



COALHOUSE FORT NEWSLETTER

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EDITORIAL

The start of the season began with the Motor Bike Day on Sunday 29th March, but what a day in true English Summer style the rains came then the wind and only seven bikes arrived. Many thanks to all who helped on that trying day. The Bank Holiday Monday, our next open day was a great success with plenty of interesting visitors and lots of children wanting to search out the clues to earn an Easter egg or bunny. This time the weather was kind with a morning of hot sun although the afternoon turned a little cool but from reports everyone seemed to have enjoyed themselves. Our thanks must go out to Hazel and Laura who manned the egg table all day, and we must also thank Fiona and her daughter for doing such a sterling job in manning the tearoom much to the pleasure of the customers. Generally our open days have had a mixed level of attendance due to the weather but those who have come have given us hope for the rest of the season. Our annual classic car and vehicle day in July was also blighted by foul weather plus the closing of the East Tilbury level crossing. We had no where near the usual number of visiting vehicles, but one bonus was the attendance of a number of Tatra Czechoslovak historic cars. They came from far and wide across Britain, including Basildon and Southend and across Eastern Europe.

We are still desperately short of volunteers for the working and open days. It is a few hours that are required each month to attend so please 'extractus digitus' and find some new recruits to come and give a helping hand. This year Peter Appleton, our vice chairman has moved to Walton on Naze, although he is still retaining his position on the committee, but he may not be so deeply involved as before. Another movement is Roy Reynolds who is moving to the west country but still hopes to attend on a number of open days. We should like to wish them well in their transfers, but hope they will continue to stay on the end of the line for the occasional chat. We also saw the move away from the fort of Sam Coates and family after many months of disquiet. Jamie Robertson has also relocated to Norfolk due to his increased daily workload. He has been a great asset to the project in running and maintaining the Paranormal Group and we wish him well. He will be succeeded by Fiona as leader, and it is beholding to me and the committee for taking on the task and also her many other jobs. Our thanks must also go out to Fiona's daughter Molly and her boyfriend for doing such a sterling job in the refreshment room.

This year we have had many forcible requests from the Thurrock Council with regard to health and safety which we have always met, but it seems that the council are taking an ever increased interest in utilising the fort for events and educational visits, but with no offer of any financial input to date, this will place an ever increasing drain on our reserves. We have now met all their requests and supplied all the necessary equipment to put this in place.

As you all must be aware the Coalhouse Fort Project is a voluntary charity and it has always been our aim to preserve the fort for future generations. The main part of the lottery bid is to improve the toilet block (old generator house) and provide a tearoom, improved toilets and a new ranger's office. A new metal balustrade to replace the existing wooden one is in the process of being installed in the fort, with repairs to the adjacent brick wall as part of the H & S programme due to the more regular utilisation of our projected education room for more regular school visits and events.

It is the intention that the new tearoom will have a storeroom in the fort for fridges etc. just off the shifting lobby. In the interest of H&S a new door is to be installed for entrance to the tunnel system. It is expected that this coming year may see a downturn in our revenue taken on our open days in the tearoom due to the new external tearoom opening, although we have been promised a percentage of their takings, let us see if this matches our reduction in takings over a season.

Gerry, Norman and Tony have been making great strides in refurbishing the very badly neglected limber for the fort's 25pdr. gun amongst the other many tasks they are asked to assist with on a Wednesday workday. Sunday 10th June we had a clear up day and attempted to remove much of the weeds from the roof etc. It would be a great asset if we could arrange a regular work party on a few occasions to make the fort tidy. The shop with James assistance is doing much better with a number of new items to sell. I realise there are many onerous tasks to be undertaken in the fort other than just preserving the mobile guns, looking after the museums, but we need new dedicated younger blood to carry on the tasks from us 'oldens' so that progress can be made to continue the fort's preservation for the future generations that follow us. I keep asking that if there are any person that you are able to bring along to help please do so. We have recently had a new recruit, Peter from the village who wishes to resurrect our blacksmiths area and make it operational, for which we wish him good fortune. KL

GRUMBLES AND GRUNTS

Once again despite many requests nobody, except Dave Thorndyke has deemed to submit any articles this time for inclusion in the newsletter, this is most disappointing and leaves a one sided opinion (mine) which I should like to readdress. I produce this newsletter to keep you all up to date and informed of events but unless more contributions are received it will become necessary to reduce the number of issues to two or possibly one annually. In this electronic age nearly all of us have access to Emails so there is no excuse, and everybody to snail mail for the cost of a stamp. Please help and support your newsletter.

THAMESIDE AVIATION

The museum keeps going well, with good open days. With all the bad weather this year at least it has benefitted the museum in that many visitors have come in open days that would not normally have done.

A new exciting project is that of a display of wreckage in another casemate of one of our early WW2 bombers, namely the Armstrong Whitworth Whitley bomber which served the Royal Air Force right through the war years. This was one of our three twin engine bombers we relied on prior to the four engine Lancaster, Halifax and Sterling entering service. No complete example of this important aircraft exists so this collection of relics is probably the largest in Europe., They have come from far and wide, the farthest from Austria. It is hoped that this collection will grow over time.

FORT MILITARY MUSEUM

Very little has changed in the museum over the past months other than maintenance and a failed dehumidifier that leaked out inside the uniform gallery, which took a lot of drying out and now has been replaced. The one artefact added is the inclusion of a replica WW1 HPG gas mask. There been a large number of visitors and quite a number of old soldiers with their reminiscences and much interest has been shown. On the open days Terry O'Brian has been a great asset in manning and talking to the visitors, for which I am most grateful. It is hoped when time permits that the museum will have some form of revamp and become more appealing to all who visit.

REMEMBERING 15th AUGUST VJ DAY

This year in on 8th May we celebrated the end of the European War of World War II, but we must never forget that the war in the Pacific was still going on until the 15th August 1945 with the final Japanese surrender document signed on 8th September 1945. We must also celebrate the end of the war in South East Asia and most of all the British and Commonwealth soldiers, sailors and airmen who fought to free the world of the Japanese aggressor and repel them from finally entering India.

Our greatest tribute must surely go to what has colloquially been called THE FORGOTTEN ARMY who fought in the jungles of Thailand, Burma and India in the most inhospitable environment of the steamy dense jungles, swamps and infested areas of these regions. The Commonwealth 14th Army was commanded by General William Slim of a combined force of British, Australian, Indian, Gurkha, West African and other Commonwealth troops.

A bronze statue of General Slim can be seen outside the MOD in Whitehall, London.

Major General Orde Charles Wingate and his Chindits who were what could be compared with the desert campaigns long range desert group (SAS) of the South East Asia area, going out on many deep suicidal penetration missions to disrupt the strong Japanese offensive ahead of the rest of the army, They proved a constant menace to the enemy and were instrumental in denying them their final push into India.

Orde Windgate was recognised as an eccentric even to wearing an alarm clock on his wrist and even addressing his troops in the 'buff'. He was killed whilst travelling in a USAAF B-25 Mitchell bomber that crashed into hills hidden by heavy trees whilst returning from Imphal. A memorial to General Orde Wingate and the Chindits stands on the Victoria Embankment near the MOD H.Q.

Everybody who has seen the film 'A Bridge on the River Kwai' will have observed the privations, diseases and ill treatment metered out to the prisoners of Britain, Australia, Holland, America and Thailand to construct what is colloquially known as the Death Railway. It was much too graphic to actually show the real horrors that occurred to build the railroad in the film. Those of us who have visited the area and visited the cemetery at Kanchanaburi came away with very strong emotions and tears in our eyes. The railroad went from Bank Pong near Bangkok to Thanbyuzayat (Burma) for some 415 Km. (285 miles). Today some 15 miles to Nam Toc is open and passes over the Mae Klong River (River Kwai). The bridge is not as seen in the film of wooden construction, although there was a wooden bridge upriver, but a steel and concrete structure which was bombed and severely damaged and finally put out of usage by RAF B-24 Liberators on 24th June 1945 following two previous aborted raids by the USAAF. The two centre sections were replaced after the war. Some 12,000 allied troops died during its construction of the railway with the cemetery at Kanchanaburi holding some 6,000 plus souls of both civilian and allied persons. There are two other cemeteries, and a total of approximately 60,000 perished during the railway's construction which was completed and operational in October 1943.

LATE NEWS

At the behest of council education representatives it is intended to reinstate the Halloween event for one night only, possibly Friday 30th October. It is also intended to hold a Christmas event with a date to be confirmed. These will be highlighted on our webpage when confirmed.

Last week we held a trial dummy firing of a replica 18th century cannon and more significantly our 25 Pdr. Mk. 2 gun recently so professionally refurbished which it is hoped will again fire again at our annual Remembrance Day ceremony in November.

MARITIME HISTORY GEMS

THE LONDON: The ship now resting approximately two miles from Southend-on-Sea is the LONDON a 17th century warship built at Chatham in 1650 for Oliver Cromwell's Navy. Circa 1658-60 after Cromwell's death it became part of the fleet of King Charles II returning him from Holland. On the London was James, Duke of York, the king's brother, the future James II. A spark is believed to have triggered an explosion in the powder magazine and only twenty five persons survived of the 325 on board. Various artefacts have been retrieved from the wreck including musket balls, shoes etc. All in remarkably good condition preserved by the mud, some of the cannon were recovered in James I reign. A further three were salvaged in the 20th century and sold without authority into the United States, but it is hoped that they will eventually be returned to be put on display in Southend. A recent coup has been the recovery of an intact wooden gun carriage which will be conserved in York for a year and then returned to Southend for exhibition with the rest of the treasures found on the London. Why was the ship just called The London and not HMS London? The reason was that only ships of the Royal Navy can carry the title of HMS which was shortened from HMBN (His or Her Most Britannic Navy). The HMBN only came into being in the late 1600's although it was not applied on to the ships, and it was only in 1797 the HMS became to be applied, but not all ships carried this nomenclature i.e Victory, Royal Sovereign etc. Since 20th century all carry HMS and even Coalhouse Fort being a shore station or concrete battleship has one HMS St. Clement in WWII.

UNION FLAG: Why do we continue to call the Union Flag the Union Jack? It is incorrect due to the fact that it only becomes the Union Jack when flying from the Jackstaff on the bow of a ship. The Jackstaff was so named in the reign of King James I (Jacobus Rex) in 1606, Jack being a derivative of Jacobus. Other ships, privateers etc. flew the union flag on a Jackstaff to avoid tax but in 1634 it was outlawed and only the country's navy ships could fly it, but only in port. Only the Monarch is allowed to fly the union flag on its bow when under sail or power. To facilitate the Royal Navy to fly the nations flag it now has the White Ensign. The Royal Navy also fly the Blue Ensign for its associated organisations often with their badges emblazoned on the blue area. To further distinguish British vessels the Red Ensign is allowed for all merchant marine and civilian vessels

JACKTARS: Why were the sailors of the 18th/19th century called Jacktars? It is believed to be because when at sea the sailors tarred their pigtails, but it is most likely that it was because their hands were covered with tar from the ropes or woodwork of a ship. It is also known that the sailors used tallow or tar to secure their hair to avoid it catching in the any machinery or equipment.

CAPTAIN KIDD: Recently we were lucky to have a BBC film unit down on the River Thames foreshore near the radar tower for a future documentary of the famous pirate Captain William Kidd. He was originally hanged twice at Wapping Old Stairs, with the rope breaking on the first attempt and succeeding on the second in 1701. The scene shot on the foreshore was of his gibbeted tarred body that hung in place for three years to warn all future pirates from plying their trade. Captain Kidd's ship was called the Adventure Prize but he wasn't one of the most successful pirates and only succeeded in taking one prize ship but was made an example of the privateering trade. He always pleaded his innocence but that did not save him, The legend has it that he stashed away a large buried treasure which lies between Boston, Mass. and India - Good Luck in your search.

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