

WASC 2089

Extracts from
RSC Historical
Newsletter
Aug. 2002

RSC National
Historical Chemical
Landmarks - RSC
Waltham Abbey

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Group Newsletter August 2002

Earlier, the children had sung a new drinking song, based upon a Keats verse found on a scrap of chemistry notes. As a finale, they 'acted' Newton's *Experimentum Crucis* on white light, and sang a new 'Rainbow song' – which outlined much of the play, including how the 'un-weaving, then re-weaving rainbows' metaphor can lead to insights into complex natural phenomena, as wonderful as the rainbow itself.

D. H. Leaback

Further Reading: D. H. Leaback, *Science & Public Affairs* (February 2002), pp. 18-19.

RSC National Historical Chemical Landmarks

The Royal Gunpowder Mills: 17 April 2002

In a continuing programme to commemorate, emphasise and awaken public interest in historical developments in the chemical sciences, the RSC held the fourth in its series of Historic Chemical Landmarks at the Royal Gunpowder Mills, Waltham Abbey, Essex, in April. The event marked the research and development of explosives and propellants over three hundred years. The Gunpowder Mills were established in the 1660s and produced explosives until 1947. The site then became a research establishment until its closure in 1991. The Mills are now open as a visitor attraction; see www.royalgunpowdermills.com. Among the discoveries that stemmed from research and development at Waltham Abbey were Kevlar, RDX (the explosive used in the bouncing bomb) and the propellants used in ejector seats.

Following short introductory remarks by Trevor Knapp, Chairman of the Royal Gunpowder Mills, Dr Geoff Hooper, the site's last director, gave an illustrated talk on some of the history and research of the site. Guests were then shown an entertaining film on the history of gunpowder and explosives. Then Dr David Giachardi, Secretary of the RSC, unveiled the plaque, which is located on the wall at the entrance to the museum. The event, which was well attended, concluded with a buffet lunch.

The plaque inscription reads: "For over 300 years explosives and propellants were developed and produced on this site. Work performed here has been influential in the development of the Bouncing Bomb, Kevlar and Ejector Seat technology. Established in the mid-1660s and bought by the Crown in 1787 the Mills had an international reputation for their production methods and quality. By the 20th Century the Mills were producing and researching new explosives and propellants such as cordite and TNT. In 1948 the Mills ceased production but carried out research until 1991."

Note: the nomination of Historic Chemical Landmarks is encouraged, and submissions may be made through the appropriate Local Section of the RSC. See <http://www.rsc.org/lap/publicaf/landmarks.htm>. However, the Historical Group and the Landmark committee hope to collaborate more closely on future awards, to ensure that all historical aspects of potential landmarks have been explored. If you have a suggestion for a landmark that you would like to discuss, please contact the Group's chairman or secretary.

Katherine D. Watson

American Chemical Society – Division of the History of Chemistry

Anyone who wishes to join HIST may email the Editor for an electronic copy of the Membership Form. Alternatively, contact HIST's Treasurer: Dr Vera Mainz, 142B RAL, Box 34 Noyes Lab, 600 S. Mathews Avenue, Urbana, IL 61801, USA.

Message from the Division Chair

Dear HIST Colleagues!

Let me begin my final chair's message with news about the division's awards for 2002. This year's Outstanding Paper Award goes to "The History of Ozone," which was written by Mordecai B. Rubin and appears in volume 26(1) of the *Bulletin*. If you haven't had an opportunity to read this article yet, I recommend it to you. I think you will be as impressed as the award committee was. I want to thank the members of that committee, who made this selection: Leo Slater, who served as chair, and Paul Buonora and Paul Schubert. We all appreciate their efforts on behalf of HIST.

As you know, the 2001 Dexter Award was the very last one to be given, and this year HIST will present the first Sidney M. Edelstein Award for Outstanding Achievement in the History of Chemistry. This award is generously supported by Ruth Barish, the daughter of Sidney Edelstein. The 2002 award will be presented to John Parascandola, historian at the U.S. Public Health Service. Dr Parascandola is an outstanding choice for this first Edelstein Award, and he will be honored at the first Edelstein Award Symposium in Boston on 20 August. I also want to express my sincere thanks on behalf of the entire division to this year's award committee: Seymour Mauskopf, a former Dexter Award winner himself, who served as committee chair, Roald Hoffmann and Jim Bohning.

In addition to the award symposium on the morning of 20 August, there will be a symposium that afternoon to honor Sidney Edelstein himself and his