

Touchpaper

March 1995

ISSUE 13

EDITORIAL

It seems only a short time ago that we were wishing everyone a Merry Christmas and here we are, nearly Easter.

I thought we were going to have an early Spring until a couple of weeks ago when the weather changed so suddenly. We now seem to have combined wild March winds with heavy April showers turning to sleet and snow. I was very concerned last week when I fully expected Sevenoaks to become Oneoaks again! My main concern was one of the larger trees under which I usually park the car but it all seems to have 'blown' over now.

This issue is a little thin as articles seem to be 'out of season'. Perhaps we can expect a new crop when the weather gets warmer.

You will note from the pictures in this issue that our technology is really improving so we are now in a position to print your photographs as well as your articles!

This issue also gives advance notice of an E Branch reunion as well as our annual one at the Old Town Hall. Further details in our next couple of issues.

Best Wishes to you all

Norman Paul
Editor

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TOUCH

BYTES

“ Very many thanks for sending ‘Touchpaper. It was really quite warming to hear of the old patch and its inhabitants after all these years. Barbara and I look forward to hearing more; and attending the next reunion.

My realisation that people still know and care about Waltham abbey has come at an opportune time as I have been conned into giving a chat to our Village association on a topic of my choice. I have been thinking of a topic they haven’t heard before and I thought it would be a good idea to give them a slug of history about the Gunpowder Mills. I would be very helpful if I could borrow some slides to illustrate my talk. Can anyone help, or point me in the right direction?

Best Wishes from Barbara and myself. We both look forward to meeting many of you at the next reunion.”

Sincerely

Steve Bell.

A set of slides have been sent from the Touchpaper archives. Ed.

“You will probably be most surprised to hear from me after all these years. I have recently been in touch with Mike Healey and he gave me a copy of ‘Touchpaper’ which I have read with great interest. can you please add my name to the register.

My sojourn at Waltham was from October 1946 to early 1977 so presumably I am one of the senior citizens in more senses than one - I am nearly 79! I would welcome information on the next reunion which I would like to attend.

I have been living in Sheffield since late 1980, on my own, in a modern flat and I now do my experimental work in the kitchen! I’m very active, playing golf twice a week, duplicate bridge twice a week and go dancing (sequence and ballroom) 2-3 times a week.

I’ve lost touch with all the old WA crowd, except Alec Pryde who I see occasionally.”

Leslie Phillips.

“The latest issue has landed on my desk and prompted me to write. Nigel (ex- MDP at WA, now working in the Planning Office at Summerfield) and I had a baby boy - James George - the 7th June last year. Nigel reports that he found the whole experience remarkably painless!

We have fond memories of our “Abbey” days and especially the Social Club, which was where Nigel and I met, being introduced by the late Bob McGuchan with the phrase “This is Nigel - but you don’t want to have anything to do with him, he’s trouble!!”

I am now back at work and find the business of dealing with rocket motors very restful after months of nothing but babies bottoms and all that regurgitated milk!”

Sue Salsbury (Née Baalham) ex-P2 Section

“Following the article in the last Touchpaper (Dec 94) relating to a ‘stroll around South Site’ I would like to pass on the following in the hope that it’s of interest to all those who worked in the area.

The old safety building R662 and the following Stove buildings; R646, 649, 650, 651, 654, 655, 657, 658, 659 and 660 have now got a new lease of life. An Italian grower is using them for mushrooms! Some are full of round plastic bags of growing medium, others have staging set up ready for growing, but the biggest insult is that the office block that used to house ISRG is also being used for the same purpose! The long corridor kept so highly polished by the cleaner ladies and where the staff took their tea, the ‘high tech’ conference room, plus other offices are now full of plastic bags and boxes of exhausted compost full of mouldy mushrooms. How the mighty have fallen!”

George Savill

**DEADLINE FOR
NEXT ISSUE**

25th May 1995

BIGGER

BYTES

WALTHAM ABBEY SCRAPBOOK

Since this issue of 'Touchpaper' will be nearer Easter than Christmas this may seem a little unseasonal. About mid-December five LOSW members and Bill Smith took John Littlefair to Chasneys for a pre-Christmas lunch. We were all still yarning away at 3pm and John Littlefair, who will admit to being 83+, asked if anything had been heard of 'that young Geoff Stocks?'. We also wondered where Norman Foster was now that he's moved away from Cheshunt - anybody got any clues?

Lake ERDE, where the tennis courts used to be, has been joined by another stretch of water which might be called 'Lake Hoppit!' This latest piece of landscaping (or should that be 'Lakescaping'?) is the result of decontamination as far as H10. Digging is continuing where H8 magazine used to be and at H67. This looks likely to result in an even larger body of water that will probably be christened 'Lake Superior'.

It would appear that all of North Site and all of South Site lie within the Green Belt (whatever that may mean in terms of what building is allowed in this day and age).

Two new owners spent their first Christmas in their flats in Lea View, Anna Costen and Barbara Colley. Geoff and Pam Colley seem to spend all their time working on Barbara's flat, this taking precedence over their own home!

1994 had been a quiet year for the Residents Association up until December when there was a blockage in the sewer near number 90 Monkswood. This was ascribed to the 'Crest' houses that were built on the old cinder carpark (Bob Rainbird said something like this would happen). It seems that an 'interceptor' was fitted the wrong way round but 'Crest' have promised to re-install it correctly.

Two interesting letters accompanied Christmas cards; one from Allen Clarke in Australia where he's kept busy making toys for his grandchildren, friends and charities (Could be the start of an Australian 'Toys 'R' Us). The other letter was from Beryl Barratt who tells me that Tony is now a Quality Manager at HSE Buxton and that Mike Bagley has been 'brought in from the cold' (Sheffield) as Chief assessor.

Finally, I'd like to echo the Editor's usual plea of "What's happening in the farflung outposts of the Empire?" Do write in and let us know.

I also wonder how the Nth Legion, under the command of Marcus Phillipus is faring at Bridgwater and perhaps Andy Clayton can update us on the Chorley Turnpike Motorway.

Bryan Howard

AND OTHER MISCELLANEOUS BITS

ON THE MOVE ARE:

Andy Wilson from Bishopton to Glascoed

Also transferring to Glascoed, Ian Murray from Bridgwater.

Both Tony Kosecki and Ted O'Day went to the Ordnance Board when the Abbey Closed to avoid working at the 'orrible Fort. Now that there are plans to move London HQ down to Bristol, Fort Halstead suddenly seemed more attractive and both Tony and Ted have relocated here recently.

NEW ARRIVALS:

Andrew Sanderson, currently working at NATO in Brussels announces the birth of their second child, a girl this time.

Also, due this year, is a second offspring for Malcolm and Denise Stewart

ABSENT (?) FRIENDS:

We get the occasional missive from Glascoed and Summerfield but, do Bridgwater, Chorley and Bishopton still exist?

Also, is there life in the 'colonies'?

Fax, 01959 516023

phone 01959 515632

or write to us, even if it's just a short note to say hello.

CARTOON PAGE

TO ALL YOU D.I.Y. ENTHUSIASTS



**DON'T EXPECT EVERYBODY ELSE TO
SHOW THE SAME ENTHUSIASM**

THE FUTURE OF NORTH SITE

TRUST BRIEFING SEMINAR 26th January 1995

Nearly 60 people attended the briefing seminar in the North Site Library Lecture Theatre. After the 'invited guests' had finished their buffet lunch, Councillor Don Spinks (Chairman of the Project Steering Committee) welcomed everyone and introduced Dan Bone of CIVIX, who have been managing the site for MOD since the closure.

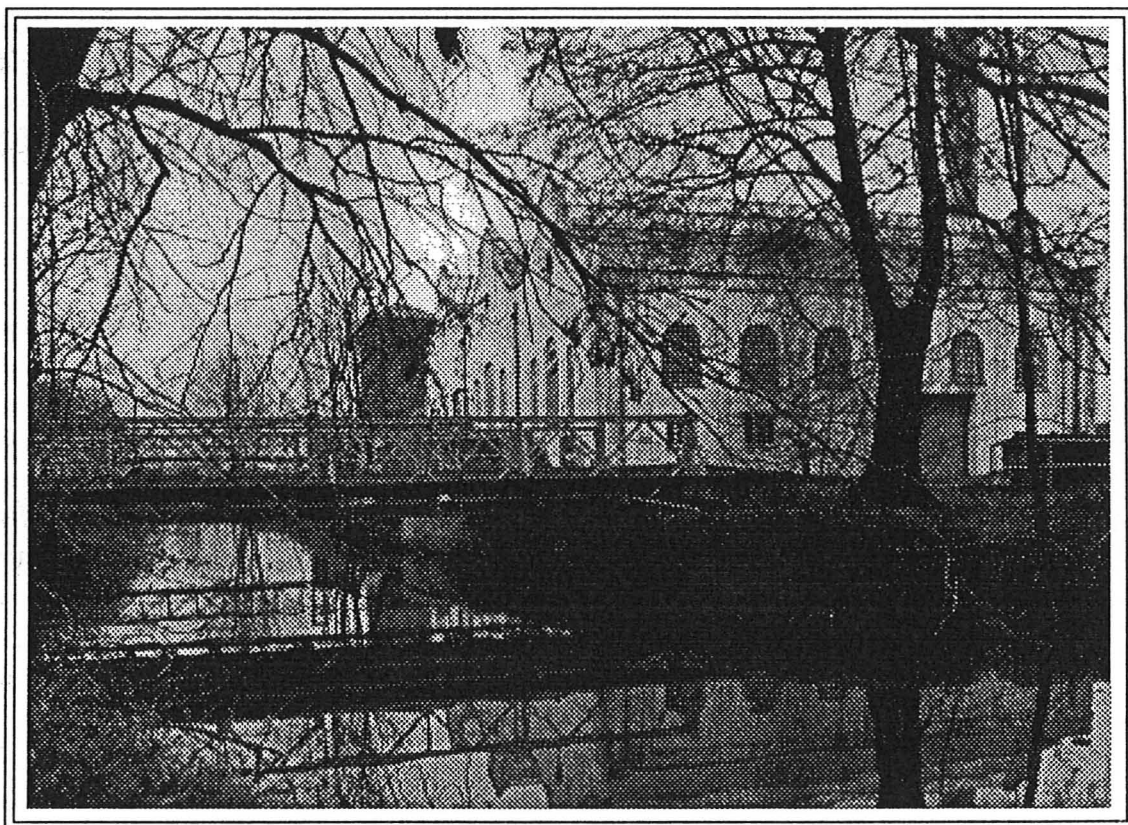
Dan Bone summarised the background of work by CIVIX in relation to the survey of archaeologically important buildings, decontamination and the options for the future leading to the conclusion that the best choice was for a charitable trust to be set up to manage the site. Dr David Prince followed with a presentation for Prince Research Consultants who had advised the Trust Steering Committee on the best administrative structure for the trust. To minimise payments to the Inland Revenue it will be necessary to set up a trading company whose function would be to generate funds which could then be transferred to the nontaxable charity to carry out its functions such as; setting up a gunpowder museum, preserving historically important buildings and developing the site for the community in accordance with the wishes of the trustees.

The chairman of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum, Mike Love, gave an insight into the financial aspects of an active trust with a turnover of the order of £1M per annum.

In closing the session, Don Spinks invited questions from the audience. The Trust Steering Committee members were able to answer some of these and Geoff Hooper tackled those questions which referred to the past use of the site by the MOD, pointing out that while the Official Secrets Act might influence what information could be divulged, he did not see any difficulties in recording anecdotal memories by past staff for historical reasons.

For anyone accepting an invitation to join the permanent Trustee Committee a daunting task awaits them. Not only a difficult job but it's unpaid!

Bryan Howard



THE BOAT RACE

Senior staff from the Ministry of defence and a Japanese company once attended a course held at Oxford University for top managers. As a result of some friendly rivalry that developed between the two organisations during the course, it was decided to hold an annual competitive boat race on the River Thames. Both teams practised long and hard to reach their peak performance and, on the day of the race, each team felt they were as ready as they could be.

The Japanese team won by a mile!

The MOD team was very demoralised and this was evident from a general decrease in work performance. Senior management decided that something had to be done and a study team was commissioned to investigate the problem and to recommend appropriate action.

The Study Team deduced that the reason for defeat lay in the fact that the Japanese team had eight people rowing and one steering, while the MOD had one PTO rowing and an Assistant Secretary, a Rear Admiral, a Brigadier, an Air Commodore, a Principal and 3 HEOs steering.

MOD Senior Management immediately let a contract, at great expense, to a management consultant to study the team structure. After many months and many thousands of pounds later the consultant reported that: "...sole reason for defeat lay in the fact that the opposition had 8 rowers and 1 steering, whereas the MOD had 1 PTO rowing with an Assistant Secretary, a Rear Admiral, a Brigadier, an Air Commodore, a Principal and 3 HEOs steering..".

To avoid losing again the following year an MOD Rowing Team Organisation Review was undertaken. As a result the team structure was revised to provide a Steering Manager, 3 Steering Advisers, a Steering Coordinator and 3 Steering Officers. In addition a Rowing Quality Performance Scheme was set up for the PTO rowing the boat to give him an incentive to work harder.

Next year the Japanese team won by two miles!

MOD Senior Management gave the PTO a Box 4 marking for poor performance. After a further review it was decided there was no need to support rowing as one of the Nation's core capabilities since expertise could be obtained more economically by means of a Trade agreement with the Japanese Government. The oars were therefore sold as surplus to requirements to private industry for 15p each and a development project for an improved boat was cancelled. The Steering Managers were cited in the New Year Honours List for their contribution to Defence Cost Savings and services to International Relations.

It's just a fairy story and couldn't possibly really happen, could it!

Contributed by Dave Salter.

1995 REUNIONS

ANNUAL WALTHAM ABBEY REUNION

The 1995 Reunion will be held at the Waltham Abbey Town Hall on Friday the 20th October from midday until about 4pm.

We are looking into the possibility of a Site visit(s) in the morning or some special presentation during the afternoon but will keep you all informed in later issues.

Booking forms for the event will be sent out with the September issue of Touchpaper, by which time we shall have a clearer idea of the exact programme and the cost of the event. In any event the price will probably be kept to the same as last year as we still have some surplus funds from previous years. The amount in hand is sufficient to pay for the hall booking so the price will depend on the catering costs.



E-BRANCH REUNION

It is proposed to hold another E-Branch Reunion this year, as was suggested at the first one in 1993. Although a date has yet to be finalised it will probably take place sometime in June.

All those who attended the 1992 event will be contacted, but to make sure (or if you missed out last time) contact Ken Bascombe (01992 715353) or Pam Garrod (01295 268755 ansaphone).

THE NIGHT TO MAKE CRYSTALS

contributed by Peter Honey

‘Twas the night to make crystals, and all through the hood
Compounds were reacting; I’d hoped that they would.
The hood door I’d closed with the greatest of care
To keep noxious vapours from fouling the air.
The reflux condenser was hooked to the tap
And the high vacuum pump had a freshly filled trap.
I patiently waited to finish my task
While boiling chips merrily danced in the flask.
Then from the pump there arose such a clatter
That I sprung from my chair to see what was the matter.
Up to the fumehood and up with the door
And half of my product foamed out on the floor.
Then to my disbelief what should appear
But a viscous black oil that once had been clear.
I turned off the pump, all in a rush
And the oil that sucked back filled the line up with mush.
Then all of a sudden I heard a loud crash
And the ether boiled out of the flask with a splash.
My nose turned quite red, my eyebrows went bare
The blast had singed off almost half of my hair.
I shut the fumehood door with a violent wrench
As acid ate holes in the floor and the bench.
I flushed it with water but to my dismay
Found sodium metal had spilled in the fray
And then ‘ere the fire got way out of hand
I managed to quench it with buckets of sand.
With aqueous base I diluted the crud
And shovelled it up, six buckets of mud.
I extracted the slurry, again and again
With ether and then with dichloromethane.
Chromatographic techniques were swiftly applied
Several times ‘til the product was purified.
I finally viewed, with a satisfied smile
One half a gram in a shiny new vial.
I mailed the yield report to my boss
“Ninety percent (allowing for loss)”
“Good Work” said the boss in the answering mail
“Now use the same conditions - on a preparative scale!”

THE TOUCH PAPER REGISTER

ADDITIONS
as at 24th February 1995

<u>name</u>	<u>currently at</u>	<u>WA dates</u>	<u>WA section 's</u>
David Ashen	MOD Main Building	1963 - 67	M2
Steve Bell	Suffolk	1956 - 81	P1
Barbara Bell	Suffolk	1968 - 82	Surgery
Mrs Blows	Upshire		Main Lab
Edna Cole	Edmonton		
Geoff Creigh	Upshire [rtd]	1935 - 64	Cordite
Ted Hitch	Bourne LINC'S [rtd]	1923 - 67	Main Lab.
Alan Jones	Waltham Abbey		Stores
Leslie Phillips	Sheffield [rtd]	1946 - 1977	E Branch/SGC
Cyril Povey	West Sussex [rtd]	1939 - 44	RGPF Main Lab
Jean Povey	West Sussex [rtd]	1937 - 44	RGPF Office
Pat Webber	Deeside CLWYD		Instrumentation

**A FULL LIST WILL BE PUBLISHED EACH
YEAR WITH THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE**

**ADDITIONS OR AMENDMENTS WILL
APPEAR EACH QUARTER IN TOUCHPAPER**

**PLEASE CONTINUE TO NOTIFY THE EDITOR OF
ANY CHANGES TO
OR OMISSIONS IN
YOUR ENTRY**

