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Mod Police Newspaper  
incl article on RGPF





# TALK THROUGH

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THE NEWSPAPER OF THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE POLICE

AUGUST 1990

## ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL REUNION

The Fourth Annual Reunion of the Retired Officers' Association, like last year's equivalent, was blessed with splendid sunny weather at the Police Training School, Medmenham. The event was held on Friday 15th June, this date being chosen to coincide with the Passing-Out Parade of Recruit Course 2/90.

Over 200 former officers, many accompanied by their wives and families, attended – and all appeared to enjoy the proceedings. In the afternoon, the ROA held its Second Annual General Meeting, this also being well-attended.

### Static displays

Several static displays, demonstrating some of the specialist tasks and aspects of the Force, were on view. These included the Operational Support Unit (OSU), the Special Escort Group (SEG), the Force Recruiting Caravan, a Ministry of Defence Police motor cycle and the magnificent 'travelling display' of Force activities normally based at Devonport.

### Force archives

Another major attraction on view for the first time was a special presenta-

tion of part of the Force archives. These are currently held within Cornah House and were covered in detail in our May edition.

The Chief Constable's extensive collection of police headwear from around the world was displayed prominently and it provoked much interest and discussion.

Several reunionists were able to add to the information already known concerning some of the photographs, books and other items held. One or two comments were overheard about former colleagues which can certainly not be quoted here. Constable Nick Wilmot was very grateful to those ex-officers who had gone to the trouble of bringing along items to donate to the collection.

### Passing-Out Parade

The Passing-Out Parade of the 63 students of Recruit Course 2/90 opened with a precision demonstration of PE and self-defence given by a group of the recruits under the watchful eye of Sergeant Cliff Sharp. With the World Cup in full swing – and as Sergeant Sharp is closely connected with the MDP soccer side – it was no surprise that the self-defence element involved a couple of 'football hooligans' being swiftly and effectively dealt with by

two female officers!

The PE display included individual and squad exercises and was given a competitive edge by the inclusion of an England *versus* Scotland 'log-race' – run on similar lines to the Royal Navy Field Gun Race at the Royal Tournament.

The MDP Band and the MDP Pipe Band then came on to the arena to give their usual faultless displays. They also combined for a 'Massed MDP Bands' selection – only the second time this has been done.

The bands were followed by the Force Dog Display Team under the direction of Sergeant Tony Bailey. The usual smooth performance included some new features. There was an 'attack' on a dog by a man with a sawn-off shotgun and an 'undercover' operation in which the dog emerged from inside an ice-cream barrow to chase and catch a robber.

### Inspection

The students marched on and were then inspected by Mr Kenneth Gooderham, Assistant Under-Secretary of State (Security and Common Services), accompanied by the Chief Constable and by Chief Superintendent Barry Smith, the School Commandant.

### Presentations

Presentations were made to those students who had won the various course awards. Constable Elaine Denholm (Coulport) won the Federation Trophy as Top Student. Constable Kevin Collins (Devonport) received the Federation Cup for second place and the Endeavour Cup was awarded to Constable Patrick Surgenor (Devonport).

Long Service & Good Conduct medals were presented to three officers: Constables Colin Iles and Ewart (Jeff) Smith (both from Chilmark) and Constable Peter Garratt (Bedford).

Detective Sergeant Peter Parkes was then presented with his recently-awarded Chief Constable's Commendation – full story in the June *Talk Through*.

### The AGM

The 1990 Annual General Meeting of the Retired Officers' Association was held in the informal surroundings of the tented area and was presided over by Mr John Reddington QPM, FBIM, the Chief Constable. Over 80 ROA members were in attendance – including Mr Reddington's predecessor, Mr

Jack Aspinall QPM, FBIM.

The existing committee was re-elected *en bloc*: Chairman Arthur Aitchison; Vice Chairman Arthur Bedwell; Secretary Wally Freer; Assistant Secretary John Chilvers; Acting Treasurer Supt Tom Sloman and committee members Maurice Dewhurst, Dick Howard, Harold Landrey, David Mahoney, Dick McAvoy and Reg Stanton.

The new format for the ROA column in *Talk Through* was commented on with favour and it was hoped that there would be more contributions submitted for publication.

Arthur Aitchison confirmed that affiliation to NARPO – the National Association of Retired Police Officers – was still being pursued. He added that it was open to individuals to make application to their local branch of NARPO if they so wished.

### Day of friendship

The overall day can undoubtedly be described as one of friendship. Young and old enjoyed themselves in different ways – and at the same time mingled with one another and swapped stories and experiences.

### Here's to 1991!



The Annual General Meeting of the ROA.



General salute at the conclusion of the parade.



Constable Elaine Denholm receives the Federation Trophy from Mr Kenneth Gooderham, AUS (SCS).



Det Sgt Peter Parkes shows off his Commendation with wife Sue and children Neil (8) and Wendy (11). Sue (née Hall) served as one of MDP's first WPCs (1974/77).

Photograph taken in one of the force Archives rooms.



Const Mike Searle (Devonport) shows Assistant Chief Constable Mr Albert Scale some of the exhibits in the 'travelling display.'



Inspector Derek Holmes (Recruiting Dept.) with former Chief Constable Mr Jack Aspinall QPM, FBIM.



Winning recruits with some of their Instructors: left to right – Sergt Tony Eason, Const Patrick Surgenor (Endeavour Cup), Const Kevin Collins (Federation Cup), Sergt Pauline Snowdon, Inspr John Pritchard, Sergt Andy Kirkwood, an officer representing Yellow Class (Drill Cup), Const Elaine Denholm (Federation Trophy) and Sergt Wendy Benson.



Never too young to learn! Gareth, son of Det Ch Inspr Gary Lewis, tries out one of the MDP Nortons for size.



The MDP Band passes the saluting dais.



CCMDP presents Const Ewart Smith with his Long Service & Good Conduct Medal.

All photographs by Sergt. Ian Griggs



# Glasgow to Nürnberg = Eurotour 90

*Eurotour 90* was the title given to the unique charity cycling marathon between Glasgow and Nürnberg (Nuremberg), undertaken by a group of Couplort-based MDP officers in May. Sergeant Alan Snedden and Constable Derek Knowles, two of the participants, put together comprehensive accounts of the event. We have taken the liberty of combining them for *Talk Through*.

## Historical background

Glasgow and Nürnberg are Twinned Cities and the countries of Scotland and Germany are very much to the fore in the invention and development of the modern bicycle. Since 1990 is the 150th anniversary of the invention of the *pedal* cycle by the Scot Kirkpatrick MacMillan – and is also the European Year of Tourism, it seemed natural to mark it in this way.

The forerunner of the pedal cycle, the velocipede or dandy horse, was invented in Heidelberg, Germany by Drais von Sauerbronn around 1817.

Kirkpatrick MacMillan not only



Bill Dickson and Lindsay Fraser with five-year-old Paul Vinter – winner of the event's logo competition. The bicycle is a model of MacMillan's first pedal-driven model.

invented the first version propelled by pedals – he also became the first ever road cyclist to be convicted of a traffic offence. Being jostled by a crowd of Glaswegians seeing his pedal cycle for the first time, he knocked over a small girl. The following day he appeared in court and was fined half-a-crown (12½p). His 'offence' occurred on 31st May 1842 – 148 years to the day before the completion of *Eurotour 90*.

## Culture

The eight officers actually participating are very proud that their ride took place during the period of Glasgow's year as European City of Culture. In keeping with the cultural theme the route to Nürnberg was deliberately chosen to include six EEC states (UK, France, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg and Germany).

## Team members

The team members were divided into three pairs of cyclists (Jack Trodden and Alan Snedden; Chris Cruise and John McCarroll; Derek Knowles and Lindsay Fraser) with a further team of two (Mick Byrne and Bill Dickson) driving the equipment vehicle and acting as reserve cyclists.

## The route

Setting off at 7:00am on Sunday 27th May from Glasgow, the route took



Preparing for the final leg into Nürnberg: Left to right – Chris Cruise, John McCarroll, Mick Byrne, Alan Snedden, Jack Trodden and Lindsay Fraser.

the team through Catterick, Alconbury and London to Ramsgate, where they took the ferry to Dunkirk. They then passed through Antwerp and Eindhoven and into Luxembourg. It was then across the border into Germany and through Ottweiler, Weingarten, Schwabisch Hall and Heilsbronn and into Nürnberg at 11:00pm on Thursday 31st May.

Total mileage was 1,200 miles – achieved in just under 90 hours cycling time. Almost everything went to plan, the one exception being when Derek Knowles suffered a bad fall requiring hospital treatment. Mick Byrne proved a valuable reserve, however, finishing the last 90 miles strongly.

## Thanks

Special thanks are due to a large number of individuals and organisations

whose assistance proved invaluable in so many different ways. Sergeant Graham Scott (Stirling) provided a great training aid with the loan of his cycle rollers. Many police forces along the route also provided vital support and encouragement, the hospitality of the Dutch Police at Eindhoven being unforgettable.

The **Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Yorkhill** in Glasgow will benefit from the charity funds raised by *Eurotour 90*. Details of the total amount raised will be published when known.

## Congratulations

*Talk Through* speaks for the entire Force in congratulating everyone connected with *Eurotour 90*. The only question we would ask . . . what do you do *next* year?

*Talk Through* recently took up an invitation to spend a day with the Force Recruiting Department at Medmenham. Inspector Derek Holmes proved a very helpful and enthusiastic host and your Editor was 'invited' to participate in some of the 'potential-Recruit' activities.

He stoically sat the five **Standard Entrance Test** papers and managed to prove that although he may be slightly

too old to join the Force, he can still stumble his way through the written tests. His greatest success, however, was managing to avoid the physical jerks and the **1½ mile run**. The eight *bona fide* candidates – who all looked superfit, – ran, jumped, stretched and strained well enough to pass with fly-

ing colours.

The Recruiting Department is currently handling between 30 and 40 initial enquiries every day! Approximately one per cent of all initial enquiries finally results in a Recruit under training.

The current staff consists of

## Back to basics

Inspector Derek Holmes; Sergeants Alan Cook and Alan Prior; and Constables Nigel Cooper, Kirsteen Exley, Colin Hunter, Glenn Ross, Andy Kingwell and Les Cracknell. Some of these are on detached duty to assist this very busy and important part of the Force structure. The staff is completed by two civilians, Mrs Helen Heyborne and Mrs Jean McKay.

## Modern times at Portsmouth

Spare a thought for Constable Andy Blogg – who thought he had a classic 'nick' at Portsmouth Naval base a couple of weeks ago.

Andy was on duty at Victory Gate one afternoon when he heard the distinctive sound of the clocking machine being operated about a dozen times in quick succession. Knowing that only one person had entered the clock-

ing station he went over to investigate, expecting (and hoping) to find somebody clocking out a number of absent colleagues.

To Andy's surprise he discovered that the person in the clocking station was a Heritage Area visitor (member of the public). He had selected a clock card at random believing that the clocking machine was an antique

(which it certainly resembles) and that the clocking station was part of the museum attractions (which it most certainly is not!).

After putting the visitor wise, Andy informed the Finance Department of the incident to prevent them from quizzing the unfortunate employee as to why he had clocked out twelve times in as many seconds!

## Bright display at Menwith

Chief Inspector Alan Skipper, Senior Police Officer at Menwith Hill, is a very proud man. His station is the first in the Force to be equipped with a Dale Stem-Lite. Sergeant Kevin Craddock organised the procurement of this piece



Sergeant Kevin Craddock (left) and Constable Steve Hall with the newly-equipped vehicle

of equipment in conjunction with the United States authorities. He explains exactly what it is.

The Dale Stem-Lite is basically a high-intensity floodlight system. Our particular Stem-Lite is the top-of-the-range model and has been fitted to a long-wheelbase Land Rover. Total cost of the system is £2,500.

The system consists of high-intensity floodlights which extend up to 2.5 metres above the roof of the vehicle. The 2,000 watt halogen lamps then provide near-daylight illumination up to a range of 33 metres. It is housed in a low-profile roof assembly with an illuminated Police identification sign and Police 'Stop' sign to the rear. This is surmounted by a four-beam halogen beacon.

The unit has already been in opera-

tion and has proved very successful both on base and at the scene of road traffic accidents in assistance to the North Yorkshire Police.



. . . and in use at night

## Poets' Corner

The inclusion of a poem (*An English Lesson*) in our May issue has provoked a steady stream of similar poetic offerings. The following has been submitted by Constable Peter McGuinness (Glen Douglas) under the title *Averse to English*.

Should you be blessed to find your station  
In life uplifted to the Scottish nation,  
A few examples may make a start  
To understand this northern part.

The gentle art of conversation  
Is different at a Scottish station,  
The sound of which is as foreign as Bach  
If you happen to be – a Sassenach.

Communication I'm sure you'll need,  
Translation starts here so please pay heed,  
Don't introduce *How do you do?*  
*Whose it gaun?* means *How are you?*

*A bull* is said to rhyme with *gull*,  
You'll find that talk is seldom dull,  
If you're in Scotland now or *noo*,  
Don't say *cow* – pronounce it *coo*.

If called *neeb* in Fife then you're in favour,  
This means *friend* and is short for *neighbour*,  
Friendship will grow if you plant the seed,  
By just remembering *bread* is *breid*.

Further north a gentle lilt  
Caresses the ear like the swish of a kilt,  
Don't call this a skirt, if a Scot hear it said,  
You may quickly become very *deid* – that's *dead!*

English as spoken by the Queen  
Is spoken not in Aberdeen,  
To make friends there it is a boon  
To know *girl* is *quine* and *boy* is *loon*.

The lesson there I must conclude,  
The Scottish tongue is far too good  
To have justice done to it by me,  
To flavour more, come hear and see.

## TALK THROUGH

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**Representative**  
Arthur Bedwell

(Crown copyright reserved)

## Mr A J Cragg

Last month we included details of the three new members of the Police Committee. We have now received the photograph of Mr Cragg – see below.



## Chief Constables afloat



MDP at Faslane enjoyed a 'multiple VIP visit' on Thursday, 10th May when they entertained two Chief Constables and an Assistant Chief Constable.

Pictured above (left to right) are Mr Andy Grant, ACC (Scotland) with Mr Andrew Sloan QPM, BA, Chief Constable, Strathclyde Police and Mr John Reddington QPM, FBIM, our own Chief Constable.

They were photographed on board one of the MDP Clyde Marine Unit police launches prior to a tour of the Gareloch and display of the capabilities and expertise of the RIB (rigid inflatable boat) Section.

(Photograph by Det Const Malky Lobban, CSB Faslane)

## Help!

We are now running short of *Station Profile* material and hope that officers at those stations not yet featured will help us out. If they don't, then we'll have no option but to give you **Force Headquarters!**





# STATION PROFILE

No. 24

## ROYAL ORDNANCE/RARDE WALTHAM ABBEY



The Waltham Abbey establishment is located 20 miles north east of Central London and consists of two separate sites. The North Site is occupied by the Royal Armament Research and Development Establishment (RARDE) and the South Site by Royal Ordnance (Explosives Division).

The twin sites cover an area of 465 acres, about 80 per cent of which is surrounded by the waters of the River Lee and its associated streams. The establishment also lies on the Greenwich meridian at 0 degrees longitude.

Constable Ray Hackett (above) takes a great interest in the history and wildlife of both the establishment and the town and he has compiled a comprehensive Profile of this ancient and unique station.

The work currently being carried out at Waltham Abbey includes studies of the compatibility, stability and hazard assessment of energetic materials, adhesion, mechanical properties of propellants and the use of composite materials in the design of weapon systems and the application of computational techniques. A far cry from the early years when the primary function of Waltham Abbey was the manufacture of a single product – **gunpowder**.

### The early years

Although gunpowder was first used by the English on the battlefield of Crécy in 1346 it was not produced in any great quantity until the middle of the 16th century. Gunpowder production at this time was solely in the hands of private manufacturers with the exception of a small scale operation in the Tower of London.

Waltham Abbey's association with gunpowder is recorded as far back as 1561 during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. By 1660 the production of gunpowder had become an important local industry. In 1662 the Curate of Waltham Abbey, Dr. Thomas Fuller wrote: "It is questionable whether gunpowder be more profitable or dangerous. The mills in my Parish have been five times blown up within seven years but blessed be to God without the loss of one man's life."

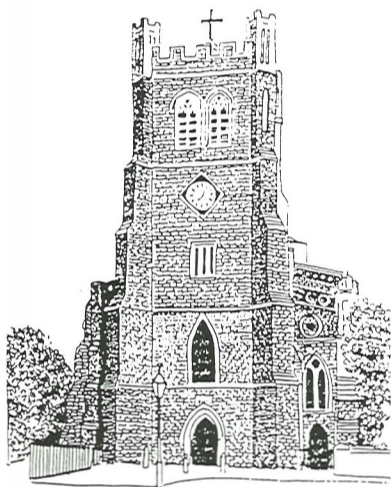
The powdermills eventually came into the possession of the Walton family who later sold them to the Crown on 18th October 1787 for the sum of £10,000. The subsequent two hundred years have seen the site make a very important contribution to the defence of the Realm.

### King Harold

Local legend maintains that the remains of King Harold and his brothers, Leofwin and Gurth, are buried in the grounds of the old abbey at Waltham. King Harold founded the abbey (circa 1060) and a large stone behind the present church marks his last resting place. The Augustinian Order of Monks worshipped at the monastery and are said to have been the first people in England to manufacture gunpowder. For this reason, Waltham Abbey was to become the site of the



Contemporary print of the Royal Gunpowder Factory, February 1861



Waltham Abbey Church (founded 1060)

most famous gunpowder factory in the country – **The Royal Gunpowder Factory**.

### Guy Fawkes

Another local legend claims that Guy Fawkes purchased gunpowder from the mills at Waltham Abbey prior to his ill-fated attempt to destroy Parliament in 1605. Unfortunately there is no solid documentary evidence to substantiate this claim. However, about 12 years ago a receipt was discovered in the Public Record Office which referred to 18 hundred-weight of gunpowder purchased by a gentleman living near Waltham Abbey. The gunpowder was 'for his private use' and the receipt was dated 1605.

Guy and his fellow conspirators often met in a 'safe house' just a short distance from Waltham Abbey and it is quite possible that local legend is correct.

### Royal Gunpowder Factory

Having purchased the mills on behalf of the Crown (1787), Lieutenant General Sir William Congreve, Deputy Comptroller of the Royal Laboratory, spent a further £35,000 on repairs, improvements and extensions. It was not until February 1789 that the first batch of gunpowder was made for the Crown. Congreve made rules covering safety, discipline and the production of gunpowder of uniform performance. The mills began to produce what was to become the finest quality gunpowder in the world.

Sir William was succeeded by his son, another William, as Comptroller and he continued his father's improvements and invented the 'granulating machine' which remained virtually unchanged in design for over 150 years. The young William Congreve

is probably best known as the inventor of the military rocket system.

Although the military rocket was not very accurate it terrorised the enemy and had great incendiary value. It was used successfully in several campaigns including Boulogne 1806, Copenhagen 1807, Leipzig 1813 and Waterloo 1815. The use of rockets against Fort McHenry in 1814 is commemorated by the words 'the rockets' red glare' in the United States National Anthem.

### Gunpowder production

During the Napoleonic Wars the annual production of gunpowder reached 25,000 barrels (about 1,100 tons) and it also saw the introduction of what was to become the definitive method of gunpowder production. This involved mixing saltpetre, sulphur and charcoal in certain proportions and then incorporating the subsequent mix under massive millstones. The resultant 'millcake' was then broken down and pressed before being granulated to the required size. A very dangerous process indeed!

### Accidents

Accidents during the 19th century were both frequent and major. On 13th April 1843 ten men died in an explosion, in June 1870 five more, in August 1890 another two were killed and in 1893 a further nine. Many minor accidents over the years have resulted in serious injury.

The possession of contraband items such as matches or tobacco within the confines of the mills was a serious offence. Employees found in possession of such items would be dismissed immediately. Contractors were expected to sack any of their staff who broke the contraband regulations.

Even today, the possession of contraband in certain parts of the factory is considered a very serious offence. The manufacture of gunpowder has always been fraught with danger and although safety procedures were strictly adhered to, it was always feared that just one tiny spark could prove fatal.

### Decline of gunpowder

For years the entire production of the mills had been gunpowder but by the middle of the 19th century there was a growing interest in two new explosives products – guncotton and nitroglycerine.

In 1863 Sir Frederick Abel, the War Office chemist, set up an experimental plant at Waltham Abbey for the production of gun-cotton. The plant was successful and production was increased to 250 tons per year by 1872, and eventually exceeded 2,000 tons per year by 1908.

Nitroglycerine, a liquid explosive, was extruded with guncotton and mineral jelly and then formed into cords by Abel's Explosives Committee in 1890. These powerful new materials were manufactured in bulk and by 1901 a new cordite factory was in operation to the south of the town of Waltham Abbey.



The Main Gate, North Site Above: the 1990 view Below: the same building in 1899 – a Metropolitan Police Sergeant carries out a body search of an employee for matches and other dangerous materials



The importance of the *role* of gunpowder as an explosive and as a propellant declined with the introduction of materials such as cordite. As a result of this, the existing gunpowder mills were converted to cordite processing.

The age of gunpowder had virtually gone forever.

### Two World Wars

During the First World War, the Royal Gunpowder Factory was the only government-owned manufacturing site of explosives. It employed over 5,000 people, half of them women.

After 1918, employment and production were reduced but effort on experimental work was increased, leading to the development of newer and safer processes and the discovery of even more powerful materials. This rundown of production was reversed in 1933 when the international situation deteriorated and the RGPF was placed on standby for full wartime output.



Watercolour painting showing the remains of the last Gunpowder Mill (circa 1941)

At the outbreak of the Second World War the RGPF was the country's major explosives producer and as such became a prime target for enemy air attack. It was dangerous enough to work in an explosives factory without the threat of air raids. The continuous production of the high explosive RDX was maintained however.

There were many 'close shaves' as the *Luftwaffe* tried its best to stop production. The nitroglycerine plant had a lucky escape when a V2 rocket struck the town a quarter of a mile away causing horrendous damage and injury.

Continued on page 4



Constable Ray Verrill with SY/AT dog Libra (the only pure white German Shepherd Dog in the Force) on one of the original millstones – still on South Site



# Consistent batting brings well-deserved victory

**GLOUCESTERSHIRE CONSTABULARY v MDP**  
**MDP win by 8 wickets**

MDP's first ever match against the Gloucestershire Constabulary was played on Thursday 5th July at the Dowty Sports Ground, Gloucester – a ground frequently used by the County second XI.

The match was dominated by the batsmen with the home side's number four, Carpenter, easily taking the 'man-of-the-match' title with a magnificent unbeaten 102.

## Invited to bat

Skipper Andy Gallant won the toss for MDP and invited the home side to bat first. The MDP opening bowlers, **Alastair Love** and **Ian Oultram**, confined Gloucestershire to just ten runs from their first eight overs before the run-rate accelerated.

Gallant then brought himself on in place of Oultram and this paid off almost immediately, both he and Love grabbing a wicket apiece with the score on 21.

This brought the aggressive Carpenter to the wicket and he set about the MDP attack with a vengeance. Partnered by Kellard, he took the score along to 114 for two before Kellard became Gallant's second victim. Carpenter continued to dominate and even a series of bowling changes failed to contain him. When the Gloucestershire innings closed after 42 overs he had scored 102 not out – an outstanding knock which included 13 fours and three sixes.

An interesting feature of the MDP play was a good performance by **Paul Goodridge** in the unusual role of wicket-keeper.

## Opening stand

**Derrick Maguire** and **Barry Frost**, now a well-established opening partnership for MDP, were soon into their stride to build another fine opening stand. They had reached 78 before Frost was bowled for 39 (five fours). Gallant then joined Maguire in a stand of 57 before being run out for 35 (five fours).

Ian Oultram came to the wicket to continue the run-chase and his rapid unbeaten 25 included five boundaries.

MDP overtook the home side's total in just 33 overs and owe a debt of thanks to Maguire who carried his bat for 54 – an innings which whilst not as spectacular as some others, was full of consistency and purpose.

The season has begun brightly for the MDP side with no glaring weak-

## SCORECARD

Gloucestershire Constabulary		Total ... 175 for 3 (42 overs)	
Gallant	11 - 2 - 51 - 2	Love	10 - 3 - 32 - 1
Oultram	7 - 1 - 15 - 0	Walker	3 - 0 - 24 - 0
Maplesden	11 - 1 - 50 - 0		
<b>MDP</b>			
Derrick Maguire (CSB Faslane)	not out	54	
Barry Frost (Menwith Hill)	bowled	39	
Andy Gallant (Colchester)	run out	35	
Ian Oultram (Longtown)	not out	25	
	extras	23	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>176 for 2</b>	<b>(33.1 overs)</b>

Did not bat: Lee Maplesden (Greenham Common), Paul Goodridge (Trecwn), Steve Walker (Shoeburyness), Alastair Love (Longtown), Andy Manning (Force HQ), Terry Mitchell (PTS Medmenham), Phil Anthony (Burghfield).

nesses amongst either the batting or bowling. There is also a strength in depth in the Force which promises much for the future.

Leading batting averages (after three matches) include two men (Ian Oultram and Lee Maplesden) averaging over 50 and three others (Derrick Maguire, Barry Frost and Andy Gallant) over 20.



Barry Frost – established opener

## STATION PROFILE

(continued from previous page)

### Post-war

After the war the RGPF eventually ceased production and in July 1945 it closed. Two days later it re-opened as an experimental station of the Armament Research Department.

This later became the Explosives Research and Development Establishment (ERDE) in 1948. Further changes in organisation led it to become the Propellants Explosives & Rocket Motor Establishment (PERME) in 1977.

In 1984 the site at Waltham Abbey was divided into the two separate parts which we know today. The Royal Ordnance site (South Site) is now closed and is being returned to civilian use.

### Site of Special Scientific Interest

In 1986 the Nature Conservancy Council declared part of the old RGPF a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) under Section 28 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. The Waltham Abbey site not only contains a wealth of historical interest but also an abundance of flora and fauna.

The Waltham Abbey SSSI is described as 'an area of woodland on damp alluvial soil overlying glacial gravel in the valley of the River Lee.' The woodland has largely generated from coppice stools and is dominated



The Royal Gunpowder Factory Fire Brigade circa 1890

by alder, ash, sycamore, poplar and crack willow.

The ground flora is dominated by common nettle, ground ivy and butterbur.

Rabbits, squirrels, foxes and fallow and muntjac deer are commonly seen throughout the site and most species of British birds and mammals are represented. The site supports the largest heronry in Essex – with over a dozen breeding pairs.

What was once The Royal Gunpowder Factory is now dense woodland and all that remains is but an echo of its past greatness. William Fitzgerald said it all in an article in the *Strand Magazine* (1895): "The tremendous energy that lay dormant in every building oppressed us, even though that energy slept behind massive traverses and walls ten feet thick; so we came away."

### Early policing

The middle of the 18th century was a time of worsening international relations, this being the reason for the Crown's purchase of the mills. Without gunpowder a war would be lost; without gunpowder the nation could not defend itself from its enemies. The fear of sabotage by enemy agents was very real.

Security of the mills was of paramount importance and initially process workers were employed to carry out the task. Until 1860 all security patrols were conducted on an overtime basis – a shilling's extra pay for four hours work after completing an eight-hour shift. The patrols were paraded at the Grand Watch House and told of their 'beats' by the 'Rounders' whom they had to meet every hour whilst on patrol.

### Special Constable

In 1846, at the request of the

Ordnance Board, a Special Constable was employed. Unlike the security patrols he was not a process worker and he had the powers of Constable within the confines of the factory and the powers of Special Constable outside.

The Metropolitan Police took over the policing of the mills on 1st April 1860. Their duties included internal security patrols, control of entry and exit and, most important of all, contra-band searches.

By 1871 there was a Police Barracks situated adjacent to the Main Police Office in Powdermill Lane. The Main Police Office has been in continuous use from 1860 to the present day and is believed to be the oldest police office still in use in the Metropolitan Police area.

### Escort duties

During the First World War, Special Constables were employed to escort the many sailing barges carrying explosives between Waltham Abbey and Woolwich Arsenal and their duties included opening and closing the many lock gates on the River Lee. By 1923 the Metropolitan Police had relinquished the task of policing the RGPF and the job was taken over by the Departmental Constabulary who policed the mills throughout World War II, being assisted by units of the Local Defence Volunteers and the Regular Army.

The RGPF was vital to the war effort and sabotage was still as great a threat as it had been during the Napoleonic Wars.

In 1971, amalgamation of the Departmental Constabularies meant that policing was the responsibility of MDP.

### The MDP task

The MDP role at Waltham Abbey is primarily one of security and general policing since the closure of Royal Ordnance and the run-down of RARDE. The security task is as important today as it was in the early days of the RGPF. The threat is still real.

The MDP complement is tasked to police both ROF and RARDE during the run-down programme. It includes a Dog Section.

The Senior Police Officer and his deputy are in an unusual position as they have to deal with two different

administration systems as RO and RARDE are two separate entities.

MDP carry out regular patrols of the associated married quarters at Waltham Abbey as well as patrols of the ten-mile fence line.

### Personalities

No MDP officer is more at home at Waltham Abbey than **Constable Ken Hicks**. Ken, a gifted musician who plays bass tuba in the MDP Band, was actually born in a house within the Royal Gunpowder Factory.

**Constable Malcolm Ashby** is a member of the Force rugby team (hooker).

This duo also hold high office (Treasurer and Chairman respectively) in the establishment social organisation. It is unfortunate that the current situation sees the organisation slowly running down but in the past it has supported and encouraged not only the usual snooker and darts teams but has also catered for the more genteel pastimes of chess, bridge, sailing and croquet!

### Ghosts

Waltham Abbey presents an extremely pleasant environment in which to work – unless you are afraid of ghosts. Whilst there are no headless apparitions or mysterious 'grey ladies' the North Site does boast a certain building which is said to be carefully avoided by police patrols once the sun has set.

The entrance door to this 200-year old building is flanked by two ancient cannons and the coat of arms on the wall contains a hideous grinning gargoyle looking down. The building, once a residence, stands unoccupied now but in years long past it must have been a very pleasant place.

In the early 80s, contractors renovating the building found a large snake embedded into the plaster



The 'haunted house' – formerly the residence of the Factory Superintendent.

above the entrance door. They disposed of it – and then strange things began to happen. Panes of glass would shatter for no obvious reason, work tools would suddenly move of their own accord or disappear, only to reappear in another room. Noises and footsteps were heard in empty rooms and lights would be seen glowing at strange hours in the locked house.

The contractors refused to work alone in the building and always vacated it before dusk. Police dogs shied away and one officer who entered the building to check strange lights claimed that as he ran out of the place, something had followed him down the stairs.

It has now come to light that in the 17th and 18th centuries, to protect one's house from the devil, a snake would be killed at the full moon and then nailed above the door.

Had the contractors, in their ignorance, thrown away the very thing that had protected that house for all those years? Who knows? The house is still empty at the time of writing this profile and it stands silent and alone, shrouded in mist from the river.

### End of an era

With the closure of Royal Ordnance and the run-down of RARDE, four hundred years of history will have passed since the production of that first batch of gunpowder at Waltham Abbey.

Over the years, tens of thousands of people have entered the powder-mills to work for the defence of their country and it is sincerely hoped that when the site is eventually returned to civilian use the Royal Gunpowder Factory will be commemorated in some way.

It is also hoped that the Site of Special Scientific Interest will continue to be regarded for what it truly is. A unique place that not only contains many species of plants and animals but also, buried in its woodland, the last remains of what was the Royal Gunpowder Factory.

*Editorial note: For security reasons we have been unable to mention the exact location of the establishment, the current MDP complement or the names of the Senior Police Officer and his deputy.*



The War Department Constabulary Dog Section circa 1969. Standing left to right: Sergeant Paddy Hanrahan, Constable Sandy Powell with Nevis, Constable Fred Hastings with Ashim; at front: Constable Reg Chapman with Charl. (We acknowledge the help of Reg Chapman – now a Sergeant at Sculthorpe – in identifying the officers and dogs shown)