## Autumn 2022

# TOUCHPAPER

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

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Autumn 2022

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Deadline for the next issue is 25th November 2022

## **Editorial**

With the usual help from my frequent supporters I have filled another issue.

The bad news is that we have lost John Wilson who was one of our longest serving volunteers. He started with the 2' 6" railway group and later 'moved south' to start his own 7 ½" railway also setting up our current workshop and working tirelessly to do maintenance work on almost anything that needed attention. I always enjoyed my time with John; he was one of the few people I could always hear! We had many conversations on a variety of topics and John was always willing to give help when needed.

We have lost a very good friend.

If you noticed the omission of the Chairman's Chat it has been replaced with the following piece, the main obituary is towards the back of this issue.

Brian Clements

# **Remembering John Wilson**

Over the years John has made a number of entertaining items for children. Here are some of them.

Two of John's smaller items are to be found at the entrance to the Rocket Vault and Mad Lab and have proved very popular with younger children for many years. They both involve navigating a steel ball through a maze. One is a small horizontal table that can be tilted in two directions and the other is a vertical wheel where the ball starts at the outside and finishes in the centre from where it returns to its starting point.

A somewhat larger project is his water rocket monorail. In this, two litre plastic bottles are half filled with water and pumped up with air to race one another suspended on separate rails. On occasions we raced a water rocket and a black powder D motor rocket. This can be viewed on our YouTube pages along with his larger rocket powered vehicle on his miniature railway using up to four D motors.

## https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FvCjGyX05Y

Latterly John was also an active member of the Friends committee and a Trustee of The Friends Association charity.

Len Stuart WARGMFA Chairman

# **Building H67**

A few weeks ago I was given a bundle of photographs of the Site taken in 1992, a year after we had shut up shop on the North Site and moved down to Fort Halstead. One of them is looking north along Long Walk. This puzzled me, taxing my memory back to the 1970's, for there was on the picture of a road going off to the left in a westerly direction and there is virtually no trace of it now.



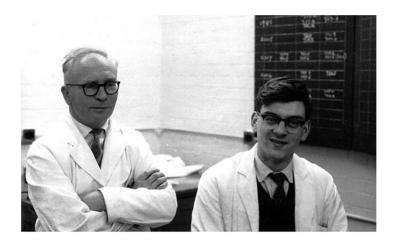


Whereas there is physical evidence of a lot of the buildings, structures and roads on the site that we used to use that are still there now, albeit showing the signs of ageing, nearly all visible signs of that road have gone. The road actually went across a couple of disused waterways to Building H67, and once again all traces of that building have gone. The contemporary maps and aerial photographs show the road and H67 very clearly.





I have to confess that H67 was one of the buildings I knew least about; I would not have needed to visit it back in the 1970's, having been an explosives rather than a propellant chap. I did recall it being known as the "Stockade" after Geoff Stocks and I knew that Tony Barratt carried out Closed Vessel tests there. Indeed Tony wrote a good article "H67 – 1960's My Internal Combustion Years" about this in the Spring 2012 issue of Touchpaper to which Bryan Howard added a couple of anecdotes. That article included a picture of him (on the right) with John Littlefair, and can be seen on WATI 2012.03 in the on-line archives.



Tony has helpfully added to the stories of H67 and I can do no better than to reproduce his words verbatim:

"There were two rooms with strand burners, one run by Jack Ponting for routine samples and the other by Bob Forbes which had a high pressure burner. The nitrogen to pressurise the burners was in cylinders outside on large trailers ....Calorimetry was in 4 rooms at the east end of the building. The photo from an undated Orange Ministry of Technology Activities and Facilities booklet shows John Littlefair holding one of the calorimeters. The inset is of John and Bob Forbes taking readings from a Wheatstone Bridge.



The calculations involved plotting these on large graphs (4 or 5 feet by 2 feet) and measuring areas with a planimeter. This was for special accurate measurements with a gold plated bomb. For routine cordite samples an automated bridge was used".

Bryan Howard recalled another story about H67 in a Touchpaper article of 1994 (WATI 1994.06). A special high pressure closed vessel was to have its inaugural test in a building at the back of H67 and these are Bryan's words.

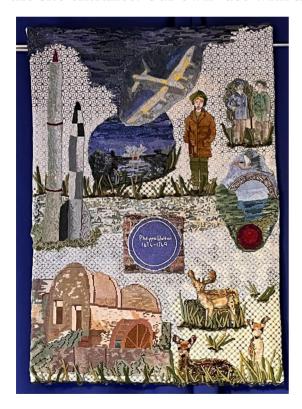
"A number of interested engineers and scientists had gathered at H67 to be in at the first firing (albeit from a safe distance). The Designer, who was an external contractor, was so confident that he suggested that we made a saddle for him to sit astride the vessel when it was fired. We persuaded him to retreat to a safe distance with the rest of us. Just as the final preparations were being made Ken Thomas told me that there was a phone call for me in my office. I didn't take much notice of the muffled "crump" from outside during my conversation but, on emerging from H67 I became aware of a group of rather crestfallen engineers surveying the two doors of the firing pit that had been blown off their hinges. The vessel has been alright but, due to a miscalculation, the pressure release valve had failed to hold the pressure and, at some 40 tons per sq inch (that's 700MPa to you youngsters) and had ejected into the wall. The moral of the story is that if you go to your office at such critical moments you're going to miss all the fun! Incidentally, that was the last we heard about saddles on closed vessels".

## **Geoff Hooper**

**Contents** 

## **Events of 2nd June 2022**

Two key events happened on 2nd June 2022. The first was the unveiling of a tapestry depicting the history of Waltham Abbey. This comprises a series of ten panels featuring various aspects of the town, past and present. One of these covers the Royal Gunpowder Mills and shows the waterwheel that powered a hydraulic gunpowder press, a semi-circular canal bridge, the Barnes Wallis bouncing bomb (which of course used Waltham Abbey-produced RDX as the explosive charge) breaching a Ruhr Valley dam and the Petrel rocket launcher that now resides on the roundabout just inside the site entrance. Our own "ace with a needle" Diane Howse played



a significant part in producing the tapestry.

The unveiling took place in the Sun Street Museum at 7:30 p.m. with various town, district and county councillors and other dignitaries present. There was plenty of food and wine, and an enjoyable evening was had by all. The second event formed part of the Platinum Jubilee celebrations later that evening; the lighting of a beacon. This was organised by the Waltham Abbey Town Partnership and the beacon was located behind the Abbey Church rectory. In common with the lighting of beacons all over the country; this took place at 9:45 p.m. The event was well attended, including by a couple of our former work colleagues who still live in the town.

The ceremony was not without its problems, including a failure of the sound system which rendered some of the speeches inaudible. A piper was present who subsequently made his way around the town. He is seen here in the market square, blowing his pipes to the vexation of regulars in the adjacent pubs.



**Geoff Hooper** 

## **Postcard**

We recently had a request for help from Lawrence Greenhall of the Waltham Abbey Historical Society about a post card for auction on

ebay,.



WW1 STEAM LORRY MILITARY VEHICLE LONDON REG POSS WALTHAM CROSS NR CHESHUNT

I circulated this to those members for which we hold email addresses. This item has now been sold for £37, I think the photograph is unlikely to relate to Waltham Abbey but see the comment from Peter Stone.

#### **Brian Clements**

# **Postcard Response**

Sometimes I used to walk from the South Site into Waltham Abbey through the Gate near to the River. There was a large house on the main road (B194) with a Government Arrow on the front wall. It might still be there! It was constructed of (I think!) 18 inch solid brick, which is very unusual, and often connected with resistance to adjacent explosives storage. A derelict building in the South Site near to that gate contained an ammunition box addressed to a Major in an Essex Militia unit, but from WWII I think. I don't remember any houses behind the "Government" building though. It seems to me slightly possible that the post card maybe connected with this observation. A bit of research into the use of that building might help.

#### **Peter Stone**

# **The First Cordite Factory**

In last month's Touchpaper I wrote about the Water Tower on Quinton Hill. I suggested it was built for the first Cordite Factory that was constructed here. Gunpowder, which had been in use for hundreds of years, produced a great deal of smoke. In the 19th Century Chemists were discovering new explosives, and most countries were looking to Nitrocellulose (NC) based explosives as propellants. These produced much less smoke and were often referred to (erroneously in my opinion!) as smokeless. Britain developed Cordite. This was the subject of a patent battle between Alfred Nobel and the British Government. The Government won, and the Patent was granted in the names of Sir Fredrick Abel and Sir James Dewar. Abel worked as a chemist at Woolwich and he developed the well-known Heat Test for the stability of cordite etc. Sir James Dewar was the inventor of the Vacuum flask.

Whilst at Waltham I had, from Mr McClaren, a photocopy of the Board of Inquiry Report into the explosion that occurred in the Factory in 1894. Prior to the explosion there were two rectangular buildings for the processing of Nitroglycerine (NG) in this vicinity. This was used for the manufacture of cordite. After the explosion they were replaced by two round buildings, which were semi sunk into the ground. These were designed by Colonel Majendie who wrote the 1875 Explosives Act. This was in force for over 100 years! These two rebuilt round buildings were of light weight wood construction with zinc sheet roofs. They were sunk into the ground with a brick traverse, jutting just a couple of feet above the ground, acting as an earth retaining wall. Although only one is shown on the later plan, they were both still there in 1984 when I left the site. Colonel Majendie's philosophy for the new design was, that the blast wave would be diverted upwards and that the light construction would not produce hazardous fragments. Whilst the later proved to be true, the former is more problematic!

When considering the explosion of large quantities of explosives, blast waves reassert themselves over earth mounds. However, the smaller quantities used in this process this might have resulted in a reduced side on overpressure. Corners do enhance blast waves, and there are directional effects from rectangular buildings, so a circular design may have some advantages. I suspect Colonel Majendie deduced this from his experience of accidental explosions. But it is not used today, probably because the benefits would be minimal over the distances we now use to separate explosives facilities. I explored all the buildings involved in the accident, and also some other buildings that were shown on the original plans in the report. If you are wondering how I came to find time to explore all these historical ruins, I expect that my line mangers of the time are also wondering that if they are reading this!

There was, in the lower of the two buildings, a large wooden open barrel and a black board with chalk writing on it. When I was at Waltham, we called the lead vessel where we mixed the wet NC slurry with the NG, a Tundish. A Tun of course being a barrel and I presume this is where the name came from. I think this wood barrel was used in the skimming of the NG to remove water, rather than for mixing. It was this operation that was conjectured to be the cause of the 1894 explosion. It was thought the explosion was caused by a lead skimmer striking the side of the vessel. The lower building usually had a foot or two of water inside it in the 1980s!

There was a Public Footpath shown on the plan of the 1894 explosion, which was closed after the accident in case of sabotage. I wonder if the land of this part of the South Site was purchased specifically for the construction of this Factory. That might explain the presence of the footpath. Also, of note in the report, was that the Wake Arms Pub, a considerable distance away, claimed for damages! I suspect that they were taking advantage of the situation! When the distances used in the Quantity Distance Tables (for the storage of explosives) were deduced, this explosion was one of those used. The quantity of explosives was accurately known, the only complication being to decide if the two explosions occurred simultaneously.

I found a circular, similarly constructed building hidden in undergrowth to the North of, and adjacent to, the Black Ditch. This had been a Guncotton store or possibly a stove. It was not underground. I presume they learnt their lesson after the lower of the original two was found to be permanently under water. It still had some of the original Tram lines at the entrance. At one time the South Site had a Tram system servicing the buildings. I came across some operating instructions for Guncotton Stoves at some point. The Process Workers were required to work bare footed on a wet floor! When I was at Waltham buildings where dry NC was stored required socks without shoes to be worn on a dry floor; progress I suppose! Later, when I walked the Green Chain Walk, I found an information board, near to the Woolwich Arsenal, denoting the site of a circular Explosives Magazine. An information board said they were known locally as "Tumps" (Tump is a term for a round mound or hill). I presume the design came from the Waltham originals. Many of the buildings of the first Cordite Factory survived and were repurposed when I worked in P1. We worked in them unaware of their historical significance.

When I was at St Mary Cray, I loaned my tatty photocopy of the report to someone who promptly lost it! I badgered him so much that eventually he came up with a bound copy of the report. This also contained the reports of two or three other contemporary accidental explosions at Waltham. I was slightly perplexed, as it had a very fresh-looking stamp on the frontispiece for the OB library a year after the actual date that he proffered it to me. More careful inspection showed the year to be prefixed with 18 and not 19! It had small pieces of paper with manuscript notes, which I worked out were written by the then Superintendent Colonel Nathan. The Board of Inquiry was commissioned by the Government, as there was much speculation about the explosion in the National Press. It was being described in the press as a "Cordite" explosion and was putting the future use of this new material in jeopardy. The spate of accidents covered in the reports gave rise to the introduction, at Colonel Majendie's, insistence, of the Danger Building Visitor. This role survived into my own time. It was filled by an experienced

Explosives Worker who could visit any building throughout the Site at any time to ensure good practice was being followed. As you may imagine they were very popular characters!

#### NOTES:

- 1. I hope to compare the map from the 1894 explosion with a more recent one to see which buildings survived from the first factory. Maybe I can report in the next Touchpaper.
- 2. I started by caveating several statements with "as far as I remember" or words to that effect. But have abandoned this in favour of this note that I may have misremembered some things! If so I ask for your forebearance!

#### **Peter Stone**

# South Site Tower 478 / An Explosive Footpath

Further to Peter Stone's article on the South Site Tower : Touchpaper Summer 2022 :

In the 1917 South Site map / inventory of buildings – WAMP 900 – 85, in the north of the NG area there is a small circle with the building reference no. 478. In the building inventory this is listed as Water Tower. Due north of this, Bldg.478a is listed as a reservoir.

## **Explosive Quinton Hill Footpath**

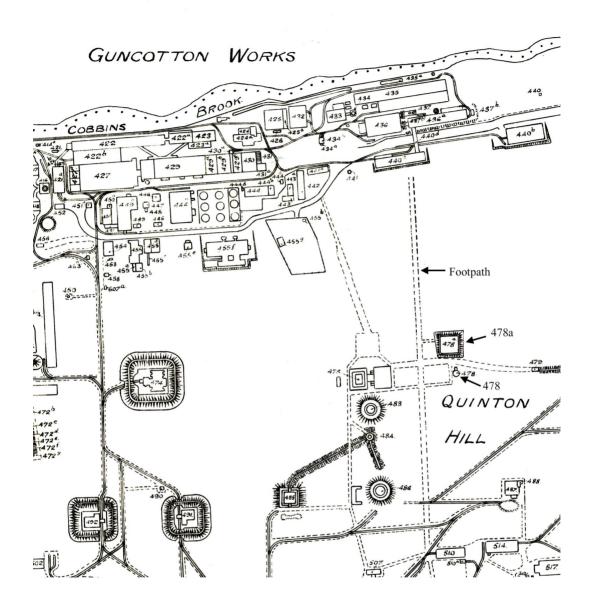
Due west a track is indicated. This is possibly the line of the Quinton Hill footpath. This was a well used path from Sewardstone to Waltham Abbey, via Quinton Hill, crossing Cobbims Brook and the Black Ditch. When the Government purchased the land the path became part of what was to become the South Site and it appears terminated at the first explosives plant on the site - the guncotton factory.

The footpath and public areas would pass through the planned security and safety sensitive NG complex. Clearly an unsatisfactory situation for the Authorities, and when the land was purchased in 1887 the RGPF introduced the Waltham Abbey Gunpowder Factory Bill proposing an Act to abolish the footpath and all rights of way in the area of Quinton Hill Farm.

This provoked a storm of protest with severe criticism of the local Board for not standing up to the Authorities to protect residents' rights and a campaign involving the local and national press was instigated.

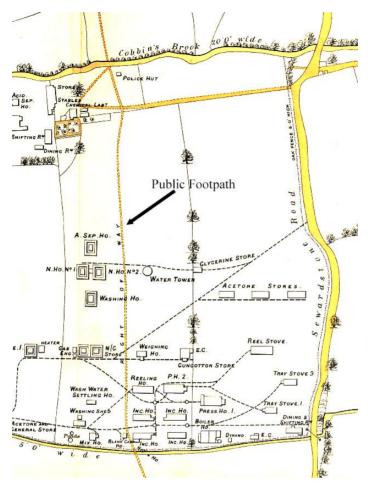
The campaign succeeded and the footpath remained open, surely in terms of surroundings one of the most unusual in the country.

#### Les Tucker



Part of South Site factory including water tower and possible line of Quinton Hill footpath. WAMP 900-85

# **Old South Site footpath**



Map extract from 1894 explosion report WASC\_0001\_00

The map from the 1894 report shows a right of way to the East of the buildings that exploded and to the West of the water tower. It has come out an unpleasant yellow on the scan. I presume the red ink has faded!

#### **Peter Stone**

# Mills Archive Historic Information Summary 3 German Rocket Scientists / Engineers At Waltham Abbey Post WW2

Two influxes of personnel to the Waltham Abbey Gunpowder Mills from 'outside' were of interest technically and socially. The first, in the late 19th century, involved industrial staff and scientists from the West of Scotland Nobel chemical explosives plant at Ardeer and other sources, mainly the Glasgow, area taking up employment at the Mills as it made the transition from gunpowder to chemical explosives. And the second was in 1946 with the recruitment from Germany of a small number of specialist rocket scientists and engineers for employment in the Explosives Research Centre which had been established in 1945 by the Chemical Research and Development Department (C.R.D.D.) utilising the old Mills factory buildings after closure as a ROF manufacturing facility.

The following describes the German presence in Government service at Waltham Abbey based on copy documents in the Mills Archive (WAROC 2-20, AVIA 67-40).

WWII ended and large parts of Europe lay in ruins with a huge numbers of refugees, what were termed Displaced Persons, DP's, seeking sanctuary in refugee camps. However behind the scenes a full scale scramble was going on between the now rival Super Powers, the US and Russia, to acquire German scientific expertise / scientists, particularly in rocketry which was becoming increasingly important both in the military and civil fields. Both were successful at a top level, the best known von Braun to the US. Britain and France were very much in the second rank, left to secure whatever they could, in some cases it later appeared by subterfuge.

British policy under the D.C.O.S. Scheme was a characteristically gentlemanly process more akin to a private firm's recruitment policy. It was set out in a review of 1/12/46 headed Employment of German Scientists in U.K. in a File rather revealingly / unfortunately titled 7/Exploitation/12. Basically the Germans would be offered 6 or 12 month contracts with review after that to determine whether they wished to stay or return to Germany or other destination.

"It has been decided that a limited number of high-grade German scientists and technicians will be employed for the benefit of our Defence Services".

Emphasising that there was no question of displacing British scientists and they would be on lower salary scales and grades. The review also introduced the 'Darwin Panel' under which German scientists could also be considered for private employment in industry or Research Associations.

#### How were the Germans selected?

Interested parties consulted a list of candidates, with their position, location and action to be taken, such as Assessment Report required or required in UK for interrogation. This was probably based at least partly on information obtained by 'T' Force (1)

Five rocket research personnel were selected in 1946 for Waltham Abbey:

Hans Ziebland Experimental Engineer. Already at Rocket

Research Institute at Trauen

Botho Demant Chief Chemist Luftwaffe At Peenemunde,

transferred to Trauen

Norbert Luft Chemist At Peenemunde, transferred to Trauen

Gerhard Muller Described as Chemical Assistant At Peenemunde,

transferred toTrauen

( there is some doubt as to how this lower grade came to be Included in this 'high grade 'group)

Franz Neunzig Engineer Transferred to Trauen

Apart from Ziebland already there, the Waltham Abbey Germans were included in a group assembled at Trauen for sea / rail passage to the UK, to be escorted by a Mr. A.Vietch, possibly a MoS employee. The Authorities were obviously solicitous of the German's welfare – Mr. Vietch's Movement Authority / Instructions included a specific instruction that at the Hook the group could be taken into the Officers Mess for not only a meal, it had to be a hot meal!

The group commenced their rail journey at 13-45 on 19th June 1947. A copy of the Movement Order is annotated 'Demant and Luft arrived at Waltham Abbey at 11-30-a.m. 20-6-47.'

A small number, but of considerable social and technical interest. It must have been a strange journey for the Germans. Here they were travelling to work for what had been 'the enemy' in an area of research which had been dedicated to destruction of the enemy. How would they be received, at work and in the community?

Apart from that, there were family concerns. Ziebland's wife was dead and he had to leave his two sons in the care of his parents, not a simple situation for grandparents in war ravaged Germany with all its difficulties.

However, Demant's problems surpassed this. In August 1947 he wrote a heartfelt letter to the C.R.D.D. which is a good example of the myriad problems the War had brought for so many and what conditions were for refugees. It is apparent that Demant had a 'former' and a 'new' family and his concerns were with his new family. He had been promised that he would be able to bring them across after a six month period of service.

However this waiting period had extended to a year and this meant that his new future wife and children, who were in a camp for refugees from the Russian Zone, would have to wait over the winter for a fresh period of service to expire.

#### Demant describes the conditions:

"Beside all the other incredibly hard conditions of life at the present time in Germany, my future wife and her two little children must live alone as a refugee from the Russian Zone with people who dislike refugees. There is no possibility for her to get some other food than only the very small rations, no fuel,, no clothing, no potatoes etc., nothing more than trouble, sorrows and grief's day by day.

Now she is alone and unable to endure any longer all the daily increasing difficulties regarding the last wintertime in Germany. It is really quite impossible, that she will survive under the present intolerable conditions the coming winter without danger for her life."

(Demant uses the term future wife as circumstances had made marriage impossible before he had to leave for his first six month term in the UK).

Food Parcels: In the above conditions and in the absence of a parcel service to Germany it was permitted to send one food parcel a month to Germany via an organisation, 'Save Europe Now' at 14 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, who required payment of 4/- by Postal Order to cover costs.

## What became of the Waltham Abbey Germans?

#### Hans Ziebland

Ziebland was a senior experimental engineer at the German Rocket Research Institute at Trauen with particular expertise in heat transfer effect in liquid rocket fuels, including the design and building of proof stands. Post War there was a steadily increasing interest in rocketry, military and civil, and the materials studied at the Research Centre formed the propellant in what was called the rocket motor. Ziebland was therefore of considerable interest to the Research Centre where a liquid rocket fuel research plan was under way.

Ziebland was an assiduous worker and created a good impression virtually from the moment of his arrival at Waltham Abbey. The internal memoranda speak for themselves:

6-11-1947 It should be noted that this is a continuation of the work for which Ziebland was responsible at Trauen, and in which he is an expert He has.done excellent work at Waltham. (WASC 2372)

15-1-1949 In support for an application for special merit salary increase Ziebland has made a first class contribution, both theoretical and practical ....... His familiarity with engineering design and past experience of proof stand work in Germany are also exceedingly valuable. (WASC 2372).

Ziebland went on to become a senior figure at Waltham Abbey, progressively extending his work.

Ziebland published extensively in Government reports and in the open literature on his specialist subject of heat transfer, collaborating with the Rocket Propulsion Establishment at Westcott, and received special merit promotions (WASC 1914)

Ziebland brought his sons over from Germany and established his life here. Later, one of his sons, living in Broxbourne, visited the Mills and recollected his father toiling into the night over his Reports.

## Franz Neunzig

Neunzig specialised in the evaluation and testing of solid catalysts for decomposition of H.T.P. As this was intended for use in submarine torpedoes, much of his time was spent at the Admiralty Research Station at Welwyn, working with Shell Petroleum.

6-11-1947 Neunzig has proved a most useful and willing member of the team, and is very assiduous in his duties (WASC 2372)

Neunzig emigrated to Australia in 1950.

#### Norbert Luft

No information has been discovered on Luft. He returned to Germany in 1950.

#### Boho Demant

Demant does not appear to have fulfilled the promise which would have been expected from his position at Peenemunde.

It has not been possible to find any information or valuation of his activity at Waltham. His correspondence indicates severe dissatisfaction and he is mentioned as 'awkward'. He is reported as having left Waltham Abbey in1948 for other, non rocket, work in Britain.

What was the conclusion on the value or otherwise of the German experiment, with the scientists or engineers (around 40 in 1948) scattered around the various Governmental research establishments according to their specialisation?

The following are extracts from an analysis by John Becklake, a major authority on the subject (WASC 2115 Acta Astronautica 59 2006)

The Germans were generally well liked and respected, most stayed to make their homes here, but there were not many exceptional talents among them.

#### And further:

Apart from the invaluable experience in rocket and guided missile systems which the Germans brought with them, which saved some 18 months R&D, they had little influence on British rocket technology.

It could be said this is a little stringent. The US and Russia had already taken the top talent and those remaining whilst on the whole able inevitably had to be somewhat lower than the very top personnel.

However there were some notable successes.

In this context Hans Ziebland should be counted a notable success of the Scheme, both technical and societal. His contribution in his specialisation was invaluable, counting as a notable example of transfer of technology, and he tirelessly extended his activity at Waltham beyond this, publishing Reports extensively and achieving a senior scientific position. Societally he integrated himself and family into the Waltham Abbey area and was a notable example of reconciliation after a devastating war.

(1) T- Force was a secret intelligence unit set up to go in with the spearhead forces and secure any technical equipment, documents, personnel etc. of potential interest to Britain. The Force was involved in a strange incident at the end of the War. It had been detailed to seize and take control of Kiel, an important strategic

area, when the order was received from the British High Command, i.e. ultimately Field Marshal Montgomery, ordering all British forces to 'stand still'. However there was a very real danger that the Russians would seize Kiel. It seems that Brigadier Pennycook, the boss of T-Force, who prior to the stand still had ordered the Force, led by Major Tony Hibbert, to press on to Kiel was awakened in the middle of the night by his staff after the stand still order to confirm that he stood by his decision and in a Nelsonian mode reiterated his order - a direct contravention of an order from High Command - a heinous military crime. Kiel was successfully seized, but a British General placed Hibbert under arrest. It appears it was later realised that in the circumstances of victory to further proceed against a holder of the Military Cross who had been suffering from a leg wound throughout the advance would be invidious and the matter was dropped. The leg injury forced Hibbert's retirement from the Army in 1946. In 1960 aged 90 Tony Hibbert returned to Kiel to do a TV programme on the episode. One of the most important WW2 armaments development and manufacture works was in Kiel, the WalterWerke. Swords into ploughshares - it now makes machinery for manufacture of ice cream cones and wafers.

#### Les Tucker

(Royal Gunpowder Mills Friends Association)

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## WARGMFA AGM/Reunion June 17th 2022

After the last two years it was great to see everyone at the Reunion and I thank the majority of you who were able to make it to the AGM first. Probably one of the best AGM turnouts for several years! I was pleased to see many old friends but do understand why some folk were unable to make the journey this time. Hopefully, next year will be better!

It was very good to see Dr John Wright, a previous chairman of the Friends, who was kindly brought by his grandchildren. Also Les Tucker who has worked so hard on the archives and has supplied many articles for Touchpaper over the years! It was good to have Sheilagh Owens with us again, thanks to her sister, Margaret, who drove her over from Melbourn. David Manners organised a taxi from Leigh on Sea to bring him! Grant Privett drove all the way from Salisbury and very kindly provided the photograph of some of the attendees at the Reunion. Always difficult to get everyone into a photoshoot! See below/above

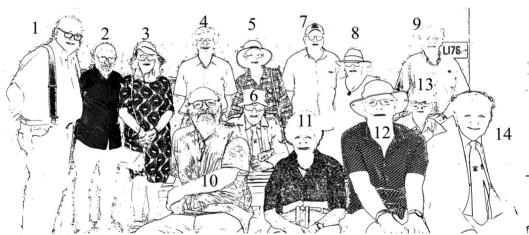
The weather was very hot on the day and we were all glad to keep to the shade where we could. The usual land train trip was popular and many an anecdote was recalled of our time at the establishment.

Best wishes,

**Daphne Clements** 

**WARGMFA** Committee





1	Ron McEvoy	8	Linda Gough
2	Brian Clements	9	Richard Penfold
3	Daphne Clements	10	<b>Grant Privette</b>
4	John Rowley	11	Sheilagh Owens
5	Diane Howse	12	John Cook
6	Kim Henshaw	13	Len Stuart
7	Martin Gough	14	Geoff Hooper

# Obituary

# John Wilson 1944 - 1922



John came to the Mills as a volunteer in 2001, working with the railway group on the 2' 6" railway.

In 2010 he branched out to begin construction of his 7½" railway which he mainly funded himself. Latterly, the Friends contributed to some rails and a battery. Whilst John was occupied with both railways he also did a lot of general maintenance for the Mills.

He built the 7½" single track railway running parallel with Long Walk from the roundabout to opposite Main Lab, with a station at either end of the line. There is an engine house where the various elements of his trains are kept. At both stations he added a runaround to allow the engine to change ends.

John and his team maintained the track and rolling stock. Visitors were able to ride on the train with John providing tickets. I joined the team after the heavy work had been completed and was duly "trained" to drive and issued with a whistle! Luke and Harry also became drivers and we fell into the routine of John, Luke and Harry driving with Mary and me acting as guards.

The pandemic meant that the site was closed to visitors and the railway was unable to run. Sadly, as the restrictions were lifted John's health deteriorated and he was unable to return to duty although he remained interested in his railway. He passed the responsibility for the railway to Luke and with help from Brian the train was able to run again. Sadly, John then had to move to a nursing home where several of us visited him. He remained very interested in the railway and the site in general as we reported the latest news, offering pertinent suggestions.

We were very sad to learn of his death last month.

## **Daphne Clements**

I first met John back in the early days, he was always busy in the workshop. There wasn't anything he couldn't make and there wasn't anything he couldn't repair, which in my case was "John can you fix this for me please" I can't ever recall him saying no. John was a dedicated volunteer sometimes attending up to 4 days a week or more. I can recall him telling me how he applied to be a volunteer and couldn't wait any longer for the reply as the Mills hadn't officially opened, so he just turned up one day and after introducing himself he never left. John and I soon discovered that we both shared a passion for wildlife photography and we went on many walks together. He inspired and supported me and I would like to think that somewhere along the way he had a hand in what is now my nature column. I will miss John greatly, his laughter, his kindness and his never-ending support.

#### Julie Matthews

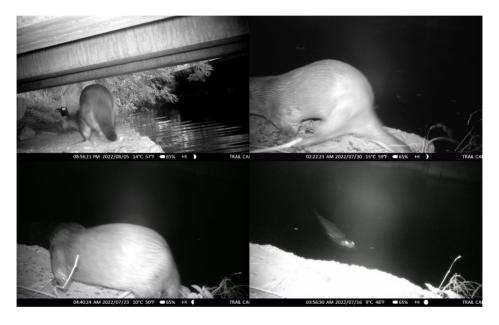
# Julie's Nature Column

In the last edition I mentioned that the Kestrels that were nesting. The young have successfully fledged, possibly three of them, but it was difficult to tell sometimes which was the adult and which was the chick up in the tree tops. Every day for weeks you could hear Kestrels calling, but now it has all gone quiet, so I assume that they have moved on. I hope that they return next year and will be successful again. Here's a photo of an adult Kestrel sitting on one of the Incorporating Mill buildings.



I think it's quite impressive that the Mills can provide the right variety of habitats for so many nesting birds. You have the Raptors which include the Kestrel, Common Buzzard, Hobby, Red Kite, Barn owl and Tawny owl. Those are just the ones that I know about. Then you have songbirds which include the Robin, Blue tit, Great tit, Blackbird, Long-Tailed tit and Wren. Also Waterfowl such as Mallards, Coots, Moorhens, Swans and Geese. One of my favourites is of course the beautiful Kingfisher, all of these birds nest at the Mills. How amazing considering how much activity takes place on site.

I have an update on my Otter Cameras....really good news, they are visiting regularly. I say they, but it could be the same one each time. The not so good news is that I can't get a decent photo of one. I've even put a second camera out the get the otters face, but this second camera doesn't seem to trigger when the Otter arrives, but it does trigger for mice, foxes, deer and me when I attend the cameras! I'm keeping the cameras out and I'm keeping my fingers crossed for some better photos.



Our fallow deer are looking healthy, the males have just lost the velvet on their antlers and I've witnessed a few clashes already. This has nothing to do with the rut, it's about pecking order. When the deer are in velvet they can't use their antlers to settle a dispute so they have to box instead. They rear up on their hind legs and use their front legs to box. The blows are heavy, you can hear the thumps. It's surprising how agile they are on two legs, but I do believe that the bigger males tire quicker than the smaller ones due to their heavier bulk.

Here's a photo of two deer boxing, it looks like they're having a dance! The deer on the left was getting ganged up on by a total of three deer and in the end he had to concede, he got chased and ran over to his buddy...the biggest one on site. The other three deer soon stopped in their tracks. Deer politics, who knew!



When this deer isn't getting into trouble and being chased he's normally quite comical. I call him Cheeky boy and you can see why in this photo.



Well, that's all for now, but I'll be on the look-out for more wildlife stories and photos to bring you again soon

Julie Matthews Mills Nature Conservationist

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