff Hooper

Reunion 28th June 2024

The original date of the AGM/Reunion was 14th June. However, the RGM negotiated a lucrative contract for filming on site which was too good to refuse and we had to move our AGM/Reunion date. As a gesture of goodwill the RGM offered to pay for the catering, this was accepted and a revised date of 28th June was arranged.

I contacted all members to advise the change of date and offer a refund to those who had already booked their place. I was very touched to discover that everyone was happy to donate the money to the Friends, you are a generous bunch!

Naturally, I am sorry about those who could not make the new date and pleased that some folk who couldn't make the first date were available for the second. Swings and roundabouts!

The EGM/AGM business was concluded very promptly leaving us plenty of time for socialising/lunch. Then we visited the JWR where Luke, Mary and Brian were on hand to offer rides down to the rebuilt North Station. The Mills had provided paving slabs and some wood from L157 but the Friends had funded the decking, fencing and preservative used. The actual work was done by Luke, Brian P, Brian C and Brian S. I had intended to get a group photo on the new platform but was too slow!

Time then for a trip on the Land Train around the site. Rob kindly drove us, we did not need a guide of course. It is sad to see the buildings that are still deteriorating but encouraging to see the renovations of L157. By next year we hope the planned exhibition will be open. Toilets have been added to the building, good news for most of us.

Daphne Clements

Attendees

John Cook

Daphne Clements

Len Stuart

Ron McEvoy

Frances Burgess

Geoff Hooper

Liz Chapman

Gordon McKinnon

Martin Gough

Brian Clements

Richard Penfold

Michael Seymour

Diane Howse

Terry Stemman

David Debenham

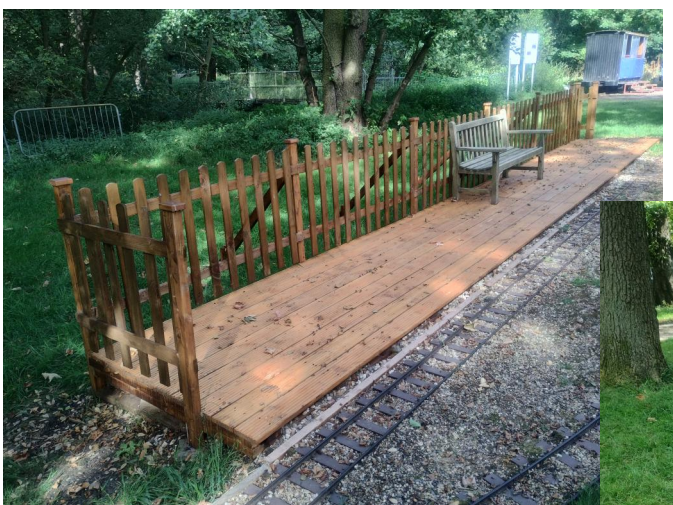
Dave Hewkin

John Wilson Railway Update

The Summer issue reported the replacement of the North station, required after damage to the seven year old original. Since then work has been completed by adding a replacement fence.

Now improvements to the South station are reqired, but hopefully, these can be made using materials to be found on site without additonal cost to the Friends.

More urgently, repairs are required to the tram driven bogies as we were unable to use it on Sunday 25th August, hence the smaller loco in the picture below.





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