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Handover of
Pendulum

Mercury Memories

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PICK OF THE PAST

25 years ago

Pupils' letters in Falklands book

LETTERS written by Hoddesdon children to cheer up men fighting in the Falklands have appeared in a new book.

The letters were written by pupils at St Cross RC School in the last spring term and sent to men serving on the *Canberra* in the South Atlantic.

To the surprise and delight of staff and children, some of the letters have been reproduced in a new book, *Canberra - the Great White Whale Goes to War*.

The schoolchildren took a special interest because one of the Marines on the *Canberra* at the time was a cousin of pupil Katie Bartlett.

To cheer up the troops with memories of home, the children wrote letters and made books and drawings.

10 years ago

Spice Girl to turn spouse



ENGAGED: Victoria Adams and David Beckham (s)

GOFFS Oak's most famous resident, Victoria Adams, spoke to the *Mercury* about her hopes and dreams for the future with England football ace David Beckham.

Messages and congratulations from friends of the Spice Girl have been pouring in to celebrate "the romance of the century" after the couple announced their engagement.

Victoria, who lives with her parents in St James's Road, said the wedding would be in spring next year. Posh Spice, who said the wedding would probably not be at St James's Church in St James's Road, Goffs Oak, added: "It's going to be a big one, definitely. It will be somewhere quite private, but in England."

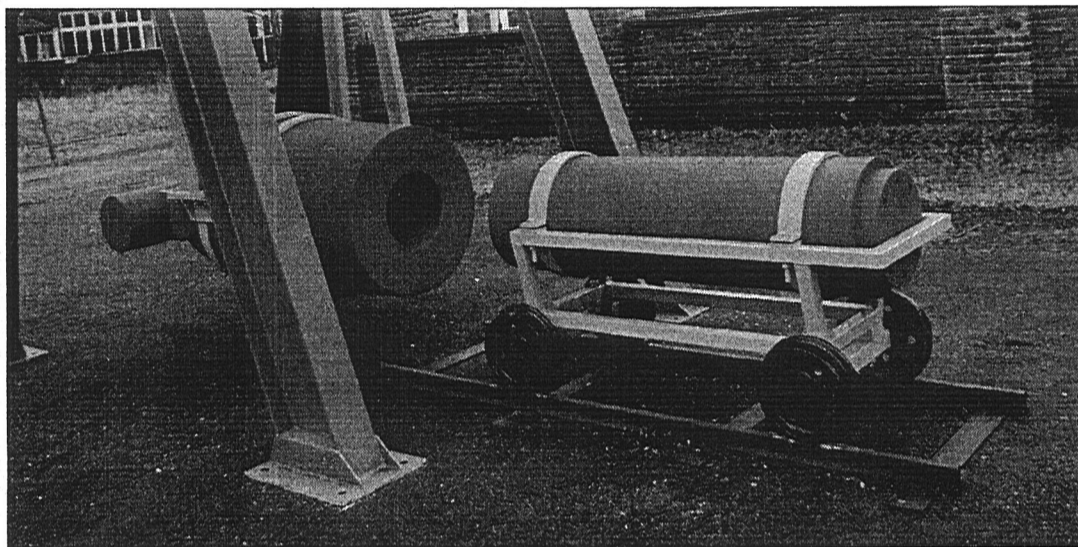
She said being a Mrs would not affect her career as Posh Spice in the chart-topping group.

"David is a '90s man and understands I want a career."

Proud dad Tony said: "David asked me and I was absolutely delighted - you couldn't ask for a better son-in-law."

Victoria's former headteacher, Terry James, of St Mary's High School, said: "We are very pleased for them and hope they will be very happy."

Gunpowder Mills adds to its explosive past



SWINGING IN TO ACTION: One of the explosive testing pendulums on display

Photo: KVTHZSYK-04



IT'S A GIFT: John White, left, and Roland Walton at the hand-over

Photo: KVTHZSYK-02

THE Royal Gunpowder Mills in Waltham Abbey is getting fired up about its latest additions - two large 'pendulums' used for testing explosives.

The pendulums have just been handed over by Dr Roland Wharton, a senior scientist with the Health and Safety Executive at Buxton in Derbyshire.

They were used for many years to test the quality of mining explosives at the site in the Peak District.

The chairman of the Royal Gunpowder Mills Friends Society, Dr John Wright, who helped to restore the rusted pendulums at the site in Beaulieu Drive, explained: "They now have much more modern equipment to do this sort of task so they have not been used for some years.

"Rather than get rid of them for scrap, they offered them to us, particularly because they were originally used for gunpowder testing and more modern explosives later on." The main component of the larger pendulum is a prototype siege mortar developed for the Crimean War (1853-56) but not actually used there. It weighs five tonnes and is about four metres (13ft) high.

"The smaller one is a lighter machine and works in a slightly different way, but they both do the same thing - they measure the recoil when a charge is fired," said Dr Wright.

"You fire a charge inside a cannon and measure how much recoil you get from that."

By JEAN MARSDEN
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The machines were brought into use in around 1900 and remained in service for about 50 years.

Gunpowder Mills spokesman Mark Mortlake said Dr Wright carried out much of the restoration of the pendulums.

"When they were decommissioned they were handed over to us for display, to show how explosives were tested on this site. They are big pieces of kit.

"When the explosive is detonated it forces the pendulum back and you can gauge the force of the explosion by how far back it goes," he said.

"The last thing you want on the battlefield is an explosive which is unpredictable."

He added: "On this site we didn't just manufacture gunpowder. Towards the later years the site was involved in all sorts of explosives and testing including RDX [royal demolition explosive] and cordite. Gunpowder was obsolete by about the end of the Second World War."

Visitors can view the pendulums but they will not be fired. "It is to show how the mechanism works," added Dr Wright.

The Royal Gunpowder Mills is open to the public at weekends and bank holidays from April 26 until September 28, plus Wednesdays during the school summer holidays. For more information, go to www.royalgunpowdermills.com.

Open Evening

Tuesday 5 February 2008

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