

GUNPOWDER AND EXPLOSIVES HISTORY GROUP

The Gunpowder and Explosives History Group was set up in October 2000. We had first met in 1985, drawn together by Alan Crocker, Glenys Crocker, and Phil Philo, and had decided to call ourselves the Gunpowder Mills Study Group. At that stage almost nothing had been written in recent years about the subject, and I recall a great buzz of enthusiasm when I produced an article written jointly with Malcolm Tucker, also present at that first meeting. Published in the *Industrial Archaeology Review* of 1981, its subject was the powder mills of the Bristol region. A photocopier was found and copies were made by most, if not all, of those present. This enthusiasm was maintained for many years as, thanks largely to the efforts of our Chairman and Secretary, Alan and Glenys Crocker, memorable visits were made to gunpowder mill sites nationwide, and regular Members' Days were held. Members also contributed to the *Newsletters* edited by Alan, and the *Gunpowder Mills Gazetteer* compiled by Glenys.

The second phase in the life of the Group began in 2000 when it was realised that our interests were growing beyond the mill sites, though we still enjoyed visiting and studying them, and also beyond the scope of our founding convenors. We therefore re-formed ourselves, adopting our present name to indicate our widening interests. Three officers were appointed to share responsibility for the organization: Brenda Buchanan, Chairman (and unofficial meetings organizer); Wayne Cocroft, Newsletter Editor; and the late Kenneth Major, Treasurer. For seven years we have enjoyed success with an admirable second series of *Newsletters* and our modest finances have been maintained in good condition.

But what of the heart of the matter, the promotion of the understanding of this most absorbing subject? This has been served through 14 meetings, of which five were to sites of linked interest, often newly opened after receiving HLF funding. These were: Priddy's Hard, Gosport; the Royal Arsenal Woolwich; Purfleet Magazine and Tilbury Fort; the Royal Naval Cordite Factory at Holton Heath; and the Faversham Powder Mills. There have also been five themed research days, three on the ingredients of gunpowder and two on individual experts especially the War Department chemist Sir Frederick Abel whose collateral descendants were present at one meeting to share family papers with us. In addition there have been four Members' Days in which a wide variety of subjects have been introduced. Several of our meetings have been held in conjunction with the History Group of the Royal Society of Chemistry, including one at Burlington House. Apart from three at the Institute of Historical Research, the others have been at Waltham Abbey.

Now we move into the third phase of the history of the GEHG. Interest in the subject continues to grow, judging from e-mails received and work published, but the times are changing for small groups such as ours. We find we must cease to be a paper-based group and become an electronically-based GEHG. We have explored this possibility with the staff of the Waltham Abbey Royal Gunpowder Mills, with whom we have had close contacts for many years, and are delighted that they are willing to provide us with accommodation on their website. We hope to put this to good use, not only by giving notice of future meetings, but also by making our *Newsletters* more generally available. Our paper-based GEHG may now be in 'abeyance', but we welcome the new electronic possibilities.

GEHG Meeting and Tour May 2011

Below are photos from the Tour.

SECRET ISLAND
ROYAL GUNPOWDER MILLS
ORIENTATION CENTRE





WATERWAYS BOOKS
EXPLOSIONS BOOK
SPOT LIGHT GIRDER FITTINGS

STOR
MAGAZINE

EXPLOSIONS BOOK
WATERWAYS BOOKS

PNY GeForce
Canon
L25

WASC
LARGE FORMAT

A3





A green and pleasant land

SEC
ORIE
EN

ROYAL
MILLS
STAFF ON

