

Spring 2022

TOUCHPAPER

The Newsletter of the Royal Gunpowder Mills Friends Association
Registered Charity No. 1115237

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Mills Archive Information Summary 2**

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AGM / Reunion

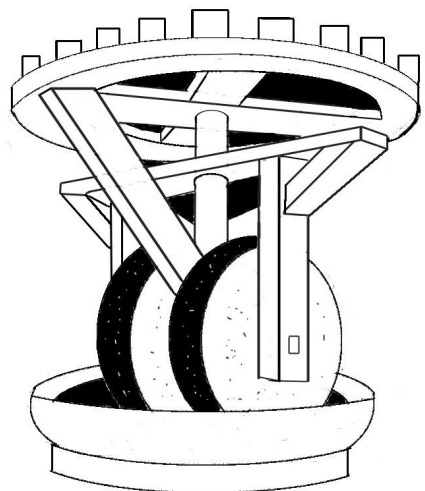
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**John Evans
Edward Panter**

Julie's Nature Column



Spring 2022

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Deadline for the next issue is 27th May 2022

Chairman's Chat

What will 2022 bring? Currently the Company proposes opening the site to the public on Sundays only, starting at Easter and continuing through to the end of October. Not all of the buildings will be open for various reasons – Covid restrictions, safety, staff and volunteer shortage. If you know of anyone who would like to join our volunteers please let us know. The Railways, Green Hut, Rocket Vault and Land Train all need new volunteers when we are open to the public, plus site maintenance work at other times.

<https://www.royalgunpowdermills.com/volunteering-at-rgm>

The car park is now in use by film companies on weekdays for the next eight months bringing much needed income to the Mills. Abandoned Engineering has been back on site filming for their new series and recently a couple of other companies have been filming on site.

All copies of Touchpaper up to winter 2019 are now available online.

https://www.wargm.org/archive_viewer/wati-index.php

The Friends are in the process of purchasing five picnic tables made of recycled plastic to replace existing wooden tables that are now beyond repair.

Len Stuart

Editorial

The last issue was printed by our new printers, Hertford Display; we were very impressed with the quality as I hope you were.

Those who pay for a paper copy may also have an email version at no extra cost; just send me an email requesting it. If you wish to use a different email address please email me so that I have a correct address to use. In the email version of this issue all the images in the online archives (WAI numbers) have hyperlinks to the original online images (the numbers are not coloured or underlined but the links are there). Contact email addresses also have hyperlinks to make it easier for you to contact us with news and articles! Hopefully all these will work in this issue although I confess to problems with the Winter 2021 issue. I have found that various PDF readers do not all behave in the same way; my default reader is Adobe Acrobat DC.

On Page 18 is a photo of the P1 group on the occasion of Colin Lawson's retirement together with a numbered version and, on the following page, a list of names provided by Peter Stone and Dave Hewkin. This is incomplete and may contain errors so any help with identification is welcome. Here is a direct link to the group photo in the online archives: https://www.wargm.org/archive_viewer/wai-record.php?record=&item=680

On page 22 there is a notice of our AGM and reunion/social event and a booking form for the reunion is enclosed / attached.

Finally, of our 105 members of the Friends Association, 52 have now renewed; those of you who have not yet renewed your subscriptions will find a renewal form enclosed/attached. A further reminder will be sent with the summer issue; after that no further copies will be sent, unlike last year when we did not 'chase' for subscriptions.

Brian Clements

Tetryl (CE) - A Donation & Mills Archive Information Summary 1

With the introduction of on line viewing, it might be helpful where there is information in the Archive on a particular subject but it is diffuse to pull it together in a Mills Archive Information Summary. The following is an example.

Trinitrophenyl-methyl-nitramine

Tetryl – Trade Name

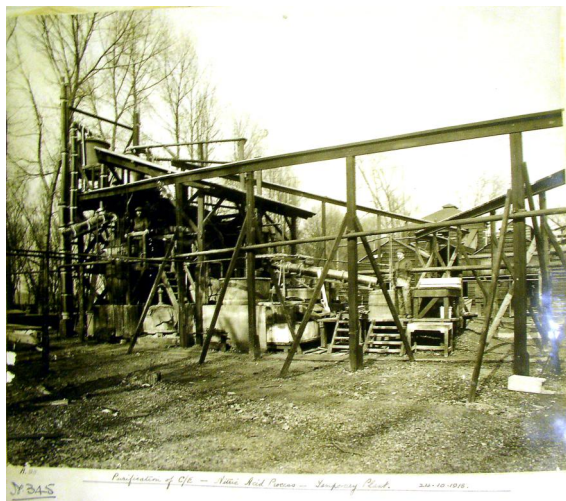
CE (Composition Exploding) - Service Name

For general comment purposes the two names are interchangeable.

Tetryl was the product of nitration of Dimethylaniline, which had been dissolved in concentrated sulphuric acid. It was an intermediate high explosive, the culmination in 1903 of work by Oswald Silberrad, a noted chemicals consultant with his work focused on explosives and the related dyestuffs and metallurgy. His expertise in explosives had been recognised in appointment to the Government Explosives Committee in 1901, with the post of Superintendent Chemical Research. He left the Committee in 1906 and in 1907 established a consultancy business at his property in Loughton – Dryads Hall on the edge of Epping Forest a few miles from Waltham Abbey, building a separate laboratory block and library.

Tetryl was termed intermediate as it acted as a ‘booster’ between the mercury fulminate initiator and the main charge in shells etc. The term derived from Tetryl’s function providing a reinforcing sharp shock to ensure reliable and complete detonation. It was eminently successful and was a core element in the detonation process of Composition B, the standard explosive filling of the Allies in WW2. (*Note 1*)

A Tetryl plant was constructed to the western flank of the RGPF North Site in WW1. A fire occurred in the Purification Plant and a temporary plant was put into operation.



**Temporary Tetryl
Purification Plant
1918 WAI - 1743 -
9175 - 01**

In WW2 from 1940 a new plant was built to the east and it is in this area that elements survive (below). Along with surviving parts of the old group, Tetryl production therefore was in a kind of arc from west to east, in a rather ad hoc arrangement. Any visitor to the plant expecting a 'normal' factory must have been startled when he saw what this Mills factory looked like.

Archive Donation

Mrs. J. Muir of Wingrave, Aylesbury has made a donation to the Archive, comprising the working papers of her father, Mr. J. Houghton, who worked at the Waltham Abbey Tetryl plant from 1942.

The papers include 100 pages of process description, operating instructions, listing of buildings and plant, a blueprint of the plant, a Tetryl flow sheet with production data, a Handbook No. 1 - Explosives from War Office Text Book of Ammunition, widely distributed to the RA, RAOC, Technical and Training Establishments and Schools of Instruction.

This is an important link with the actuality of use by a member of the staff of the plant.

RGPF Blueprint

The blueprint, to be lodged in Archive Section WANBD, will be the only blueprint in the Archive. Detail is:

51in.W 28in.D Scale 1inch = 1 Foot

Title Detail: Superintendent RGPF, RGPF 3695 (Sheet 1), 16-12-42,
Drawn by JRM

Elevations Acetoning Plant for CE Upper Works.

Acetone and Acetone Recovery

Acetone was an integral part of Tetryl manufacture. Acetone, which the RGPF bought in, was never an easy supply, with other industries competing for scarce supplies. As early as 1905 therefore a system of acetone recovery from cordite drying was introduced at RGPF and every effort for recovery was made thereafter.

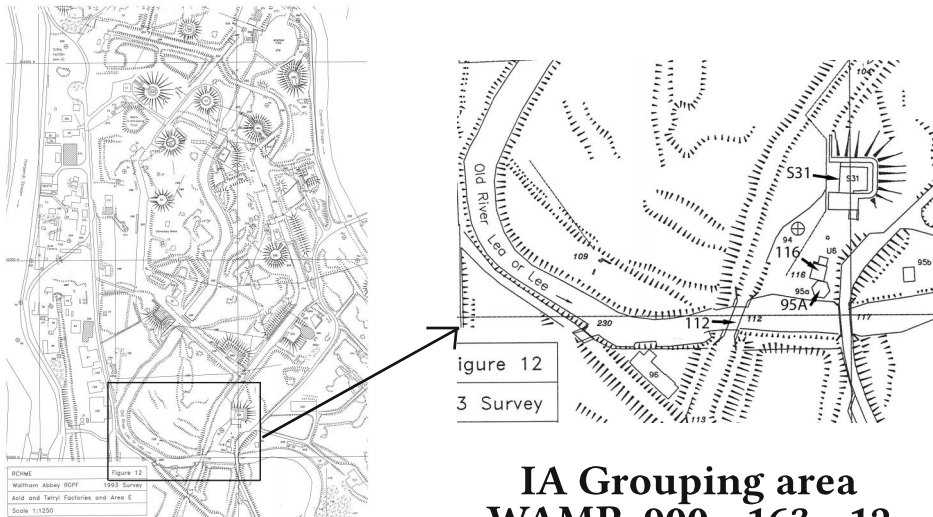
Pure tetryl was produced from a crude tetryl / acetone solutionpurified in the Purification Plant. Acetone was recovered by distillation from an acetone liquor/ caustic soda solution.



Bringing in Acetone 1920 WAI 102 - 09

IA Grouping and the Land Train

Almost all of the Tetryl plant has been razed, but fortuitously several elements have survived, important in themselves but also with the advantage they provide a feature visible from the Land Train. In addition, other built features are also visible from the same point and together form an interesting grouping for the IA enthusiast, which will be termed IA Grouping in the following:



From the Land Train

1. The Hexagon (95a) 1917 Tetryl Purification Plant

A hexagonal concrete structure catches the eye. Part of its possible interest to land train guides is that it defies all public efforts to guess what it is. It is in fact a base block for the Tetryl Purification Plant.



Concrete hexagon 1994

(Photo Les Tucker)



**CE Purification
Plant Acetone Stills**

WAI 640 – 110 -01

2. Tetryl Packing House - Surviving part (S31) 1879 original date

S31 is a good example of adaptive re use at the Mills long before the term became fashionable.

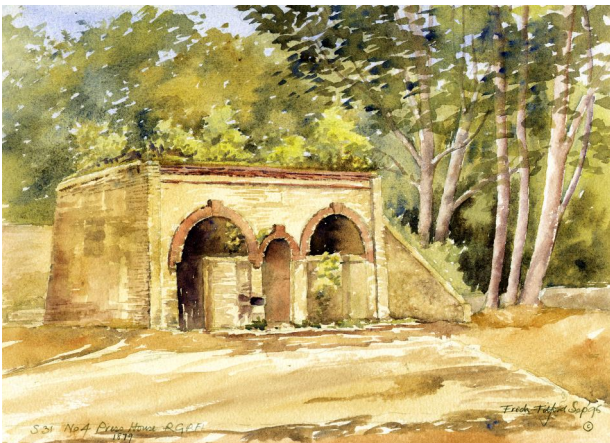
The building of which S31 was a part started life in 1879 as Press House No. 4, hydraulically powered from steam produced hydraulic power from what was later Group E, L149. Around 1900 the Press House became No.1 Moulding House, then later Cylinder Cutting House and finally in 1917 CE Packing House.

A large part of the House was demolished in 1945, the surviving substantial remains later being designated S31.



**S31 Entrance
tunnel and two
Bays 1994**

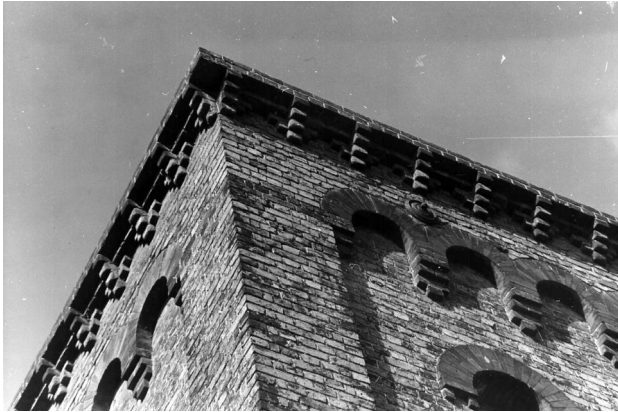
(Photo Les Tucker)



**Ravaged by time,
weather, vegetation**

**S31 Water Colour by
Freda Titford 1994
WAI 1250 - 16**

The brickwork was of good standard overall, evidenced by features such as the dentil course, and there are two stone wall plaques – one VR and one reading ‘No. 4 Press House 1879’,



**Dentil course
Earlier days
WAI 1214-19**



**VR Plaque
WAI-1214 - 02**



Date Plaque WAI 1214-16

(Any chance of some volunteers doing some 'scrub bashing'? The site around S31 probably looks rather scrappy)

3. Cast Iron Aqueduct (112) 1878 / 1879

Also visible is an Aqueduct carrying a canal over the Old River Lea. Made up of iron plates riveted together, as with ships of the time, this is interesting as one of only 26 cast iron aqueducts in the UK, i.e. entirely self contained metal troughs to carry the canal in a novel application of the cast iron which dominated so much of Victorian engineering. A study was made by a canal expert of iron canal aqueducts in Britain, coming up with a definitive total of 23. Unfortunately for the author, hidden within the Mills and totally unknown were three more, bringing the true total to 26.

As well as documentaries, the North Site has attracted film companies for location work. S31 appeared in the film 'Enigma'.

Kate Winslett filming on location at a bridge near S31.



**Cast Iron
Aqueduct
1994**
*(Photo Les
Tucker)*



**TV
Cameraman
filming the
Aqueduct
2005**
**WAI 1246 –
01**
**S31 in
background**

Tetryl - the last Mills Survivor – the final Chapter 1944

For general purposes manufacturing ceased at the Mills in 1943. Realistically the buildings and facilities in normal circumstances by the 30's might well have been deemed no longer a viable manufacturing facility.

But WW2 changed all that and the venerable buildings were called on for one last effort, finally ending production in 1943.

But there was one exception - Tetryl. Normally termed CE in the War, practically unknown it was vital to Allied artillery capability. It had never been in easy supply and the ancient Waltham Abbey Tetryl plant was in fact an important element in national supply. So critical that it continued to produce into 1944, alone as the last Mills survivor.

(1) Possibly partly for reasons of security, history has not been kind to explosives, in the sense of recognition of scientific discoveries which had monumental implications, either military or civil or both. Tetryl is a case in point. Arising from his consultancy work Oswald Silberrad's immense collection of scientific papers was bequeathed to the nation, only, to lie untouched for over 50 years and, only recently has a start been made in examining and cataloguing.

Les Tucker

Friends Association of the Royal Gunpowder Mills

IA Industrial Archeology

Future of the Site

Whilst the site is presently closed to visitors until Easter 2022, the Company has not been twiddling its thumbs. It is adopting a two-pronged approach to sort out the future of the site; short and long term plans.

The short term plans for the site have been worked on by a Visitor Experience Working Group. The principles underpinning the Working Group's thinking are that, since 2022 is bound to be a year of transition, the Company should focus on a few things but do them really well. It is proposed that the offer will comprise about five major activities that can be run consistently and well throughout the opening season. The scale of the offer will depend critically on the number of volunteers ready and willing to provide regular assistance, and the nearly two years of COVID-related disruption has just about halved the number of hours worked by volunteers in 2020 and 2021 compared with pre-COVID years. It will be apparent from the above that a number of elements of the pre-COVID visitor attraction will not be in operation in 2022. This does not mean that those aspects not on display this year will be lost in perpetuity but that we will focus our effort to best effect on reopening. Expanding the offer for the 2023 season once we are up and running could well include those activities excluded in 2022, so we will need to keep the relevant expertise alive. It is planned that the site will be open on Sundays from 17th April to 30th October along with the Easter and August Bank Holidays.

The longer term plans for the site are being covered by a Joint Project Board comprising three Trustees each from the Operating Company and the Foundation Trust. The objective of the Joint Project Board is to solve the current conservation crisis, establish a sustainable business model and lay plans for improved public access and engagement. A secondary objective is to push forward on establishing whether New Hill might be a source of capital receipt. Three meetings of the Joint Project Board have been held thus far.

Geoff Hooper

21 Years Selling Trains For Hospice

Since 2001 the New Mills & District Model Railway Club has appealed for donations of model railway items to raise funds for Blythe House Hospice which is based in Chapel-en-le-Frith Derbyshire. Donations range from single items to complete layouts, N gauge to Gauge 3. Goods have come from far and wide, Aberdeen to Guernsey and even Germany and South Africa.

I organised the appeal from the start.

Until recent years sales were mainly at the Club's annual February exhibition at a local school. Other Club Members help selling the donated goods and, where necessary, adding value by servicing and repairing items. We would take over a whole classroom and raise £3,000 to £4,000 in 2 days.



The photograph taken in 2018 shows part of the stock. I am on the right holding a Hornby train set with two of my retired colleagues from the Buxton Health & Safety Laboratory. Now the exhibition is in a smaller venue as much as possible is sold on eBay via the Hospice eBay shop. I prepare the items for sale checking, testing, pricing and writing the description.

There have been several large donations - one from Morecambe which included 12 Hornby train sets sold for £4,500. The biggest was a legacy of 24 boxes of models delivered personally by a London solicitor in 2020/21. This sold for £11,000, split into 220 eBay listings, taking the grand total to over £100,000.

Donations from the Friends have included:

A 1930's Hornby O gauge tinsplate train set from the late Bill Smith, who was the first scientist I met on my arrival at ERDE in 1959.

Recently I had 3 engines from the late Roy Atkins via Touchpaper's Editor. In the 1970's when I was in Spectroscopy Section in L145 Roy was in the next bay to me in L148 Rheology Section. We had lunchtime chats about model railways and went on a train excursion to the York Railway Museum.

There has been a very wide range of model types. Once I had a car boot full of used garden railway track. This had to be taken outside and pressure washed. It was sold on eBay in lots that would fit into cardboard boxes made for posting golf clubs and raised £400.

This has been a very interesting retirement project alongside building and running my own layouts, including the one which was on display on site for 7 years. Beryl gets involved as well plus we both meet friendly people - it also keeps me out of mischief!

The appeal is ongoing. Please search your attic and ask your family and friends. If you can help please email the club donations@nmdrm.co.uk or telephone the Hospice on 01298 815388

Tony Barratt

Petrel Rocket Launcher

Before the era of many satellites orbiting the earth, sounding rockets were extensively used for weather forecasting and other scientific purposes. Petrel was one such British sounding rocket. The first version of the rocket was 3.3 m long, had a diameter of 19cm and reached a maximum altitude of 140 kilometres. It was fired from a long barrel. Petrel was first flown on 8 June 1967 from the Guided Weapon Range in South Uist; one of the islands comprising the Outer Hebrides. Since 1968, several hundred Petrels were launched; about two-thirds of which were from South Uist, with others from Kiruna, the northernmost town in Sweden, Andoya, an island off the Norwegian coast, Thumba in India not far from the equator, Sonmiani in Pakistan and also from Greenland. Later variants were used as target drones, including from Woomera, Australia and from on board Royal Navy Auxiliary vessels. The programme of Petrel launches came to an end in August 1982 and the system was pensioned off.

A Petrel Launcher now has pride of place on the roundabout as you come on to the Royal Gunpowder Mills site. That was not where it started its sojourn at the Mills; it arrived in 2007 and was off-loaded alongside our Grade One Listed Building – L157. By 2008 it was in place on a concrete slab behind this former incorporating mill.



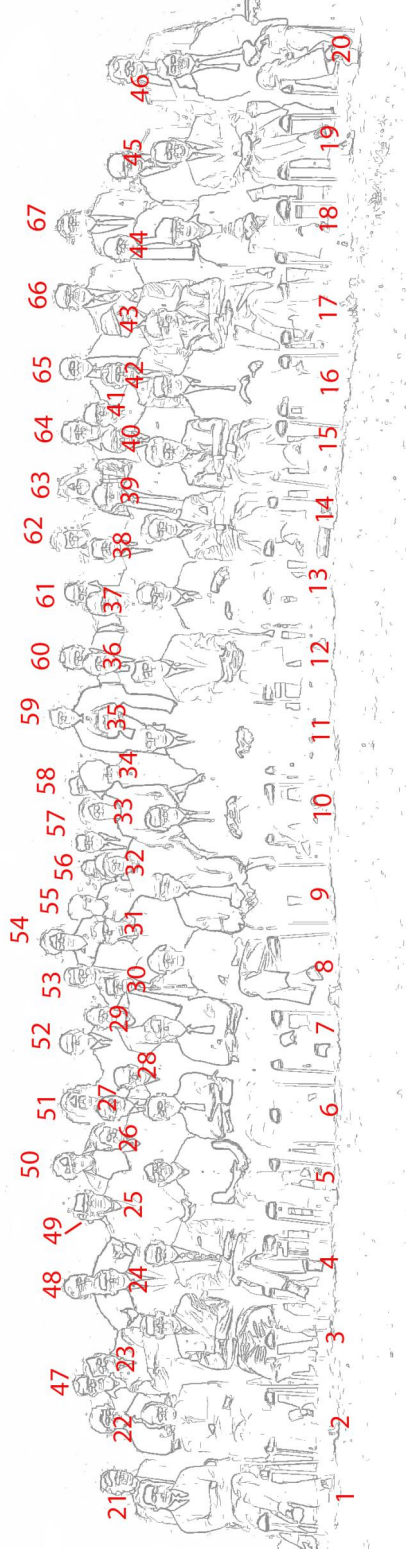
It was subsequently moved to the roundabout. Time and the elements, however, took their toll, at least on the physical appearance of the Petrel Launcher. Brian Clements has devoted many Wednesday morning volunteer sessions to painstakingly re-painting it, and whilst that work needs a few more detailed applications of his paint brush; it has now been visibly rejuvenated and provides an impressive centrepiece for the entrance to the site.



Geoff Hooper

P1 Group 1971

WAI-164-01



P1 PHOTO COLIN LAWSON'S RETIREMENT 1971?

Name	No	Name	No	Name	No
John Holloway	1	Ron Allen	25	Reg Prior (hidden)	49
Dave Bullock	2	Keith (Everard) Couchman	26	Peter Stone	50
John Costin	3	?	27	Paul Benton	51
John Wright	4	Tommy (Pisser) Dawson	28	?	52
Eric Baker	5	?	29	?Tom Baggot	53
John Hughes	6	George (Wanger) Page	30	Colin Smith	54
Roy Stenson	7	?Tom Price	31	?	55
Gordon Palmer	8	?	32	? (hidden)	56
John Gooding	9	June Wright	33	George Chapman	57
Jack Powling	10	Margaret Clear (nee Heath)	34	Alfie Payne (Hidden)	58
Colin Lawson	11	Joan Bourn (nee Hewick)	35	Bob Greenfield	59
John Scrivener	12	?Len Abbot	36	Henry Clark	60
Richard Wallace	13	Len Heath	37	?	61
Ron Whalley	14	?Bert George	38	?	62
Charlie Stacey	15	Charlie Dolman	39	Peter Bourn	63
Geoff Stocks	16	?Joe Smith	40	George Brown	64
Bob Forbes	17	Ted Spillet	41	Dennis Warren	65
Johny Littlefaire	18	George? Bowman	42	Jim Bennett	66
Bill Smith	19	Freddie (the Fox) Speller	43	(Darkie) Pegram	67
n Eyres	20	Bill (Taurus the Bull) Watson	44		
Jim (Titch) Lermitt	21	Len Wright	45		
Dave Hewkin	22	Ken Lawrence	46		
Ted Brett	23	?	47		
Iack Stoker	24	George Hood	48		

H₂O, The driving force

The Royal Gunpowder Mills has, in all its incarnations, relied on water throughout its long history. Indeed, without this precious and finite commodity it simply could not have functioned. It was used as a motive source, a cooling and drenching agent, for fire fighting, and crucially to create the steam for power and heat, so vital in the production processes. Waterways, both manmade and natural, also provided a safe medium for conveying highly volatile materials gently from one place to another on site and off it. In the 20th century new high powered explosives were also tested under water, notably at Newton's Pool, to help defeat Hitler, and today the legacy pools and streams, once integral to production remain important in preserving the natural environment in an ever more ecologically conscious world.

Prior to steam power, natural waterways were used to harness energy for industry and engineering. Local geology therefore played an important part in siting any mill not otherwise powered by wind or horse to make it productive. The streams and marshy flood plains of Waltham Abbey were ideal for such an enterprise, the water table here being suitably high. Alder trees, like willow, flourish in these wet conditions, which was fortuitous as they were abundant and easily grown on site. This negated the need for at least one of the raw materials to be bought in at expense. The alders were grown in a plantation and were coppiced around every 15 years or so to induce renewed growth, thereby providing a constant source of wood to make charcoal, one of the 3 ingredients of gunpowder. Today the alder trees are synonymous with the site's industrial heritage and very much part of its fabric and identity. This makes it a rare and special place, not just for people but for wildlife too.

The water from the River Lee was the lifeblood of the factory from its inception in the 17th century to its closure in 1945. It fed the interconnecting streams and channels, which were linked at different levels, and formed both a water highway and a source of hydraulic energy to power the gunpowder presses. The pressure required for their operation was maintained and regulated by accumulator towers, which were connected to steam powered pumps. The system was utterly reliant on water to make it work.

In the 18th century the natural waterways were supplemented with manmade channels connecting them together and creating a water network. The canals were added in stages over time, the first two canals being in place by 1806, with more being installed up to 1866. There was a later surge of canal building between 1878 and 1879 to facilitate access to the new nitro-glycerine, guncotton and cordite processing buildings with the shift in production from gunpowder to nitro-based high explosives. These processes required heat for drying the materials, which was created from steam at suitably strategic locations throughout the site. This heat was conveyed to the many drying stoves via steam pipes still visible in places today. Again, without water the process was completely inoperable.

Explosions and consequential fire was, of course, a constant threat and water for quenching fires was always kept close at hand. Indeed by the very nature and design of the site, it was never far away. The network of waterways created fire breaks between discrete process areas, paradoxically also forming connectivity between them. Water was also used to control the risk of rising temperatures in chemical production processes and to create pools to contain residual explosive material until it could be disposed of safely in a controlled manner.

After the Second World War nature began to reclaim those parts of the historic infrastructure that were not adapted at this time for research purposes. The canals gradually fell into disrepair and became overgrown; the damp and often flooded soil favouring unchecked alder growth and scrub. Inevitably more wildlife moved in with the site's closure in 1991.

Newton's Pool, once a noisy test area is now a peaceful wildlife haven where grey wagtails and other birds nest at its edge, and large carp inhabit its depths. Today kingfishers and dragonflies, not powder boats, cruise the water highways in search of food, and bats abound at dusk in summertime, feasting on midges from the water below. Water birds, grass snakes, amphibians and even the elusive and rarely seen otter now call this wetland home. It is particularly favoured by the Grey Heron, a characteristic that was instrumental in the designation of the reserve as a SSSI by Natural England around the time the site opened to visitors in 2001.

It is fair to say that much water has passed under the proverbial bridges of the Mills during its long history. Busy industrial activity and secret scientific research may have given way to heritage and conservation in the 21st century, but water remains at its core and it is a driving force still.

Phil Smart

**WARGM Friends Association AGM/Reunion at the Mills on
17th June 2022.**

The last two years have been difficult for us all but we are planning to have a reunion following our AGM and we are hoping that many Friends will be able to attend, we have missed you.

The lunch will cost £10, as in previous years. We are mindful of the many cancellations that have had to happen during the pandemic and have decided that we will not bank your cheques until 1 June in case we have to cancel the event.

Please complete the attached/enclosed form and return it, together with your cheque, to me at the address on the form.

Daphne Clements

Obituaries

John Evans

On December 30th we sadly lost a Friend and Volunteer John Evans.

John joined as a volunteer shortly after me which was around fifteen years ago. Unfortunately I do not know much of John's background; I do know that he worked at the Royal Small Arms in Enfield and for a short time at R.G.M. We had not seen much of John these last few years as he had suffered health problems, but he stayed in touch. John was a serious guy not prone to laughing and joking but a valued member of the A Team and provided valuable input on some of our tasks over the years. I also believe he had a great interest in motorcycles and motorcycle racing..

Our sympathy and best wishes go out to Pam and his three daughters at this very sad time.

Russ Orchard

Edward Panter

Although Edward was not a member of the Friends he was a guide at the Mills for many years and really enjoyed his time there. He will be sadly missed.

P1 Recollections

P705 Rolling House Fire

I joined ERDE in October 1967. I had just finished a year as an unqualified teacher in an Inner London School. Having been somewhat scarred by the experience I was reluctant to find another job. However, my girlfriend of the time, now my wife of many years, thought that it was not good for me to be enjoying a life of leisure and found a job advert for ERDE in the local paper. My father, who was a local Policeman, counselled against it. The Scientists who are there, he said, are a very strange lot. And how right he was proved to be! Well, I thought, working with explosives sounds exciting. Of course, I soon discovered that when processing explosives the last thing you want is excitement. But sometimes you can get lucky.

A part of the process for making solventless cordite is to gelatinise the dry paste by rolling it between hot rollers. This dry paste is a mixture of Nitroglycerine and Nitrocellulose and various additives. It is quite a hazardous process, as it can burst into flames, and so the rolling machine is fitted with an automatic drenching system. From my poor memory, this delivers around 50 gallons of water in about 10 seconds. It is powered by a cylinder of compressed CO₂ and is activated by a photo electric cell. The rolling machine operators were more afraid of the drencher than of the fire itself. If you can imagine the noise and shock of this event happening, without warning, whilst you are going about your normal daily work you will get an idea of the effect on them.

On one occasion George Mortimer and John Atkins were rolling a batch of LU. This is a particularly fast burning propellant. I just happened to be present at the time.

The paste had had several passes and was now starting to form a homogenous sheet. There was a loud bang (we called it a pistol crack) followed by the operation of the drencher. This was the usual outcome, which is normally followed by the complete termination of burning. The sheet was now submerged under a shallow pool of water which had formed in a tray, designed for this purpose, under the rolls. However, on this occasion the propellant was still reacting and producing bubbles of a gas. This was forming a pleasant brownish coloured column of gas as it rose in the updraft created by a large ventilation shaft, again provide for this purpose, over the rolling machine. The procedure, as soon as the drencher operated, was to exit the building very, very quickly via the large double doors, which were left conveniently fixed open for this very purpose. So, we all stood outside the building watching this in rapt fascination. After a while the propellant sheet, whose surface was by now covered with bubbles, rose to the surface of the water. This was followed almost immediately by the ignition of the aforementioned column of gas and sheet itself. The large ventilation shaft now caught fire in several places, as it was made of some combustible materials, and the flammable parts of the rolling machine were also burning merrily.

At this point I decided, as the most responsible person there, that we should ring the Fire Brigade. And since I did not wish to miss any of the excitement, I delegated the job to John Atkins. Now George and John were something of intellectuals and we had in the past had several hypothetical discussions about the role of the Fire Fighting equipment located in the building. We had some large bore Fire Hoses, which were also used for washing down. They had both insisted that they would never risk their lives fighting any fire. I pointed out repeatedly that the hoses were provided only for the protection life. For instance, to extinguish someone whose clothes were on fire. Hence, we waited for the Fire Brigade to arrive. We waited. And we waited. And we waited. We began to fear that the Firemen might have been misdirected. And I can only presume that this was the case in this instance.

After a time of watching their beloved building being consumed by flames, and in spite of their previous declarations to the contrary, they asked to get the Fire Hose and put it out. I said that we had better wait for the Brigade. But eventually they wore me down and I suggested that they get a hose located well away from the fire and to use it from where we were standing outside the building.

Thus it was that by the time that the fire Brigade arrived, with their usual noisy display of haste, the fire was beginning to die down. My being the Scientist in Charge, and looking resplendent in my regulation white coat, I expected the Chief Fire Officer to come and ask my advice regarding the location of any other explosives that might be present¹. As it was, he nearly knocked me over in his haste get up onto the roof with his chopper. This he used to great effect to cause even more damage to the building. I could feel George and John wincing beside me.

Note 1 We always kept the bulk of any explosives well separated from those being processed. In my later role in conducting Accident Investigations it became very clear that, although this requirement was always present in the work instructions, it was hardly ever complied with. I can only attribute our compliance with it to the unusually high standard of our Process Workers and their Foremen.

Peter Stone

Memories of South Site

The Friend's Association is trying to produce a history of the work and lives of South Site staff from 1946 – closure, with a view to publishing a book/booklet. The size of which depends on the amount of information supplied by the people who were there. This project was started several years ago and Bryan Howard contributed a rather technical piece which sadly has languished in limbo since then. As you will all know we sadly lost Bryan last year, amongst several others, and the Committee has been prompted to resurrect the project before we have no one left who can tell the story of the post war years.

I am indebted to Grant Privett who not only wrote a very interesting account but also encouraged a number of his former colleagues to provide their own memories. Dave Hewkin and Peter Stone have collaborated to produce a photo of P1 staff in the 1970s together with most of the names of those present. Dave also wrote a piece for me, about his years in P1, almost by return of email, which was very encouraging.

Now I ask that anyone else who worked on South Site please try and put hands on keyboard and send me an account of how it was in the olden days. I will be grateful for anything you write big/small, with/without photos.

Most of us have children and/or grandchildren who know very little of what we did but may wish they had when we are gone. If we can bring this project to fruition it will be a legacy.

Daphne Clements

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Julie's Nature Column

I have managed to have my camera at hand more often whilst out and about on site, but I still seem to miss quite a few photo opportunities as the wildlife can be there one moment and then gone in a flash. I caught a Muntjac and fox crossing paths. The muntjac kept its eye on the fox, but the fox had no interest and trotted by. I have often seen Muntjacs and foxes share the same space.



One of the most common things I'm told is that someone saw an animal the size of a fox, but it wasn't a fox. If it wasn't a fox it would definitely be a Muntjac. Something else about both animals is that people often refer to their colouring as not being typical, but different times of year can produce darker greyish colours. I saw some foxes recently chasing a female fox, she did her best to hide from them and ran under one of the incorporating mills. It totally confused one fox as he ran above her along the veranda wondering where she'd gone.



The deer have been quite relaxed lately. They often watch me go by in case I have some food for them. If I'm on the tractor and I stop on the road, they will come over for carrots and apples and some sprouts. They get very excited and I have to put the food out in long lines to ensure that each of them get a chance as there is a strict pecking order with the males when it comes to food being served. Doing several rows helps them to spread out and calm down. Some of the younger males often take up sparring. There is no real aggression, just getting some practice in for when they have bigger antlers. Here in this photo you can see two youngsters doing just that.



I recently checked under a bridge for otter spraints and was pleased to find some. My next step will be to put some remote cameras out and try to get some new photos. Unfortunately for me they turn up at night or very early hours in the morning so I'm unable to get photos on my own camera.

I am hoping that the Barn owls have used the box for breeding this year, last year it was taken over by a squirrel. I'll hopefully bring updates in the future about the owls and Otters. A few weeks ago we had a cygnet rescued. It had a minor injury and our resident pair of swans is re-establishing their breeding territory and the cygnet could have ended up in a lot of bother if they had seen it. The amazing Swan Sanctuary volunteers that do the rescues always come to the aid of any swans when we call. They certainly know their stuff and have good knowledge of what swans live where in relation to their leg ring identification numbers.

There have been flocks galore of siskins, goldfinches, chaffinches etc all feeding on the Alder trees. It's surprising how noisy small birds can be. The noise can be so loud that I think there must be 100 birds, but then only 20 fly away and all goes quiet. Here's a siskin with an alder seed in its beak.



Hérons are ever present still dropping in and out of our canals. They wait patiently for something to move in the water and then strike with lightening speed. This heron is sitting on the white footbridge, not sure if it's using the bridge just to perch on or whether it's checking the water below, but these birds do not swoop from height to catch food, they are all about stealth.



I hope to bring you some more stories and photos next time around. I'll be keeping my eyes peeled and monitoring the wildlife as usual.

Julie Matthews
Mills Nature Conservationist