



COALHOUSE FORT NEWSLETTER

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EDITORIAL

Apologies for the late issue of this newsletter but time and circumstances have forced the delay.

This season has been a busy one commencing with the first open day in March and our annual Motor Bike Day which was a great success with many motor bikes arriving and due to the good weather there were many visitors. Georgette Polley with her crown of many colours did a great job getting donations from tight pockets but was ably assisted by Fiona and a number of other enthusiastic helpers. Our next event was at the end of April with the two day Military History days. Although we had a good turnout of military displays unfortunately the footfall through the fort's gates was not that great financially in adding to the fort's income. Credit must come to Samantha who assembled a great cast of re-enactors and dancers and their displays to entertain the public. It is hoped that some will return to a smaller event in 2015. The committee have come to the decision that the fort does not have the capacity to stage a large two day military event, so a rethink is to be made that only a one day event on a smaller scale is a reality. A number of food stalls inside the fort restricted the space available for displays or stands so in future these will have to be limited and placed outside. Since April a number of open days without specific themes have been held crowned by our annual Classic Car Day. This was organised by our previous chairman Colin who presented awards to the best car on show and handed out a number of plaques. There were a number of kit cars, including a formula one scale replica, whilst in one of the casemates a large slot car racing circuit courtesy of Lee Thorndyke drew great interest from the old and young generations. There is already plenty of support for next year's event with exhibitors and public interested in making a return.

At the beginning of July Veolia North Thames Trust held their corporate event in the fort with great success and allowing many prominent persons to tour, view and familiarise themselves with the fort, thus giving us increased visibility to the outside world.

We have this year had the good fortune to enrol Jay as a new much needed guide, and a further member who is a great addition to our open day guides. Unfortunately over the past year we have had two of our older and much respected guides give up for health reasons, but we fervently hope they will continue to come to the fort for a long time yet. Unfortunately we have lost one of our stalwarts Brian Burton who will be surely missed by all of us. While reflecting on our older members it is good to see Terry Dowler and Terry O'Brian are regular visitors on open days and a great help in the fort museums.

This year in March we have also had to say a sad farewell to IAN DONALD, who unfortunately previously had to leave the fort, but will be remembered with fondness for what he achieved while with us as our conservation officer, With his enthusiasm he managed to get the grants that enabled us to obtain our replica 38ton gun, re-felt part of the roof and a number of other items too numerous to mention.

Our thanks is given for the new bench seat kindly donated by the Thurrock Local History Society in memory of Brian Burton that has now been installed in the Memorial Park. As recognition of our past members who have now passed on to that great fort in the sky, brass plaques have been added to the Roll of Honour board in the tearoom, namely Brian Burton, Ian Donald and George Mosely.

We now have on board Fiona who keeps coming up with new ideas for raising funds including raffles etc. and has been a great help with her friends in managing the tearoom in the absence of Carol and daughters who must be thanked for their efforts over the past year plus.

THE COMMITTEE

Ken Levy (Chairman), Peter Appleton (Vice Chairman), Eileen Suckling (Treasurer), Dana Tripp (Secretary), Mike Ostler (Research), John Brice (Insurance), Samantha Coats (Halloween/Military Events), Jamie Robertson (Paranormal), Roy Reynolds/ Basil Silver (E.T Village Representatives), Dave Thorndyke (Thameside Aviation), Georgette Polley/ Fiona Mc Loughlin (Events/Fund Raising).

Co- Opted: Lloyd Wells (Health & Safety).

Representatives: Jeff Appleton (Boat Club) , Roger Picket (Rifle Club), Scott Sullivan/Cathy Kent (Thurrock Council).

Trustees: Roger Picket. Mike Ostler, Georgette Polley.

VOLUNTEERS

We still need more volunteers to help swell our ranks, as us older ones are being sadly depleted and younger members dedicated to our cause are needed if we are to progress and maintain our current standard. We have built up the reputation of being able to interact with our visitors to enable them to have a pleasant visit and wish to return. Our publicity is now reaching out farther and with the current lottery bid secure for the improved external toilet block also highlighting Coalhouse Fort. I realise that we will only be getting a small percentage of the moneys pledged, but hopefully the FORT may benefit in a future bid !!!.

GRUMBLE AND GRUNTS

Once again I have been at a loss for putting together this newsletter as only the usual one person has submitted an article for publication despite many requests for items of interest. Please don't forget THIS is for you all, so please let me have some in the next few months. Email: kenle@tiscali.co.uk

Over the past 12—18 months a number of items have gone missing which include two folding tables, one 5ft and a 6ft., A gazebo green colour, a small picnic folding table used for travelling displays. The other gazebo (blue) has been severely damaged at an event this year. This will have to be repaired at a cost, A further damaged blue non fort gazebo located in a small non fort case has been found but also in a damaged state. The cost to replace these items is approximately £500.00 which the fort cannot afford or sustain. In future it will be proposed that all items of this nature will be signed for by the person wishing to use them, Furthermore it is intended to put prominent identification on all these types of items, and any damage to be identified to a committee member immediately, This draconian measure is necessary at great regret due to the inconsideration of the few who don't think of others.

RESTORATION

Well Gerry, Norman, Tony and our new recruit Dave have been doing sterling work in bringing the 25Pdr. up to scratch with great attention to detail, following its long period of neglect. They are now turning their attention to the refurbishment of the limber in its highly corroded state. Well done lads, many thanks.

Our new Wednesday recruit Dave has worked hard to cleaning up four original RML shells and lacquered them help to stop any further deterioration and corrosion. One of the shells is an original 12.5” dredged up from the River Thames by DP Ports and given to us on permanent loan. It is believed to be one fired from Coalhouse.

LATEST NEWS

You will all be pleased to know that we have at last had the revised guide book reprinted and is now on sale, but unfortunately we have had to raise the price to £4.00 each. Members will be able to purchase it at a reduced cost.

As a result of the lottery bid a new conservation officer, Stephen Keogh has been appointed. He is full of enthusiasm that has already been demonstrated by arrangement of the 100th WW1 anniversary evening on 4th August.. On that evening a short service and WW1 singsong was held in St. Katherine’s Church to a packed house. From there all present proceeded to the fort for a candlelight vigil in the south parade ground under the Union flag and as the candles were extinguished the last post was sounded from the roof.

Another appointee from the lottery bid is the new education officer Hazel Sacco who commenced work this month, and hopefully will be another asset to the promotion of the fort.

During the day of the 4th , Tilbury Fort held an open day in commemoration of the commencement of WW1. We had a display stand adjacent to the magazines which was very well received, A great number of visitors came to the stand asking numerous questions about Coalhouse Fort and many leaflets handed out, We also were asked many questions on the history of Tilbury Fort as there seemed much confusion by the public with no fort representative to help. One of the highlights of the day was the appearance of a SE5 replica biplane giving a spirited display and the regular firing of the only working 18 Pdr. Field gun from the Royal Artillery at Larkhill. Also to be seen was Don Gray resplendent in his uniform demonstrating a Vickers machine gun albeit from WW2 not WW1, nevertheless it was good to see on its tripod.

We now have the thermostats for our bottle coolers fitted, and storage and the serving area subject to hygiene improvements.

THAMESIDE AVIATION MUSEUM

The year so far has been very good, open days well attended and much interest shown. A few changes have taken place to the displays but always a battle with the water ingress from the roof. The visitor’s book contains a number of favourable comments and indicates that we are getting a number of visitors from farther afield. A visitor has promised a bent propeller blade from a crashed Lancaster bomber which crashed in Germany in WW2. It is intended to be displayed in memory of the airman, who came from Tilbury, and lies buried in Germany. It will be arriving from Cheshire.

The V2 (A4) missile exhaust in cone has been removed from the bottom of the ramp where it has rested for a number of years and returned to Wickford where it fell WW2. It has gone to the new Wickford Heritage Centre Memorial Park where it will be displayed. **Dave Thorndyke/Terry Dowler**

FORT MILITARY MUSEUM

There have been a number of subtle changes to the displays in that two new mannequins have appeared, one as a nurse to add to the medical area and a male model in WW1 army catering dress. Other WW1 items added has been a stokes 3” mortar shell, wood with French bullets still in them, German calthrops and bullets all from the Somme region, plus a British expanding tree saw in its case. Space is now becoming a premium and so during the closed season a redistribution of the displays will have to be undertaken to hopefully refresh the layout. **Ken Levy**

ANNIVERSARIES

This year we are remembering three major events in the history of warfare, The commencement of World War One, D – Day and the Battle for Arnhem. When we remember we must not only think of those who were killed, but those soldiers, sailors and airmen of all nations who suffered injuries of body, mind and sight that has lasted long after the cessation of hostilities.

KOHIMA

This year is also the 70th anniversary of the Battle of Kohima. We always remember the European battles but we must never forget what has become to be known as ‘The Forgotten Army’ or the Far East Campaign.

From April to July 1944, British and Indian regiments fought one of the greatest battles of World War Two. The Japanese army some 14,000 strong were attempting to push forth into India from Burma and Inphal. Led by General Motoguchi the Japanese 31st army division gradually drew a ring around Kohima, severing the main Imphal road and tightening their grip on the transit garrison of approximately 1500 men, comprising the Royal West Kents and 14th Indian regiments. General William Slim, commanding British forces in South East Asia made the decision that Kohima had to be held at all costs and they would be resupplied from the air. Kohima was the gateway to India and the British main garrison at Dimapur. Against overwhelming odds the British held out at Kohima for three months. This was much to the surprise of the Japanese, as they had never encountered such determined resistance to their conquests. In the final phase of the battle, with a number of airdrops not falling on the beleaguered British, including their own mortar bombs falling in the Japanese positions and being fired back on them. The British and Indian troops were in many hand to hand encounters even fighting across sixty yards approximately of the tennis court of the British consulate’s headq uarters.

The British second division army were rushed to relieve Kohima after travelling some 2000 miles, mostly by inadequate railways and finally reaching Kohima, when only some 150 fit able bodied British soldiers were left. The Japanese army withdrew back into Burma, having lost some 7000 troops, experiencing their worst defeat to date and failure to march into India. The British and Indian forces suffered some 1500 dead and wounded. We must never forget their gallant and courageous stand against such overwhelming odds. Two posthumous VC’s were awarded following the defence of Kohima.. On the memorial in Kohima are etched these immortal words.

**WHEN YOU GO HOME TELL THEM OF US AND SAY,
FOR YOUR TOMORROW WE GAVE OUR TODAY**

OBITUARY

This year we also bade farewell to another long standing member of the fort, George Mosely a driving force as leader of the gun club. He unfortunately passed away in May from a long and protracted illness. He has been interred at Basildon crematorium and will be sorely missed by all who knew him.