

# REPORT

## WALTHAM ABBEY ARCHIVE

DECEMBER 2004

The following is a report on:

1. Progress made so far on the re-establishing of the Mills Archive and archive related work over 2004.
2. A summary of objectives and considerations for 2005 and beyond.

### History

ERDE closed in 1991. At that time the archive kept at the Mills, which had been ably created and led by Malcolm McLaren, consisted of a collection of documents, objects, building drawings, maps and plans, photographs and a library. These were collectively catalogued and indexed under the generic title Waltham Abbey Special Collection ( WASC ).

The other part of the archive containing historical documents and official papers from the time of Government purchase onwards was kept at the PRO. In addition, on closure of ERDE the originals of maps and plans were copied and lodged with the PRO with copies retained at the Mills.

In the following all discussion refers solely to the archive at the Mills.

After closure the archive passed through many vicissitudes, including a period of limbo when the future of the site was being debated and the period following departure of the resident archaeologist and the establishing of the Mills as an interpretative centre when the collection was open to free access by designers of the exhibition, permanent staff, Friends and educational staff, with no record kept of document movement. Chests containing maps and plans and building drawings were subject to a series of moves in adverse conditions.

By 2003 therefore the collection was in a fairly disorganised state with documents in unwieldy large boxes and maps and plans and building drawings in plan chests in several buildings including Walton House which was undergoing internal refurbishment with resultant building dust etc. Inevitably losses occurred, either deliberately or through carelessness.

### Work done over the year 2004

It was decided to make a completely fresh start on the whole collection which would be physically checked to ascertain what was now actually held, as opposed to what was in the original index. At the same time computer based database indexes would be created.

The collection was split into discrete elements. These and their database identifiers were:

Documents and Small Objects - Waltham Abbey Special Collection	
title retained	WASC
Waltham Abbey Maps and Plans	WAMP (1)
Waltham Abbey Building Drawings	WABD (1)
Waltham Abbey Non Building Drawings	WANBD
Waltham Abbey Photograph Collection	WAP
Waltham Abbey Library	WAL

- (1) For Maps and Plans and Building Drawings it was decided at this time to confine the check and indexing to the period up to 1945.

Work done so far has been:

### 1. Collections

WASC Documents and Small Objects	- Database created (1)
WAMP Maps and Plans	- Checked and database created
WABD Building Drawings	- Checked and database created
WANBD Non Building Drawings	- Initial search made
WAP Photographs	- Collected and stored in archive boxes
WAL Library	- Collected and stored in archive boxes (2)

(1) WASC The index at present is the old index transferred to computer, a physical check follows, see tasks for 2005.

(2) Patricia Nunes has commenced work on updating an existing Library index.

The above work has been performed by myself and Richard Thomas. Richard is a waterways historian and lecturer who has extended his interests to the history of explosives and the Mills. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the invaluable contribution which Richard has and is making.

### 2. Collection Restoration

In WASC particularly there are a number of gaps created by missing documents and small objects. Two of the most serious comprise virtually all documentation on Frederick Abel and the Congreves. Through contact with the Patent Office etc. I have been able to restore some of the missing documents on Abel.

### 3. IT

Ian MacFarlane has recently taken over responsibility for overall design and supervision of databases, IT training of volunteers, creation of new databases.

### 4. Storage

As mentioned above, Photographs and Library books are now stored in archive boxes in the Storage Room.

Maps and Plans and Building Drawings are now labelled and stored in readily accessible plan chests in the Archive Room.

WASC documents are now in separate envelopes in archive boxes in the Archive Room. The boxes are on the floor occupying a considerable amount of space. Access is therefore extremely awkward and the overall impression of grovelling on the floor is extremely unprofessional, particularly to outside visitors. So far it has not been possible to obtain any funds to improve this situation.

Apart from the above work on the collection, archive related activities over 2004 have been:

### 5. Waltham Abbey Personnel Project - WAPP

It is intended to create a register of Mills personnel details and life events from the time of Government purchase, utilising initially records obtained from the PRO by a member of the Waltham Abbey Historical Society in connection with a PhD project on the people of Waltham Abbey. A database has been created and a start made on data input.

We are fortunate in having the services of Derek Arnes on this task. Derek has considerable archival experience, including researching and publishing two on the history of Ware and its people. Sandra Taylor is at present training on WAPP input under Ian's supervision

## 6.Acquisitions

### Documents

David Hewkin and David Lee have generously donated valuable collections of books to the Library.

Wayne Cocroft has supplied copies of drawings from the Hick Hargreaves Collection in Bolton Central Library covering machinery supplied to the Mills. These will be incorporated in the Non Building Drawings element.

### Objects

The Friends have taken delivery of a variety of objects from Bishopton and Fort Halstead - see comment below on Acquisitions.

## 7.Documents on Loan

### Wallis Family Abel Collection

The Wallis family, who have connection with not only Frederick Abel but also with Barnes Wallis of the bouncing bomb, have made available on loan for study a valuable collection of original documents relating to Frederick Abel.

## 8.Visits

### Kenneth Major

It was gratifying when Mr. Kenneth Major, a mills expert, accepted my invitation to visit the Mills and conduct a survey of the Hydraulic Press water wheel. Mr. Major concluded that this wheel was a rare example of the work of Sir Wm.Fairbairn's firm, with only three other Fairbairn wheels known to survive in the UK. This validation of provenance by a respected authority could be a valuable element in any fund raising endeavour for restoration of the Press.

### Nigel Crompton

Mr. Nigel Crompton, Asst. General Secretary of the Fire Brigade Society, visited and copies of photographs and site plans relating to his work on fire prevention in munitions factories were supplied to him. Since then Mr. Crompton's staff have supplied various documents to us.

## 9.Documentary Support for Projects

Machinery and barge drawings have been supplied to support Friends project proposals for building a replica incorporating mill and barge refurbishment.

## 10.Assistance to Family History Researchers

Information from the Archive has been supplied to family history researchers. This has been mutually beneficial since they have been able to supply information previously unknown to the Mills. Also, it has been possible on some occasions to put different elements of a family in touch with each other who had previously been unaware of the existence of the other element after they had supplied information independently. This assistance has resulted in several donations to the Mills.

## 11. Historical Assistance

General assistance has been given to historical enquirers.

#### 12. Talk

I have given a talk on the Archive to the Gunpowder and Explosives History Group

#### 13. Assistance to the Waltham Abbey Museum

Historical information and documentary material on loan for use in an exhibition has been supplied to the Waltham Abbey Museum.

#### 14. Waltham Abbey Historical Society

It is hoped to develop joint projects with the Waltham Abbey Historical Society.

#### 15. Displays and Exhibitions

Archive material has been employed in Mills displays at various events, such as the annual Essex history fair.

#### 16. Publications

Utilising Archive and other material, I have contributed a series of historical articles on the buildings of the Mills and the development of explosives to the Friends Newsletter Touchpaper. The series on the buildings has been incorporated in a booklet which appears to have successfully sold in the Mills shop, outside bookshops and to Friends. In addition, the Central Reference Section of the Essex Library Service has purchased several copies. I have initiated a series of commentaries on items from the Archive in Touchpaper.

I contributed an article on the waterways of the Mills to the journal of the Waterways Recovery Group (WRG). Arising from previous discussions, restoration of the Mills waterways system, or part of it, is on the WRG official possible future restoration projects list and this article has been added to their information folder.

#### 17. Assistance with Enid Clay Memoir

Although not principally concerned with the Mills, I am assisting Enid Clay ( who was born in 1920 ) with amendments/additions to her memoir of life in and around Waltham Abbey. The connection with the Mills is that Enid's grandfather, father and most of her nine brothers were employed at the Mills and references to this have now been amplified. It is hoped that the Mills will ultimately benefit by being able to obtain copies of the memoir at cost, when it is reprinted, for sale in the shop.

#### 18. Seminar

I attended a day seminar on the documentation, care and storage of document and object collections at the Essex Record Office in Chelmsford.

This was organised under the auspices of Museums in Essex, East of England Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and funded by the Museum Development Fund.

The day divided into two parts - morning documents, afternoon objects.

#### Documents

The session on the documentation, care and storage of documents was conducted by a representative of the Colchester Museums Service. He was largely concerned with

explaining the procedures which it is necessary to demonstrate when applying for registration and accreditation with the MDA ( Museum Documentation Association) under the Spectrum system which lays down UK Museum Documentation standards. It was emphasised that considerable benefit would result from accreditation in the form of opening the way to grants.

Voluminous information was supplied on what was required, which I have retained. This provides a very useful reference of best practice. However to attempt to make application, even for registration, would be a very large exercise, involving considerable expenditure of staff time.

### Objects

Objects were similarly covered by another representative of the Colchester Museums Service, who gave a similarly full and useful exposition of best practice.

Although I am not familiar with the detail of temperature, humidity, light control etc. procedures which apply to the objects in the main exhibition I assume that all this was covered when the exhibition was set up and broadly conforms with best practice.

However, our situation on the balance of the objects which we hold is very different. They are scattered between The Lodge, Walton House and Building L181 and to bring them into line with best practice would involve a start again exercise similar to that gone through on documents requiring volunteer availability which at present we have not got.

### Acquisitions

Best practice on acquisitions includes issuing proper documentation when an acquisition is made. MDA supply forms for this purpose and we employ these. However a register of acquisitions should also be kept and separate document and object movement records to enable location if required.

Over the year the Friends have taken delivery of a series of objects, mainly from Bishopton and Fort Halstead and it was not possible to follow best practice on documentation of the acquisitions. This was partly because of difficulty of communication on delivery times etc. and it might be useful to remind the Friends Chairman that adequate warning of delivery must be given if any further acquisitions are planned, in order that a proper procedure can be drawn up.

## **Objectives and Considerations - 2005 and beyond**

Objectives and considerations for 2005 and beyond are as follows.

A requirement for Funds is indicated by '- FUNDS ' and for volunteers by '- VOLS '.

### 1.WASC

Physical check of WASC envelopes to determine material now held.

Label envelopes

Sort and add approx. 100 items awaiting entry to WASC and label envelopes

Amend database index as necessary to reflect check and additions

### 2.Abel and Congreve Document Replacement

Continue search for replacement Abel and Congreve documents by contact with organisations such as Royal Society of Chemistry - FUNDS

### 3.Abel Collection

Seek to add to Abel papers with a view to establishing an Abel document sub collection - FUNDS

#### 5. Non Building Drawings

Ascertain all non building drawings held, including those embedded in WASC.  
Establish database index

#### 6. Library

Continue cataloguing and indexing

#### 7. Photograph Collection

Sort, catalogue and index photograph and slide collection

This is quite a challenging assignment and would require understanding of the history, processes and buildings of the site and the ability to bring coherence to what is now a disorganised collection. Possibly an ex employee would be most suitable. - VOLS

#### 8. WAPP

Continue data input for the Waltham Abbey Personnel Project.

#### 9. Documentation

Consider whether improvements can be made to existing documentation for document and object acquisitions in the light of best practice and administer if required.

#### 10. Object Storage

Consider the storage and documentation situation for objects and administer volunteers in a start again exercise - VOLS

#### 11. Archive Room Equipment

Determine storage and display system requirements for Archive Room and make application for funds - FUNDS

#### 12. Touchpaper

Continue compilation of booklets based on series in Touchpaper  
Establish and continue Extracts from the Archive series in Touchpaper

#### 13. Abel Papers - Wallis Collection

Continue study of Wallis family collection of Abel papers

#### 14. Life of Abel

Write a life of Abel which it is hoped might be considered suitable for presentation to the Wallis family - FUNDS

#### 15. Kaiser Trust Book

Write Gunpowder and Chemical Explosives pre WWII sections of educational book to be funded by the Kaiser Trust

#### 16. Waltham Abbey Historical Society

Continue link established with Waltham Abbey Historical Society with a view to initiating joint projects

#### 17. Superintendent Career Summaries

Compile a summary of the careers of the RA Superintendents of the Mills

#### 18. Canal History

In co-operation with Richard Thomas write a history of the development of the Mills waterways system for submission to a canal history learned journal

#### 19. Hydraulic Trail

Consider feasibility of establishing 'Hydraulic Trail' for older school science students with appropriate explanation and make proposal to management if considered feasible

#### 20. Friends Projects

Give assistance on projects when required by Friends Chairman on documentation, drawings, planning approval etc.

#### 21. Digitalisation

Consider digitalisation of building drawings and maps and plans as a more convenient means of viewing them without damaging the fabric - FUNDS

#### 22. Exhibitions and Displays

Ascertain whether it is now official policy to initiate exhibitions and displays of documents and small objects.

If so, if required by management examine sourcing/cost of display cases, boards etc. with a view to application for funds.

If funds obtained if required by management suggest exhibition themes, select documents, write captions etc. For that part of the work being done by volunteers administer volunteers, see below.

Consider whether document display should be based on photography to avoid damage to documents - FUNDS, VOLS

#### 23. ERIH Anchor Point

Ascertain whether it is official policy to put on a permanent document display in connection with ERIH Anchor Point scheme.

Balance of comment as for 22 - FUNDS, VOLS

#### 24. Wider Publicity

Consider whether we should seek wider publicity for the Archive

#### 25. Archive Room

Design display for Archive Room

This would be done in conjunction with work on exhibitions - FUNDS, VOLS

#### 26. Conservation Advice

The Essex Museum Development Officer has suggested that she might be able to arrange for a conservator to visit and advise. Consider further.

#### 27. Non Military Use

Consider ways of expanding theme in displays of explosives having important non military use, how the manufacturing processes were the same and how they were an important segment of the organic chemical industry

#### 28. Hydraulic Information Board

Formulate wording for Hydraulic Information board to be installed in Accumulator building L136

#### 29. Booking Out System

Initiate a system of booking out records for documents taken out on loan from WASC

#### 30. Computer Operating Instructions

Operating instructions, including example, for WAPP computer input to be compiled

#### 31. IT supervision, training, advice

## Objective Allocation

At present the personnel available for archive duties are:

Myself, Richard Thomas, Ian MacFarlane, Derek Arnes, Sandra Taylor, Patricia Nunes.

Objective references and personnel allocated to them are:

1. Myself

Objective : 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25,  
26, 27, 28, 29

2. Myself and Richard Thomas

Objective : 1, 2, 5, 18

3. Ian

Objective : 30, 31

4. Derek and Sandra

Objective : 8

5. Patricia

Objective : 6

Additional Volunteers

Objectives 7, 10, 22, 23, 25 would require volunteers additional to the above personnel.

On 22, 23, 25 this would involve work on display boards etc. and it would be very advantageous to have someone familiar with work of this nature in previous employment. In this respect Richard Penfold, Secretary of the Friends, would seem well suited.

Les Tucker