

WASC 2006

RARDE SITE

Summary of Importance
and Proposals

THE RARDE SITE AT WALTHAM ABBEY

SAM

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Summary

Put simply this large site, on which attention is currently focused, is the most important site for the history of explosives in Europe. This can be stated with confidence as it was not only the place where most of the major technological breakthroughs were made but it also retains, by a very long way, the best surviving examples of structures representing each of these technologies. There are 160 roofed buildings on the site and 180 known sites of buildings - many of which are suspected to retain buried remains of importance. A large area scheduling is proposed and a number of structures outside this area are proposed for listing.

The North Site - Importance

Partly in order to inform our decisions about Waltham, we have undertaken the "Step 1" and Step 3" Reports for the English Gunpowder Industry as a whole (see our Strategy for Designation of Industrial Sites). This work has illustrated exactly how remarkable a survival the Waltham site really is. Because it was the Victorian equivalent of Aldermaston and Harwell rolled into one, the structures built here are not only the originators of the technology, but also their secret status has ensured that they were never scrapped. Thus they are not only very important (sometimes unique) structures, but they are also in astonishingly good condition. At the moment it looks as though we will be proposing the whole or part of nine other sites in England for scheduling, but none have anything like the range of structures and none surviving in anything approaching the condition of the Waltham buildings. The Waltham site is also distinguished from the others by the survival of the most remarkable series of documentary records, which have been the subject of study by the RCHME. Again no other site has anything like this documentation. These characteristics make Waltham North Site an astonishing survival, made all the more remarkable because until last summer no one knew what was there.

The North Site - proposed scheduling

The whole site is potentially schedulable as every part of it could be defended as being of "national importance". However, we have taken the view that scheduling is not the appropriate form of management for those parts of the site and for structures where there is good potential for alternative management regimes (envisaged in the redevelopment proposals). The proposed SAM, therefore, is mostly confined to the northern part of the North Site, though there is an extension of the proposed SAM to the south (into the area of proposed redevelopment) to include the substantial remains of the earliest incorporating mills along the Millhead leat. By designating within this boundary the whole of the manufacturing process will be included (from incorporation to storage in the Grand Magazine) as will the site infrastructure of canals and other transport features. This boundary will also