



# COALHOUSE FORT NEWSLETTER

January 2014

ISSUE No.4

Registered Charity  
No. 289952

## EDITORIAL

I do hope you all had a very Happy Christmas and are looking forward to the New Year with good Health and Prosperity and the prospects of 2014 being a bumper year for the fort.

We had another successful season commencing with the annual March Motor Bike Day followed by our first two day Military event. In July was the Classic Car Day, and in September there was a Military Vehicle Day which really turned out to be a land rover event but with one exception of the arrival outside of the Royal Logistics Corps 7 ton crane vehicle and much too large to get inside. This was followed by the Halloween Evenings, which unfortunately fell a week before the real date and so we received less visitors and subsequently our finances were reduced, but congratulations to all put on the show. Our season ended with the end of November Remembrance Day. This year in attendance was the Lord Petre Lord Lieutenant, Mayors of Thurrock and Castle Point, Steven Metcalf MP, British Legion with their standards, a number of D-Day and service veterans, and Canvey ATC cadets. The parade and service commenced with the entry of the Sutherland Pipe Band followed by the 10th Essex WW1 re-enactment contingent. The service was conducted by Canon P. Robinson. This year we seemed to have a larger number than usual of visitors,

With the new 2014 season fast approaching and celebrations for the 100th anniversary of the commencement of WW1, 70th of D-Day and Arnhem. So I fervently hope we are able to put on displays that will honour these momentous events in our history and show the public just how much these events have affected the fort. Congratulations are in order to wish the Thameside Aviation Museum happy anniversary on their forthcoming 30th anniversary of opening.

To get down to the more mundane we must not forget our usual concern, the lack of volunteers required to run the open days act as guides and facilitate the maintenance of the structure. Many of us are of an age that new blood is urgently required so can I once again plead for any members who know other persons who are willing to give one or two days each month to keep us operating.

Many of you will now have seen that the Thurrock Council has obtained a £790,900 lottery grant with additional £110,000 added by North Thames Viola Trust. The bulk of the money will be allocated to the refurbishment of the old generating house (toilet block), an education officer and community officer. We have agreed a storage area for the cafe produce etc. in a room adjacent to the shifting lobby. The fort will have installed a new metal balustrade around the walkway to replace our existing wooden structure. The work is scheduled to commence circa November 2014.

In mid November a freak mini tornado struck the upper westerly 6"5.5" gun emplacement and severely dislodged the front metal camouflaged structure leaving it at a precarious angle also cracking the surrounding brickwork. It has been surveyed and plans are in progress to make the area safe. Therefore NO person is permitted to walk beyond the 40mm Bofors position until we are satisfied it is safe.

Once again I must comment on the military vehicle owners not adhering to the prescribed paid for locations., plus failing to display data to inform the visiting public on open days. It is now imperative that the situation be reviewed for the coming year.

## **THAMESIDE AVIATION MUSEUM**

The museum once again has had a good season and the visitor book has now reappeared showing that people are travelling a good distance to pay a visit. A number of displays have been updated and revised to make room for more donated exhibits. The museum was represented at the commemoration service of the Boeing B17 bomber which crashed at West Horndon 26.09.43, relics of which are on display in the museum. In 2014 it is intended to replace this year's Dambuster display by one to commemorate D-Day and the aerial part of this momentous event. This coming year of 2014 is very special one for the museum in that it will be its 30th anniversary since it was opened to the public and it is hoped to do something special for the classic car day that was originally started by the museum. **Dave Thorndike**

## **FORT MILITARY MUSEUM**

This year there have been a few small changes to the museum's layout but one significant addition has been the with the maquette (small model) of the Arnhem statue that stands in the Remembrance Park, and so we now have two statues of Jac Van Someren's 'Amazement'.

It is intended that the Arnhem display will be enlarged for the 70th anniversary and hopefully the WW1 and naval areas improved. A few new additions to the general area have been added so that the public can dwell in nostalgia.

Thanks to the tireless work by Gerry the water at the back of the museum main hall has greatly been reduced, but the water ingress through the wall is ongoing and to be addressed. **Ken levy**

## **PARANORMAL INVESTIGATIONS**

The regular Paranormal Nights are having a renewed success thanks to my great band of helpers, James, Roy, Sam, Steve and new members Dave and Sue. All have been a success with good feedback coming from the visitors on the fort and our staff.

The events did not commence until the summer but nevertheless gave us some very welcome income and with a full season in 2014 it should help to swell the coffers even more. We had our own internal Halloween event on Thursday 31st October coinciding with the gun clubs evening who I should like to thank for their assistance.

We now have a waiting list which is getting longer, 2014 is already fully booked with groups wishing to book for 2015 on a first come first served basis. It is great to have a location in such high demand even with the absence of the programme 'Most Haunted'.

I have been involved in media production for a number of years and think it great that Most Haunted placed Coalhouse Fort at the forefront of the paranormal locations in the U.K.

We have started an official Coalhouse Fort Paranormal Team Facebook page and Twitter account. We are gaining new followers each week and it is hoped to produce a DVD in 2014. If you want to be featured and have any stories Email [jamie@coalhousefort.co.uk](mailto:jamie@coalhousefort.co.uk). **Jamie Robertson**

## RESTORATION— 40mm BOFORS

Being an ex-gunner that served in a gun troop equipped with 40mm Bofors with 7 Mk.4 radar known as 'Yellow Fever' and an AEC Matador Truck pulling a Meadows generator. I was in turn a generator and radar operator, gun layer, also a Matador driver.

I became aware that the fort's Bofors was deteriorating so decided that Norman and I should do something about it, and with approval proceeded to progressively take it to bits. It became obvious that it had been painted more than once and on inspection indicated that the corrosion was much worse than first thought. Norman got fed up with me saying 'we won't take any more off after this bit'. Firstly we removed the wheels, then the breech block, loading mechanism, battery box, the three piece shield and the rear battery box. The shield was sent for shot blasting after much manual scraping and wire brushing which revealed the 'tac signs and insignia' that was on when deactivated. I have tried to find out more without success but am pretty sure that it was a TA battery in the Lancashire area as it has a Staffs knot on either side and a rose on the front. The front towing bar locking rings were well corroded, plus a challenge, but brute force and maximum heat won through although I finally had to remake them.

When a Bofors is deployed the wheels and axles are removed and are controlled with hydraulics with a pump and release gear at either end. My original intention was to remove the axles by releasing the towing arm lock, unlocking the axles, releasing the hydraulics and then the weight of the gun takes itself down. However axle cover locking bars refused to move despite much heat, penetrating oil and brute force so we had to accept defeat, all due I suppose to being 40 years in the open. The shell hopper and outer rigger covers was located stored in the room off the shifting lobby. The hopper cover had been used for exploding thunder flashes and was very distorted so had to be reshaped, re-welded to its original shape. The rigger covers were as they had left the factory.

After much hard work and red oxide priming it was given its original colour of deep bronze green as it would have looked from the factory. The artistic decoration of red towing eyes, brake lines etc..are similar to that of the 16th & 22nd LAA regiments of the 50's. There are 107 grease nipples that need attending to each week, so it's not surprising that parts had ceased up through the lack of it. I have taken the liberty of restoring the last known insignia. Research at the Firepower Museum hopefully will reveal the first posting of this gun then it will be reverted back, only time will tell.

**Gunner Gerry Quest**

## 25 POUND FIELD GUN

Not having learnt our lesson with the Bofors we turned to the 25 Pdr. Shall we take anything off 'NO', let's see what these eight bolts do, they hold the shield on, so taking them out everything is easier to get to. Off it came, these four bolts hold the counter balance, so we might as well take that off. The recoil arm seems jammed solid, the only answer we guessed was to take the barrel off. With that off we can remove the sighting mechanism, guess what, jammed solid, then the barrel mount and recoil to get at the saddle. If the saddle comes off we can scrape away the 1/2" of paint under it. Norms in heaven, it's a large 2" + nut holding the saddle on. I'll get the stilsons says Norm and off it came. Next the wheels, hubs and axle towing eye mounting ring locks and all the other associated miscellaneous bits. So far so good!

The grease nipples were discovered under many layers of paint and removed. The recoil ram took a concerted effort by myself, Norman, Don, his brother Bill and Tony to separate and eventually with the aid of a 50 ton jack placed horizontally it finally moved.

.It took two Wednesday workdays to achieve but never beaten we got there. It was then the invidious task of removing the very severe corrosion on the steel recoil slides which seemed to take ages. The recoil block with its bronze mountings had suffered from water ingress, and if it had been greased would have been OK. Once we had scraped, primed and painted it, reassembly was undertaken having first very well greased all applicable surfaces and all of us expecting the worst of it not going together, we were proved wrong and it went together as though it had just come from the factory.

We now have the wheels back on, also the saddle, recoil and barrel mount assembled. The chassis has been primed and all the finished items well covered up for the winter period, so a fresh start to complete it can be undertaken in the better spring weather. There is still much work to be done but Nil Desperandum we will finish the job. After this the limber is next on the list, so Hey! Ho! and on we go.

**Gunner Gerry Quest**

## **LATEST FORT NEWS**

The revised and reprinted fort guide book scheduled to be printed in time to be sold at the first open day.

Although the roof has been attended to over the museums and tearoom it is now come to our attention that the water is now permeating through the outside walls of the casemates especially the fort museum so we now have to make application to English Heritage for permission to reduce the height of the ditch behind the glasis banked mound. If agreed then quotes can be obtained to remedy this concern and thus reduce the deterioration of the metal plates.

It is hoped in the very near future to have the upstairs of the guardroom complex decorated and made habitable so that we can consider making it usable for others and hopefully earn its keep.

.A new counter in the guardroom is being designed and hopefully built to incorporate both the pay booth and the shop to come in line with earlier proposals and the remaining area to be laid out as a guardroom of the Victorian period.

## **OBITUARY**

It is my sad duty to have to advise you all of the sad demise of Brian Burton who passed away on 27th December 2013. Brian was a long standing member of the fort and for many years did sterling work as a guide on open days and was always dressed up to help out at the Halloween events.

It became a standing joke that if you were on one of his guided tours it was guaranteed to last at least one hour plus. He was a mine of information on the tours and always had some joke to tell and make it much more interesting for the visitors. He was a staunch member of the Thurrock Local History Society, Essex Congress and many other organisations. He is a friend who will be sorely missed by all who had the pleasure of his company, a true gentleman.