

Touchpaper

THE WALTHAM ABBEY NEWSLETTER

December 1996

ISSUE 20

EDITORIAL

Hooray!

We are back to a 'Light Blue Touchpaper' now that the offending cartridge has, at last, been repaired.

This issue is a bit thin due to the paucity of reader's letters but does contain some good news concerning developments on the North Site and reports of the Reunion.

Despite some sad losses during the past year our numbers continue to increase and we welcome our new 'registrants' to the fold.

And now for the:

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

[N. B. If you wish you may delay reading this bit until 3pm on 25th December]

***Wishing you all a very
Merry Christmas
and with best wishes for
A Happy New Year
in 1997***

***Norman Paul
Editor***

CONTENTS:

TOUCH BYTES
letters and reports

REUNION REPORT

DEVELOPMENTS ON:

NORTH SITE

SOUTH SITE

QUIZMAS

DEADLINE DATE FOR NEXT ISSUE:

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Write,

fax (01959 516023),

phone (01959 515632)

or e-mail (100750.1577@compuserve.com)

TOUCHPAPER PUBLICATION ADDRESS

Building All
DRA Fort Halstead
Sevenoaks
KENT
TN14 7BP

Phone: 01959 51 5632
Fax: 01959 51 6023
e-mail: 100750.1577@compuserve.com

TOUCH

Reunion 1..

My apologies for being unable to attend the Reunion last Friday. Both Chris and I were afflicted with the prevalent wave of 'flu and I felt that it would be uncharitable to risk spreading it among the aged retirees, or even among the super-fit (?) still employed.

I am sure that the Reunion will have been as successful as usual - all you need to do is provide a venue, a bar and a buffet and then let everyone loose to talk.

I do look forward to being able to make the next one, whenever and wherever it is.

Best Regards

Cyril Beck

Reunion 2..

Firstly, many thanks for the Reunion. On returning home that day I found I was still 'tagged' and return my badge with apologies and hope that I will be able to wear it next time.

I was surprised at the number who enquired as to how my knee replacement was going. (*See! People do read Touchpaper! Ed.*) Since the Reunion I have again been in hospital to have it 'forcibly bent' which has given it a little more movement, but not unfortunately enough for me to ride my bike in comfort. In fact my first attempt, in an empty car park, resulted in me falling off! I can only keep trying and hope it will eventually work out. I may be 76 but up to the time of the operation I was still capable of 60-70 mile rides and I've no wish to 'call it a day' now.

All the Best

Stan Wills

Waltham Abbey Town and LSW News..

Yet more astounding developments include the erection of no less than THREE new superstores - surely the old faithful Co-op will feel the draft now! Not necessarily since they are not food shops and not exactly in the centre being built on the old Highbridge Garage site. The stores are; "Carpet Right" (carpets), "Harveys" (furniture and curtains) and "MFI" (more furniture). Looking on the bright side this development can provide free parking for the 1997 Reunion being fairly close to the Town Hall!

The October LSW, one week after the Reunion, still attracted 10 members. A 'get well card' was sent to Margaret Williams who we hear has been rather ill recently. We hope she is much improved by the time you read this.

Your local roving reporter

Bryan Howard

A CHRISTMAS TALE

Christmas is traditionally a time for remembering and at this time I think back to how I spent one particular Christmas Day when I was full time water warden. Ron Kerr and I worked 24 hour shifts, handing over at 8 am each day. On the Christmas in question I took over and, after breakfast had a leisurely cycle ride around North Site checking Water Ways Cottage gate, along the river bank to Newton's Pool - both gates were already open - on to Fisher's Green point, down to Edmonsey Weir, then through the factory, down to Lower Island Weir - unlocking and re-locking three sets of security gates on the way, then home.

I had just started my Christmas Lunch with my family, plus mother-in-law, when the phone rang - message from King Weir "taken up two gates". That meant I should have to go out and take up the equivalent of two gates to release the flood water through the factory site. When I went up to Edmonsey Weir, water was already coming over the banks. I had to winch up the gate by turning a heavy iron handle 285 turns, then a quick cycle ride down to Lower Island Weir to let the water past out of our level. Again it was a heavy iron handle with 250 turns to get the gate up. I cycled home sweating and somewhat exhausted, only to hear the wife say "Kings Weir have taken up two more gates", so, it was out again up to Edmonsey, another 285 turns, back to Lower Island, not forgetting to unlock and re-lock three sets of gates, and another 250 turns at Lower Island - home again exhausted. During the evening another call out to lift one of the two gates at the rear of the Abbey Church then down to Lower Island to take up another gate and home again and to bed. At 3 am another call out to lift the second gate at the Abbey Church and another visit to Lower Island. While I was out I decided to cycle all round North Site to see if all was well and found a large raft of rubbish in the gates at Newton's Pool which had to be cleared. I just got started when the bulb blew in the overhead light so had to finish the job in the dark which was a bit risky. Home again at 5.30 am, cup of tea and back to bed. 7 am another call but, as all our gates were up could do no more. On Boxing Day, Ron Kerr had no calls out at all but the day after I had, during my 24 hour shift, to put down nearly all of the gates again as the flood levels dropped. As I said at the beginning of this tale, a Christmas I shall never forget!

George Savill

BYTES

ROGUES GALLERY at the Reunion

The Last (?) Visit to South Site ...

Although there were no official site visits on the day of the Reunion this year there was, what may be the last opportunity, a visit by members of the 'Last of the Summer Wine Group' prompted by requests at their meeting in September, that they'd like to go for their annual stroll (or apple scrump) on South Site.

Consequently, about a dozen were due at Quinton Gate on October 18th for a visit arranged through Lynn Lennard.

In the event it was really hissing down and only 5 brave souls actually turned up with an immediate adjournment to Red's Diner (formerly Ernie Perry's Office) for coffee.

We then drove to M343 - how lazy I hear you say, but we had only 2 umbrellas between us and didn't want to appear at the Reunion soaking wet! M343 was padlocked so we wandered up to N549 'Wet Mix' to look at Charlie Stacey's memorial tree (planted in 1977). We then went on to N549. By coincidence Tony Whittaker produced some photos at the Reunion later that day showing Arthur Witham 'Laying the Lead floor in N549). Tony discovered the set of photographs at Fort Halstead and these were handed to Ken Bascombe for safe keeping and, presumably they will eventually be passed to the curator of the Gunpowder Museum.

We then wandered back towards the cars via the 'Box and Tray Store' which was open and still harbours many interesting items; such as leather Satchels for explosive samples, Cordite Boxes and a number of unrecognisable (to us) bits of apparatus. There were sleeves of Hypalon and silicone rubber marked "for the attention of Gordon Palmer"!

Finally, before departing to the Reunion, we had a brief look at the Elephant Hide floor in M348. Most of it is still intact but it's a crazy patchwork of small pieces and, as it's only about 6mm thick must have come from baby elephants!

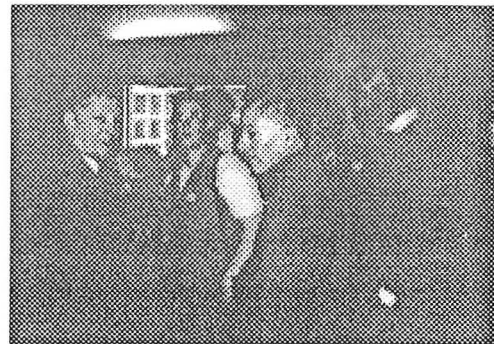
We would have liked to have met Lynn again and had an opportunity to visit P708 to view and identify the various artefacts that Steve Chaddock has assembled there but time did not allow.

As the title above suggests, this may well have been the last chance to visit South Site as Lynn expects the site to be sold to developers within the year.

Bryan Howard



Near the door for a quick get away



Stuck in the Bar - as usual!



Strategic positioning -
keeping an eye on the food but not
straying too far from the Bar!

Photos courtesy of Paul Burnham

See later for Reunion report and
more candid shots.

REUNION 1996

Although numbers were down somewhat this year the Reunion was, once again, a very successful occasion. We had expected about 165 people, and as always some extras turned up at the last minute, but this was offset by about 15 who had booked but were unable to attend due to a variety of reasons. Despite this the hall still seemed fairly full and there didn't seem to be any lack of conversation.



You may remember that Freda Titford produced some paintings of the North Site which were displayed in the Abbey museum at the start of the year. Unfortunately this wonderful collection of paintings was dispersed to the four winds as eager buyers snapped them up as mementoes of the old days. We were, however, fortunate in that a number of these were kindly brought to the Reunion by their owners for a mini display.

Once again the caterers did a superb job, but that obviously has an impact on the cost which had to be increased this year. Still, it didn't seem to put many people off and I believe that the bar also did quite well!

Being aware of some comments earlier in the year regarding the slow progress on the future of the North Site we invited along the Chairman of the Steering Committee, Don Spinks, to bring us up to date on the current situation. He was accompanied by Liz Webster, local councillor, who also has a strong interest in the site development.

Don gave us the full history of the negotiations that have been taking place and expressed the intentions and views of the Steering Committee as to the establishment of the museum. He explained that nothing could be done until the result of the bid for Lottery Funds was known but that this decision was imminent and that he was very confident of success. He also praised the Ministry of Defence for their assistance, not least the significant sum of money provided for future running of the museum site.

Introducing Don Spinks



(apologies for the quality of this photo - blame the dark curtains!)

There still seems to be continuing support for the Reunions and we have every intention of holding another next year at which we hope that it may be possible to arrange a site visit - who knows! We may even be able to hold a reunion on site in the future!

Financial arrangements worked out very well this year with an earlier booking form which enables us to pay deposits on hall and to caterers. In trying to keep the cost down there is little scope for holding a reserve fund and we appreciate those who booked early.

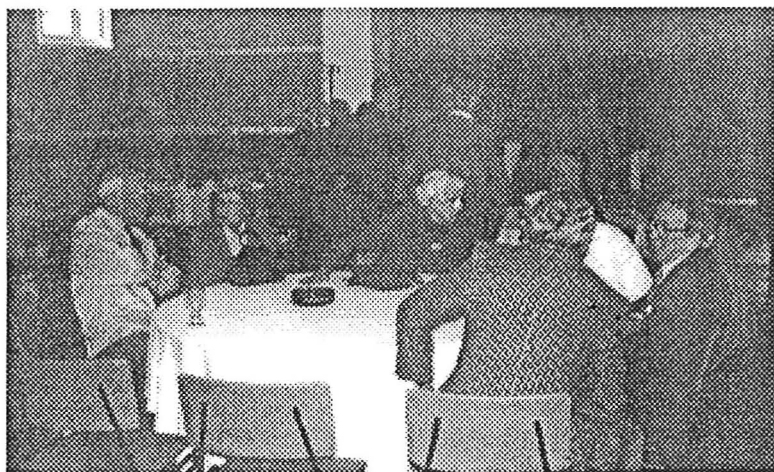
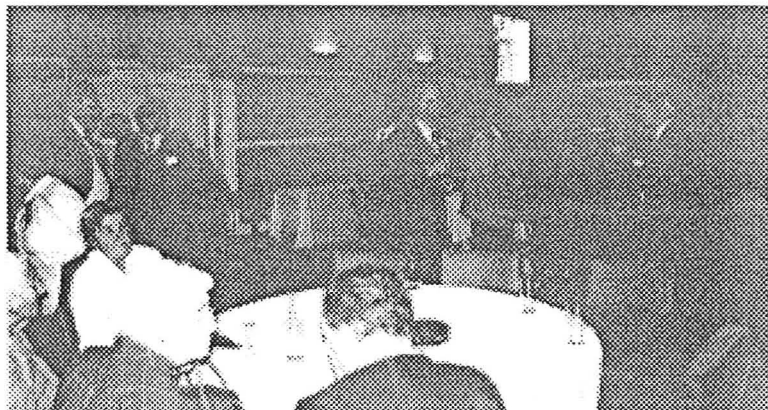
One last thing- does anyone have any ideas for extra 'activities' for future reunions. Displays, speakers, a quiz? Or would you all rather just drink, eat and talk!

REUNION GALLERY



*Photographs kindly provided
by Paul Burnham.....*

*Electronically scanned and images
edited*



*Laser printed
and photocopied
for Touchpaper*

*I feel that these could have
been better but I'm trying out
a new scanner and not sure if
I've got the hang of it yet! Ed.*



NORTH SITE NEWS

£6,500,000 !!!

Yes! £6.5 million pounds has been secured from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the development of North Site as a National Explosives Museum. English heritage regards it as the most important site of its kind in Europe, if not the world. A large part of the site is classified as a Site of Special scientific interest with the highest conservation listing as an Ancient monument with 21 listed buildings (but we knew that anyway).

This money is the start of an estimated £14.8 million development that is expected to take 3 years to complete. A further £2.8 million is expected from private sector investment and the MoD has provided an endowment fund of £5.5 million. The endowment is money held in trust as a capital investment and the interest on this will provide the future running expenses of the museum site.

This is the news that we have all been waiting for and which was hinted at by Don Spinks in his talk at the recent Reunion. It has been said, many times, that it will be important to involve local people and especially those who worked at the Establishment and we have been told that there will be opportunities for us all to have some input into the project. A call for volunteers is likely.

Touchpaper will keep you informed of developments and our register of members has been identified as a valuable resource for the future - although not too distant since we are all getting older!

SOUTH SITE NEWS

Not such a happy tale here! There is still so much uncertainty over the future of the South Site with apparent conflict between the developers and the local council.

The situation is getting very political and there is still much concern over decontamination. How much is necessary, how will it be carried out and, of course, how much will it cost.

Although the South Site has a shorter history than the North it is still contains many important features and historical aspects. It is heartening to know that at least a number of artefacts are being preserved for inclusion in the North Site development.

It isn't easy to find out exactly what is being planned or negotiated but we will continue to bring you any news and developments we hear.

QUIZMAS

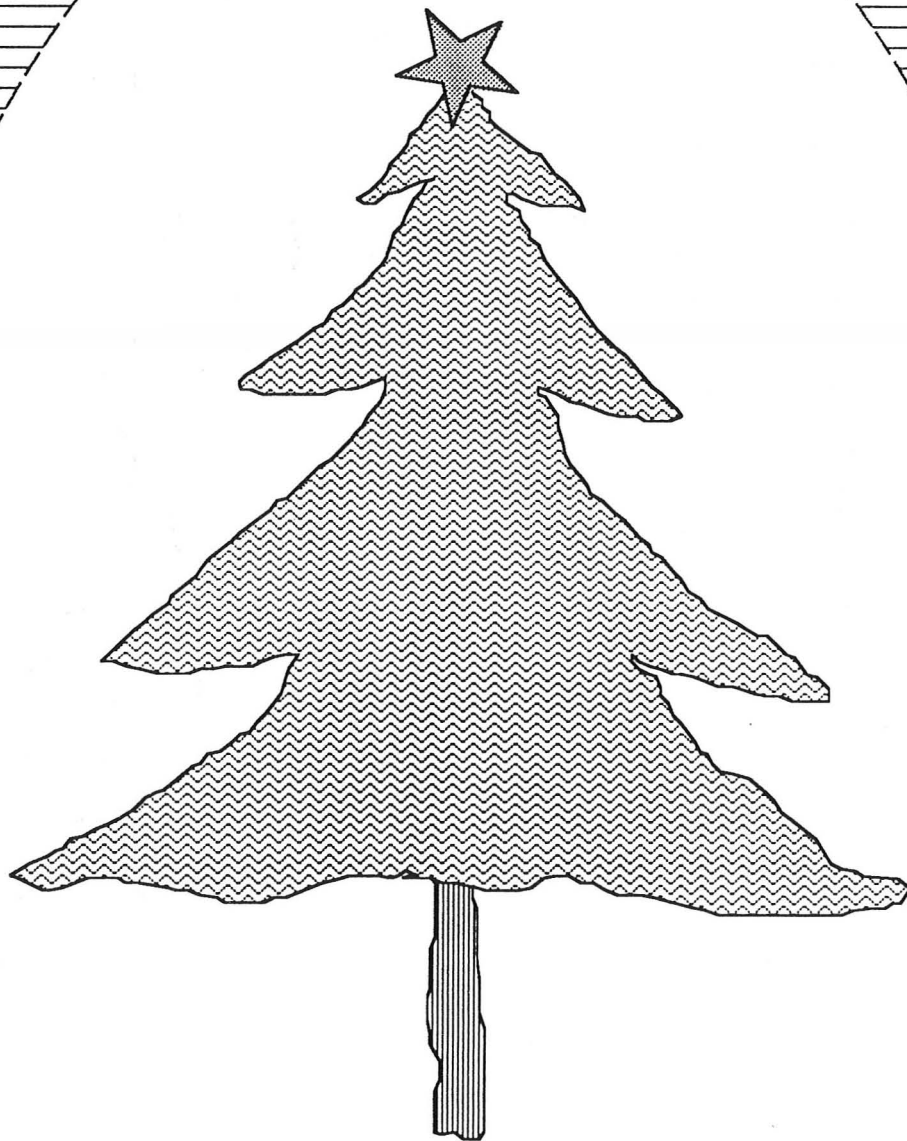
A question for each day of Christmas

- XD1. Who introduced the custom of Christmas Trees to England?
- XD2. Which Scandinavian country provides the traditional Christmas Tree in Trafalgar Square each year?
- XD3. Which country was the turkey originally native to?
- XD4. What is the Royal Navy tradition regarding the serving of Christmas Dinner?
- XD5. When is St. Nicholas's Day ; Dec 1, Dec 6, Dec 19 or Dec 24 ?
- XD6. What day is Twelfth Night?
- XD7. What day is the Feast of Stephen?
- XD8. Apart from 'me and my true love' how many persons in the "Twelve Days of Christmas" ?
- XD9. How many birds in "Twelve Days of Christmas" ?
- XD10. Which of these is the odd one out ;
Blazer, Blitzen, Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid ?
- XD11. Who wrote the song "White Christmas" ?
- XD12. Who, in 1982, sang "Blue Christmas" ?

... and here are a few non-seasonal extra questions:

- NS 1. Some months have 31 days, some have 30, how many have 28?
- NS2. Divide 30 by $\frac{1}{2}$ and add 10, answer ?
- NS3 Which country has a Fourth of July, America or Britain ?
- NS4 If you take two apples from three apples what do you have?

All answers in our next issue



Merry Christmas