Touchpaper

DECEMBER 94

ISSUE 12



CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

Nearly the end of another year and I hope you are all well prepared for Christmas.

It's been a good year for Touchpaper with our numbers still increasing as more and more of our ex-colleagues are getting in touch. Another successful re-union was held in October but, more about that later.

I sincerely hope you all have a happy Christmas and wishing you all the very best for the coming year.

Norman Paul Editor

TOUCHPAPER PUBLICATION ADDRESS

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CONTENTS:

TOUCH BYTES Letters, news and gossip

BIGGER BYTES
Longer letters or short articles

SADDER NEWS (but some happier)

ABBEY UP-DATE

'94 RE-UNION REPORT

A STROLL AROUND SOUTH SITE

AROUND THE WORLD The Third and Final Part

ADDITIONS TO THE REGISTER

TOUCHPAPER CHRISTMAS CARD



TOUCH

BYTES

Thankyou for sending me Touchpaper and for the tribute to Ivor. He knew so much about the Waltham Abbey Site and will be nice to read about the developments through the papers. Thanks also for the invite to the re-union. I don't think I'll come this year but I wish every success and hope to come at a later date. Audrey Quickenden

.....

Please find enclosed registration form to add my name to the register. I visited the Abbey recently on a touring holiday, catching up with many old friends. Derrick and Beryl Wren told me of the newsletter and lent me back copies which I am working my way through. I left N Site in November 1985 on level transfer to the Home Office Forensic Science Service Laboratory at Wetherby in W Yorks and I'm still there now, fighting the powers of evil, spending most of my time in court; on the right side for a change! It was good to read of many familiar names corresponding through the newsletter, positively nostalgic (mind you, nostalgia's not what it used to be you know!)

I'm not sure whether I shall make the re-union this year but hope to in the future. Thanks for the opportunity to re-gain contact with so many old colleagues,

Brian Ball

re: Bob Rainbird's letter (Touchpaper September 1994)
I thought his praise of my opinions, though richly deserved, embarrassingly fulsome. Of whom else may it be said that he is so rarely wrong that such occasion remains vivid in the mind after 34 years?

.....

Hay fever is a relatively new disorder; its incidence in the population and duration in the sufferer are both increasing. It was first noted about the time the tea rose was introduced and the railways extended; hence its first common name, 'rose -nose'. Academics, wiser than we, called it 'railway rhinorrhoea'. One suspects they knew as little about it then as now.

While affording Bob all sympathy, he may be reminded of his good fortune in remaining able to complain at his age of 73; vastly in excess of the mean age of death in general practitioners! As visitin doctor to the Establishment for decades, I had some acquaintance, and over a long time, with many individuals and with many Sections. Looking back now, one realizes that the Establishment was quite wonderful and quite unique. I have the fondest memories of the place, personalities and social ambiency; there cannot again be created its likeness and I have come to recognize that to have worked there was a privilege.

As for me, my wife died last year so I continue to occupy myself. Some contractors for decontamination and recovery for use
of the North Site required some degree of medical input and as a
result I was given a most interesting tour of the site. Changes are
so great that it is sometimes difficult to recall which buildings
were where. The work is being done with great care and to very
high standards. It is plain that the site will contain a remarkable
display of industrial archaeology, including, one hope, onself
stuffed and standing next to Sister MacCarthy from Carrigeen,
who had so commanding a manner when she said 'Drop your
breeches now' that I never recall any man who showed not instant obedience and I have always rejoiced at her never saying it

"The people who were not there will never know" All good wishes John Llewelyn ..many thanks for the September issue of Touchpaper. It was very much appreciated and it was so nice to catch up on all the news. Once again, many thanks,

Stan Bennett

...please put my name on the mailing list and give my regards to those who knew me at the Fort. As you may know I was retired on medical grounds last May after I had a heart attack. At the moment I am waiting for a date to go to Guys Hospital for a bypass operation,

.....

.....

Yours

Bill Tebby

Having read John Vernon's letter regarding Dr Johnson's retirement I agree that it was a retirement speech to be treasured. I happen to have a recording of the speech, presented to me by Peter Barker. Unfortunately this is on the old reel to reel tape but I may be able to transfer it to cassette and if so it could be circulated to those interested using a 'pass on system'. Before I do this however I would like to obtain the pre-agreement of Mrs Johnson. If any one is interested perhaps they could contact me but, more important at this stage - does anyone know Mrs Johnson's current address?

Dennis Eldridge

(NB Dennis can be contacted through Touchpaper)

...Yes! It's me again! I felt that I should at least show willing and put pen to Touchpaper.

I enclose a small piece of my life in the employment at Ministry of Supply, PDE Aberporth, ARD, Fort Halstead etc. etc.

Someone once accused me, in an IPCS meeting, of wanting "Potted palms and Cups of Tea". I wonder what sort of bathroom they had? (see article on next page).

Yours Sincerely

Bob Rainbird

...many thanks for arranging another successful re-union this year. Thanks also to the caterers - I thought they did very well this year - no queuing!!

Best Wishes for 1995 and hoping to see you all again next year. Sincerely

Win Clarke

(Apologies for not providing a nice <u>printed</u> badge at the Reunion Win - I found it when I got home- it had slipped down behind some papers. Ed)

DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE

The next issue is due in March 1995

The deadline for letters, articles etc

will be St Valentines day

send by letter or fax 01959 516023 or just phone it in on 01959 515632

SADDER NEWS

Sad to report a number of losses

Charlie Miller

Died 22nd August 1994 Aged 81

"Charlie" joined Waltham Abbey in 1949 after service at Glascoed, Bridgwater and Shell Mex House. He served in E Branch on Pyrotechnics and was responsible for many of the "firework displays" on Long Walk. He played cricket, not only for the Establishment, but also for various Ministries, the Civil Service and Minor Counties League Cricket for Hertfordshire. He was always interested in watching sport (especially cricket and rugby union). He was also a keen gardener (remember the sunflowers on the 'patio' outside his office?) and a gifted artist whose work was widely exhibited and enjoyed.

He retired in 1974 and was very active until about 5 years ago when a series of illnesses started to slow him down.

He leaves a wife, 3 daughters and 9 grandchildren, all of whom he was immensely proud. Paul Kennett

Kenneth Downing MRE

Died 26th October 1994 Aged 86

I am writing to tell you the sad news that my father recently passed away. Father worked as personnel officer at Waltham Abbey between 1952 & 1968 and thoroughly enjoyed his time there. I too have many pleasant memories of those years. Yours Sincerely Felicity Burgess

Recent information from Vic Clifford:

Marjorie Hodge died in August this year. Donald Hodge is still well and living near his son at Norwich.

Our sincere condolences to all those concerned

On a Happier Note:

Andrew Sanderson, currently working at NATO in Brussels has informed us of his latest addition

"David John" Born at home 19th August. Weight 3.58 Kg (Andrew thinks that's 7lb 12oz)

All doing well. No complications except that the Belgian authorities seem to need hundreds of forms to be convinced that Denyse really has had a baby!

BIGGER

BYTES

RECOLLECTIONS

"I can confirm "Smokey" Thomas's remarks about the lack of facilities at Fort Halstead in 1942 as I was also one of the small advance party. However there was one little known facility which I found very useful as you will find out later.

At that time I was lodging in Sevenoaks in a neat terraced house in Argyle Road, kept by two middle-aged spinsters, sadly both deceased now. There was no bathroom - quite common in those days. Until my parents moved house in the early thirties, they didn't have a bathroom either and used the traditional tin bath in front of the fire; no problems! No problem for my kindly landladies in Sevenoaks either! The old Victorian Council Swimming Pool and Slipper Baths were literally just over the road. One of the ladies knew the Baths Supertindent and had told him to expect "Their Young Man" next Saturday morning and asked him to show me where to go. This did seem a bit unnecessary to me but I supposed they thought (innocent young man as I was) that I needed 'mothering'. Inside the splendid mosaic floored vestibule there was a mahogany box office with a notice saying "Slipper Bath Tickets Here' so I couldn't see any point in asking for the Superintendent and just bought a ticket and joined the long queue of the great unwashed of Sevenoaks. I was somewhat shocked when my number came up. Unlike the Slipper Baths in my home town, which were terraced brick-built chalets by the side of the swimming pool, these were virtually PUBLIC baths. It was one long badly lit room with six or seven open-top cubicles down one side with open-top, disturbingly low, chest-high, chocolate brown painted panelled wood partitions. No tiled walls - only dark green peeling gloss paint. A few bare electric bulbs penetrated the fog steam with grotty duckboards. There was a lot of noise!

I was ushered into a cubicle with an unlockable door swaying in the draught.

Only then did I realise that the taps were outside the cubicle operated by a Gauleiter who marched up and down responding to agonised cries of "More cold in No.1", "More hot in No.2". The bath itself was spotlessly clean but disfigured by the mandatory wartime 'Plimsoll Line' which looked as though it had been painted on with a vandalised brush. The water was scalding hot and my shout for "More Cold in No.1" was answered by a cry of "Hurry up, others are waiting". Visions of verrucas scared me from putting my bare feet on the dirty looking duckboards so I had to go through the acrobatics of stripping down whilst retaining my shoes and socks. By standing on one leg, one shoe and sock was removed and with one foot in the bath, perilously balanced the other foot was bared. It wasn't easy but it was worse getting out, when one had to dry one foot, put on sock and shoe etc. etc. I can still balance on one leg for a minute or two at age 73! When I told my landladies that the Baths were not very nice they were surprised and said I should have seen the Superintendent and ask which baths to use. Next time I did seek out the 'Super' and he said to follow him down another corridor to, as I thought, some first class baths. He unlocked an unlabelled door and showed me into a veritable palace of delight. Tiled walls and floor, separate bathrooms with lockable doors and taps under your own control; plus, a large tablet of soap. I said that I didn't realise there were First and Second Class baths. He said that there was only one class of Gents bath and that I was in the Ladies section and, as long as I didn't make too much noise and came out the side door, no one would know! Now and then, ladies voices echoed around but they could have been the cleaners. The nervous strain of peering out of the door to slip out without anyone seeing me was too much for me. I eventually finished up using the 'facilities' in the brand new Boiler House at Fort Halstead, provided for the stokers. It was a real bathroom - modern, brand new, tiled from ceiling to floor, thousands of gallons of hot water on tap and high grade 'sulphite' anti-dermatitic WD soap. There was only one snag - the acrobatic ritual of one-legged shoe and sock removal was still required as the beautiful quarry-tiled floor was covered about 2mm deep in pulverised coal dust. I could see my footprints in it - and Oh yes! the kindly stoker had to give me a handful of cotton tow to bung up the plughole as the plug had been nicked!

Bob Rainbird

RIP "Sherry"

Dear Editor

It is with regret that on my first (and probably my only!) contribution is the sad news that I have to report. On 15th August Nigel and I made a very difficult and painful decision to have "Sherry" put to sleep. Any of you will remember that adorable fluffy longhaired black and white cat when we lived in Monkswood Avenue. We calculated that she was over twenty years old and had, over her years, given us and our two girls many funny moments. Up until almost the last day she scaled the garden fence onto the garage roof to lie, fully stretched, sun bathing until late afternoon when she heard Nigel's voice (Yes It's still loud!) whereupon she had to wait for him to get out the step ladder and carry her down. A truly determined character to the end. Unfortunately, as well as being arthritic she rapidly went blind and deaf and became very disoriented.

Many amusing incidents spring to mind but one particular afternoon, many years ago we had only had her a few weeks when she ambled into Bill Corthine's garden. His little grandson appeared saying 'Nice pussy". Now that depended on Sherry's mood and my heart was in my mouth because she had just minutes before bitten me quite hard because she didn't like the hoover, I think. Anyway, on that occasion she behaved impeccably although she later dug Bill's garden up!

Only a few months ago she surprised us all; chasing birds had long since been regarded as a waste of time and energy but, no way was she going to allow a squirrel on our front lawn. She soon chased him off!

Fond memories of a remarkable cat who will be greatly missed by us a family.

Best Wishes to you all

Valerie Evans (ex-Personnel Office)

LAST OF THE SUMMER WINE

AUGUST 94 At the 'Owl':

We have been delighted to see that more wives are coming to these meetings. Dave Manners and John Williams brought their better halves this time.

Jock McDougal, not to be outdone, brought his two sisters who were paying their annual visit to carry out the cleaning of his flat (I hear they do this every year - whether it needs it or not!). I believe there was some discussion about hiring a skip!

A mystery object was provided for identification and this was first thought to be the remains of a concrete proofstand wall. However, Ron Treadgold, who had brought it in, thought that I, of all people, should have recognised a piece of a 'concrete boat' (He still doesn't really believe that concrete will float - how dense can you get?)

We then went on to examine and discuss the latest set of plans for building no less than 83 houses and flats on the site of 'lake ERDE' where the tennis courts, admin, Powdermill Club and Director's buildings used to be. The general reaction was that there were too many units and wouldn't it have been better to leave it to nature!

Bryan Howard

PS I saw Sandra Day and her husband in Lowestoft recently and they tell me that a good definition of Redundancy is - 'A Sponsored Walk'.

Many thanks to all our 1994 contributors

May there be many more in 1995!

THE 1994 RE-UNION

Once again we had a very successful re-union in the Waltham Abbey Town Hall on 21st October. The numbers were slightly down on last year, just under 180, but there were many new faces and in particular we were pleased to see Dick Watkins and very pleased that he brought fis father-in-law, Tom Baggott, with him. Tom used to work in P2 as a Process Worker and still looks very fit and well at the grand old age of 92! There still seemed plenty for everybody to talk about and the bar staff tell me they were very busy again this year! A highlight of the day was an exhibition of the water colours by Freda Titford that was reported on in the last issue. These were much appreciated and I believe that Freda has many commissions for copies - I certainly had my eye on one in particular.

You will recall that a questionnaire was sent with the booking form asking if we should continue to hold these annually. We have to report that, of those responding, the overwhelming majority (95%) indicated their support for annual re-unions. Whilst this level of support is sustained we will continue to hold annual re-unions.

Unfortunately we were unable to organise a site visit this year but hope to try for this next year when perhaps there will be much more to see. A small number of people did visit South Site in the morning but since the numbers were very limited and it was only arranged a couple of days before we were unable to issue a general notice. A separate report on their visit is given further on in this issue.

We have yet to book the date for next year but this will be done soon and details given in our next issue.

Norman Paul

On the subject of re-unions, we have been given a picture of an Old Comrades re-union held in September 1969 by Ron Treadgold, but he cannot identify all of those shown. Can you help?



left to right standing: Vera Lodge, Pam Colley, Amy Holland, Joan Smith, Alf Nicholls left to right seated: - - (???)

Can you fill in the blanks?

Editorial note: See! We do have the technology. Despite this old print the quality here isn't too bad is it? We are now more confident that your pictures can be reproduced in

Touchpaper so you can start sending them in again!

ABBEY UPDATE

Little to report on either Site at this time. The only news we have is the published plan for housing on the North Site which has been issued recently. This is reproduced here without comment but there is a space below for you to fill in your own feelings on your personal copy. Please feel free to continue on a separate sheet if necessary!



AROUND THE WORLD IN 93

with John Williams THE FINAL LEG

BALI AWFUL (?)

Coming to Bali from Australia we found it very different. It was packed with people all rushing about in all sorts of different vehicles on very narrow roads and all seeming to want to use the same bit of road as your taxi!

The religion of the area is plain to see in the vast number of shrines scattered along the roadsides and in the decorations hung up in the trees and houses. Our hotel was a complex of Indonesian villas in an area adjoining the beach. My sister (who accompanied us and is included in the "we") had been taken ill in Australia just before we left and was getting worse but we didn't want to see a doctor in Bali. We had to be taken back to our room at the hotel during our visit to see some of the sights on a taxi tour. We visited a temple where a play was performed which seemed to be very like one of our pantomimes but told of the triumph of good over evil - so we were told. Each village specialises in some form of craft; one did exquisite silverwork, the next wood carving and many others. It was at this stage that we had to return to the hotel and we spent the rest of our stay in Bali sitting in the grounds of the hotel, watching the world go by, and hoping my sister would get better. This was interspersed with dips in the sea which was warm and very calm being sheltered by the reef about a quarter of a mile off shore. The disadvantage of this was the vast number of hawkers trying to sell us anything from watches and 'gold' rings to food of an indeterminate nature. We counted the vendors on one occasion and there was one for every minute for the hour we counted. After the first few they all got a bit wearing as they were very persistent and just would not take no for an answer. I suppose that after a quite long while you would become hardened to it and take it all for granted.

SINGAPORE

Eventually our time in Bali came to its end and we flew on to Singapore. One again this was a real eye opener. By now we were getting used to the idea that, despite the warm weather, it was getting near to Christmas, but seeing all the decorations in blazing sunshine still took a lot of getting used to. Here we even saw Santa Claus in all his red gowns - he must have been boiled! The Christmas lights in Singapore were fantastic. They make Oxford Street look very quiet and subdued by comparison. It also seems a bit odd when you realise that most of the inhabitants are not Christian, but I suppose they have their own festivals at the appropriate time. As my sister was not recovering as quickly as she would have liked we persuaded her to see a doctor. As soon as he heard the symptoms he said "Stop taking the tablets!" (malaria tablets) and prescribed some suitable tablets to ease the problem. So we all took his advice and left the tablets off. She slowly started to recover (Eventually however we had to arrange for her to fly home early from Hong Kong - once home it still took her about 6 weeks to fully recover). While still in Singapore we visited the Botanical Gardens

and saw lots of orchids growing in the open air. You could even buy gold-plated orchid flowers (for a price) and these could be made into brooches and other costume jewellery. A boat trip took us to a temple on an island in the harbour which was dedicated to turtles. There was a pond in the middle of the island which was their home. The temple buildings were more like a pleasure park to our western eyes but not like the temple we visited in Bali. More shopping visits and a look at the outside of the Raffles Hotel. Lots of posh cars outside and some Indians in white uniforms to see that the visitors were looked after in the manner to which they had paid to become accustomed! One of the things that stood out was the vast number of ships of all sizes in the harbour. We saw them better when we took a boat trip and they were everywhere - hundreds of them. They were coming and going all the time.

We had an early start the next day to catch our flight to our next port of call:

HONG KONG

Hong Kong was again something completely different. There was also a huge difference between those who lived in the twenty or thirty floor tower blocks and those that don't.! Each window in a tower block represents the living accommodation of one family. They have one room which has to serve all their needs, it has an area of about 30 square meters. Washing hangs out of the window and often as not all household refuse is thrown out of the window as well. It leaves a lot to be desired. The other side of the coin is the tower blocks of shops. These are as different from the homes as chalk and cheese. Again the Christmas decorations were quite something. A trip on the harbour was also very interesting. We saw hundreds of junks on which people spend their lives and the enormous floating restaurants at Aberdeen. Again, like Singapore, there were boats and ships buzzing about the sea between the island and the mainland. After my sister went home we took a trip round the island to what was to be seen. We saw the Peak in the mist, Aberdeen from the land and the water in daylight. We saw Stanley market where you could buy almost anything. We saw the island golf course where it costs seven figures to join (in English money not Hong Kong) and some of the houses the "rich"\people live in. The contrast is enormous. We also saw the island race course. Next day we visited the Space Museum and wandered around Kowloon.

Finally after two and a quarter months it was time to say goodbye and take our plane back to Heathrow. The flight was long, about 14 hours, but we were able to sleep quite a bit of the time. Apart from that there isn't a lot to do on an airplane.

Well that's it folks! Hope you found something of interest in this marathon account of our marathon travels. John Williams

Many thanks John for sharing this with us. Any other offers from readers? Ed.

A STROLL AROUND SOUTH SITE

On the morning of the re-union a small group of the LOSW members had a stroll round the South Site. The arrangements were made only a few days before so there was no time for an announcement in the last issue of Touchpaper.

It was intended that the group should be limited to no more than 30 because of the lack of car parking space! My apologies to all of those who would have liked to have seen South Site. However it is hoped that another visit may be possible next year.

The party gathered at the Quinton gate at 10.30; notable absentees were Alan and Marjorie Short who had managed to lock themselves out of their house and were indulging in a spot of housebreaking. We drove round to the P2 Office Block, parked and then strolled through the P1 Process area to the Dutch Barn and ten along Centre Way to the PR area where some 40 private firms are now housed. The old canteen has been divided into separate units and there are no less than 3 firms in there! All the buildings in the PR area are let except for the Admin. building which is too big for any one firm, the G432 labs (sealed off) and the front of the P&M Room (too contaminated). There is even a small cafe on site to cater for all these firms. I learned of all these facts from Ed Andrews who is the site manager, based at Westcott but who visits Waltham Abbey most weeks. "Mission Control" is at the P2 office block and when Ed is not there Dai Mathias's daughter, Lynn, is in "control". Dave Malcolm also visits to see how his latest baby is getting on. This is an ion plasma spectrograph for automated analysis of metal content of soil samples from North Site.

To continue with the stroll; we retraced our steps back along Centre Way towards ISRG where 4 members ha worked in the past. Another small group, who shall be nameless, had a nostalgic wander through the P2 Process Area, detected a tree full of eating apples near the old "Hot and Cold Store" and indulged in a spot of scrumping. (And very nice they were too Bryan. Thanks very much for the samples. Ed.)

Eventually we reassembled at the car park and then had some difficulty driving past the Dutch Barn as some saplings were being removed as part of a programme of grounds maintenance. Generally, South Site is well covered with saplings away from the PR area. It is interesting to note that the site area south of Black Ditch Road has been designated as "Green Belt" and will therefore be subject to different and possibly more stringent planing laws than the rest of the site.

Bryan Howard

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE





NO PRIZES!

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from 'Touchpaper'

THE TOUCH PAPER REGISTER

ADDITIONS

as at 27th November 1994

name	currently_at	WA dates	WA section 's
Geoff Allen	Waltham Abbey (rtd)	1982 - 91	MDP
John Anderson	RO Chorley	1976 - 79	P1/PR
Allan Ball	Home Office, Wetherby	1978 - 85	GC
Stan Bennett	Upshire [rtd]	1970 - 84	PR
Jim Brent	Hoddesdon [rtd]	1935 - 80	Safety
Pat Bush	Waltham Abbey	1966 - 91	?
Dave Catton	RO Summerfield	1981 - 90	P2
Robert Dean	Enfield [rtd]	1979 - 89	P1
Edna Donaldson	Waltham Abbey [rtd]	1979 - 88	Messenger
Shirley Eichberger	Thetford Norfolk [rtd]	1951 - 58	Admin.
Norman Elliott	Cheshunt [rtd]	1936 - 82	Engineering
Brenda Elsom	Clacton [rtd]	1972 - 83	Messenger
Valerie Evans	Northants	1972 - 85	Personnel Office
Terry Foulsham	Waltham Abbey	1972 - 91	MDP
Keith Fowler	RO Summerfield	1978 - 89	P2/Initiators/Safety
John Garrett	Hoddesdon [rtd]	1974 - 91	Safety/Hazards/ISRG
John Garrett	Hoddesdon [rtd]	1974 - 91	?
George Griffiths	Nazeing [rtd]	1949 - 80	Fire Brigade
Graham Harris	Aylesbury [rtd]	1980 - 86	Engineering
Fred Mansfield	Nazeing [rtd]	1968 - 88	Electricians
Dot Revill	Waltham Abbey	1973 - 90	Typing Pool
Colin Smith	Enfield	1977 - 90	P1
Win Smith	Waltham Abbey	1967 - 82	Cleaners/Typing Pool
Beryl Surridge	Waltham Abbey	1953 - 60	Typing Pool
John Surridge	Waltham Abbey	1972 - 78	Sheet Metal Shop
Bill Tebby	Maidstone [rtd]	1955 - 91	Stoker/TR ET5
Julie Wackett	Waltham Abbey [rtd]	1966 - 77	Cleaner
Dick Watkins	Deal KENT	1956 - 84	Glassblowers
Bob Wright	Epping	? - 89	Drawing Office