



Purfleet Heritage & Military Centre SPRING NEWSLETTER

Registered Charity No. 1080629



Welcome to all our members and friends

Our Grand Reopening proved to be a great success after an unbelievable amount of last minute hard work by our volunteers getting the Centre tidy after an intense 3 months of refurbishment.



Our Mountain gun was brought back to life after our two new explosives experts, Doug & Kevin Williams, tutored by long time supporter of the centre, Ken Slaney fired a round to signal we were open again. Local artists, T100 brought the colourful silk flags of Purfleet-on-Thames to help with the opening, before they headed off on a walk over the old Rifle Range.



The reopening was performed by our Mayor Sue Schinnick. The day was well attended, including MP Jen Craft, a great supporter of the Centre, local councillors, our valued members and the press.

The tea bar was kept busy and the day signalled a great start to the year.



those who made it happen

UPDATES

The Car Park



We have in recent weeks received 2 x 10-ton trailer loads of bark chippings from Balfour Beatty to help level the area at the side of the car park. Wooden kerbing has been exposed in the centre to define the edge of the car park, giving a smarter appearance next to the Gurkha memorial. This we hope will stop bikers using the slopes. We have another delivery on its way.

The Bomb

Martin has been busy painting the bomb. There is still a mystery as to what it is; Sue said she was told it was a Barnes Wallis proto type bomb that came from Wickford Museum. The Barnes Wallis Foundation were contacted. It is not a Barnes Wallis prototype. There is no record of a museum in Wickford. If you, or anybody you know can identify it please let us know.



The Lock Up

We are making great progress clearing the lock up and replacing makeshift storage areas with shelf units. When completed the racks will be labelled to identify location. We will go through every item; list, label and box them to make future identification straightforward. To make this possible there have been many dump runs. Organised storage will be another leap forward for the Centre.



The Mezzanine

Many items not required for display are stored on the mezzanine. Neatly labelled, listed and boxed. This is an additional storage space to the lock up.



UPDATES

Fire Safety

Following on from our Health & Safety inspection last month we requested a Fire Safety inspection. Soon after we received a visit from two fire safety officers. They made a detailed inspection. We were able to show them our new layout map giving the locations for our extinguishers and fire exits. Our long term volunteer, Peter religiously checks all of our extinguishers on every visit and convinced the officers this was being done regularly. They were satisfied with what we have in place. We were given some helpful advice on what else we can do. As a result we have appointed Paul as Fire Safety Officer. A Fire Safety policy has been written and once approved will be implemented.

Thames Board Mills Sculpture

We have received a quote to install the newly discovered TBM stones in the car park and are waiting on another. Discussions have been held with Balfour Beatty, working with The Lower Thames Crossing to fund the installation.

Pianola

Our MP arranged for her brother, an experienced piano tuner to call in to see if he could breathe life back in to our Pianola. After a valiant effort, he admitted defeat. Long term exposure to damp sealed its fate. Hopefully with modern technology we may hear the sound of it playing again.



Finances

Our Treasure, Ollie gave a financial update to the committee at their last meeting, which clearly shows a healthy start to the year. Tweaks to pricing in the tea bar, increased offerings in the shop and advanced pre payment has been set up for walks and maximising income on events are all helping to secure the future for the Centre.

Website

Mike has been busy adding content to our website <https://purfleet-hmc.org/>. You can keep up to date with our Events, Exhibitions and Engagements, listed on the top tab. One of the positive additions is a list of ten must see items in the Centre, useful for those with limited time and a phone. If you do not have a smart phone, ask a friend or member of the family who does to try it out for you.



Chairs

One of our committee, Hi Ching has offered the Centre 30 x fold up chairs, which we have accepted. The reorganisation of our lock up will give us the space to keep them.

Policies

Jim, who joined us last year has been beaver away on creating new policies for the Centre. As we move forward, these will be an important addition as we grow. Policies are a necessary requirement these days, funders often ask to see them.

Work Experience

Earlier in the year Paul arranged for students at Palmers Campus / USP College to use their skills adding artwork to different areas of the Centre. This went down well. They will be working with us again in September.

NEW DISPLAYS



High up in the beams in Bay 24 is a site you would not expect in a former Royal Gunpowder Magazine, a full size model of a shark. With our new Geology display in place, it highlights our past. Who would have thought that 54,000,000 years ago Purfleet-on-Thames was under water.

From 40 to 30,000,000 years ago the Purfleet Ridge was formed when the land was squeezed against ancient basement rock. This is shown on 17th and 18th century maps as Purfleet Hills.



THE RAF section has been receiving some updates. This section not only shows displays of Sutton Farm, (The Hornchurch Wing), you can also see the building's timbers, marking out the bays that hark back to the days when barrels of powder were stored.

Other bays are receiving updates.



Sir Harry Broadhurst display



Dave Davies display

On Wednesday 17th June at midday we remember former volunteer Len Milledge, with a plaque unveiling in the area that Len looked after for so many years, the RAF Regiment

THE POWDER SHOP



As part of the refurbishment we now have a new shop area. This allows us to sell a wider range of merchandise. We have started to sell more branded items to help with promotion and to support the Centre.

The shop display units came FOC from The White Tower at The Tower of London which was the original storehouse for gunpowder. It later moved to Greenwich and finally to the five Magazines, here at Purfleet. Four were demolished.

THE BUILDING

As many of you know the building has suffered from damp since the Centre opened. It is on record with Historic England that they knew about the damp in 2003. They suggested Thurrock Council arrange for a hydrological and drainage survey. There is no record that anything was done. For over thirty years the council have ignored their responsibility to the building.

In February Trevor contacted the Director of Place at the council, who has overall responsibility for all council owned buildings, to remind her of the damp issues and update her on the work we are doing to improve the building.

Last month a meeting was arranged with the new council Estate Manager. He arranged for a newly appointed building inspector to look at the various issues, which took a couple of weeks. As a result two companies visited the Centre to quote; one for a full drainage survey and the other to install louvred doors fitted in the gabled ends in the roof. He is arranging for a full structural survey as recommended by Historic England's Ancient Monument Inspector.

VOLUNTEER COMMENT

We are lucky to have many passionate volunteers who do all the hard work. Its time to let them speak

Tracey re the Army Section

The army section is still an amazing work in progress. Many new artifacts have been found in the sorting and tidying process. In the WW1 section there have been new wall displays added, including that of local soldiers who worked and lived here in Purfleet. We have some beautiful original regimental group portraits on the walls.



New artifacts have been added to the WW1 cabinet including a very rare letter written by a British soldier from the trenches in France to his father in England. This immersive letter recounts events from the start of WW1 and a typed copy is available for all to read. We have a rare German sawback bayonet on display and new Allied forces artifacts have also been added.

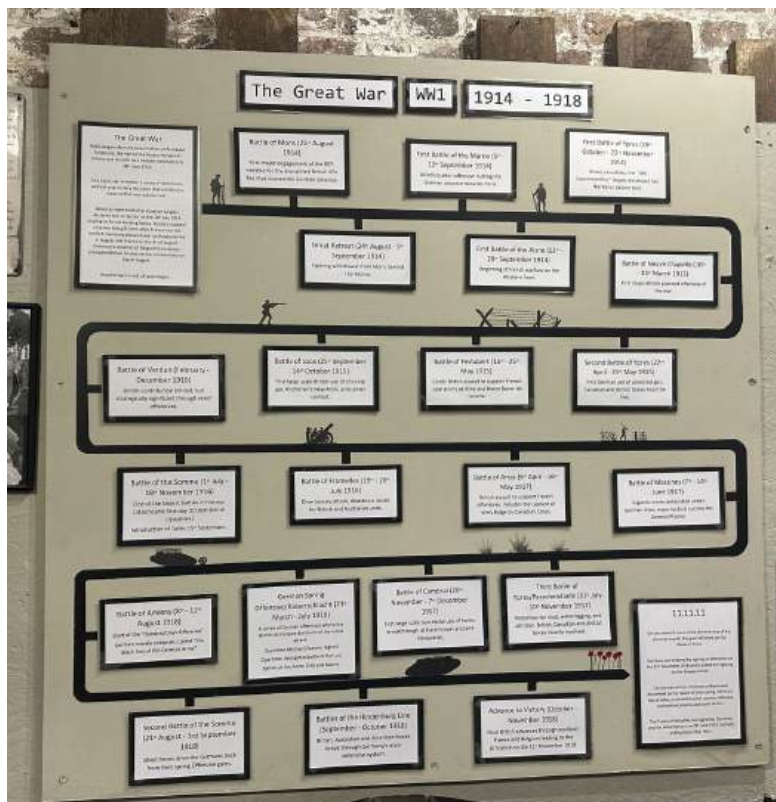
A new model has been added to the WW1 tank display, the famous British Mark IV Fray Bentos tank and a new article about Percy the tank cat, the famous and beloved mascot of the British Royal Tank corps.

In the trench area we have some new photos of soldiers who may have taken part in the 1914 or 15 Christmas Truce and also some new photographic displays of life in the trenches.

The P.O.W. cabinet has a new edition of a photo album on display.

And lastly, a brand new D-Day wall display, showing local involvement, planning, actual sand from the five beaches and many new photographs from embarkation to landing during operation Overlord.

It has been a busy a time in the Army section in the museum since our re-opening and I have also been working long hours at home to sort and present many new artifacts in a beautiful and respectful way to remember our soldiers and our history. I look forward to bringing future plans that I have for the section to life in the near future.





THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL MUSEUMS DEBATE IN PARLIAMENT



For some time there had been talks with small museums about difficulty in obtaining or lack of funding. This is usually down to small museums being run by volunteers, who often lack experience. Big and National museums attract large amounts of money. The National Gallery secured a staggering £375 million, The London Museum £20 million and The Sainsbury Centre, Norwich just received just over £90 million. Small museums struggle. At the Centre last year Our MP suggested she could arrange a Parliamentary debate to coincide with the reopening of the Centre to promote it.

On 5th March Jen Craft MP secured a debate in Parliament to discuss the importance of local museums. Volunteers from the Centre were invited to Westminster Hall to hear the debate.

After her opening comments Jen said *"I primarily want to focus on the Purfleet Heritage and Military Centre. On Sunday, the centre reopened after a three-month renovation period. Volunteers have put in an immense effort to pull together a series of new exhibitions and revamp old ones"*. During the debate she continued in that vein, mentioning the Centre in glowing terms 10 times.

Jen went on to say *"The museum also houses an exhibition celebrating and commemorating the achievements and history of the Gurkha regiments, and a significant portion of veterans from those regiments now call Thurrock home. I am extremely proud that the museum also plays host to the only Gurkha memorial in Essex, which was unveiled in 2024, thanks to the tireless efforts of the Thurrock Nepalese Gurkha Community and its work with the museum volunteers. It sits alongside the museum's proud tradition of remembering those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice for our country and way of life"*.

"New displays at the Purfleet Heritage and Military Centre also show off the borough's sporting success, our railways and industry, our geology, and perhaps most fascinatingly, our Dracula connection. Most people do not know that the infamous Carfax residence is based on Purfleet House, so for anyone who might be a goth, or of a gothic persuasion, do not go to Whitby—get the train to Purfleet, as we have a much bigger connection to Dracula than Whitby. For anyone who is interested, I am told that there is still space on the Halloween Dracula tour, which is a lot of fun". This comment created much discussion, with different MP's claiming Dracula as their own. Dracula was mentioned 16 times.

The Minister of State for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries, Ian Murray agreed local museums are extremely important saying "they may be small in size but huge in impact". He stated that this government will continue to be committed to funding the cultural sector and making as much money available as possible to do so. We did not get a cheque, but the debate is recorded in Hansard.

After meeting the Minister we had a private a tour of Parliament.





WALKS, TALKS, PRESENTATIONS AND GROUP VISITS

Out and About Update by Paul

January and February:

Although we were busy with the winter refurbishment, we still had a couple of presentations to deliver. We started the year at Willows Lodge Care Home with our new presentation on the "Influence of music on warfare" this provided half an hour of historical background followed by another half an hour singalong lead by our wonderful singer Geri. It was lovely to see everyone enjoying the presentation and the feedback was very positive.



February kicked off with Mike attending Hockley History Group to deliver his personally motivated talk on the "Life of a bomber crew in WW2" and saw us returning to Hazelwood Care Home in Kent to outline "Life in the 18th Century Navy".

March:

The opening of the centre in March marked a very busy month for us, which started a well attended "Grand Opening" the volunteers were so pleased with the comments about how their efforts had made a positive change to the Centre and it was lovely to see our Local MP Jen Craft. March also saw us on the road again with the delivery of presentations to Harwich Peninsula U3A - WW2 Evacuees (Operation Pied Piper) and Godden Lodge Care Home - Animal Heroes of WW2.

The Centre also hosted a couple of tours for the Essex Rock & Mineral Society, who came to see our new Geology display and Kensington Primary School. Once again we teamed up with the RSPB Rainham Marshes to provide a guided walk of military buildings on the reserve, these are proving to be very popular and so far have been fully booked.

We also continued with hosting Paranormal nights at the Centre, this is proving to be a very profitable venture for us and we have a number of similar events already booked in for the year. I am sure this is a topic which will form its own overview in future newsletters!



April:

Continued to be very busy, Presentations delivered to

Hadleigh Castle U3A - The Secrets within Nursery Rhymes

Hazelwood Care Home - The Secrets within Nursery Rhymes,

Gravesend U3A - History of Gunpowder and the Royal Purfleet Gunpowder Magazines)

Godden Lodge Care Home - How we Lived

In addition to visiting various groups we also hosted a number of tours including "The Breakfast - Group and Stanford U3A. With the onset of spring we are now starting our 2026 events, which kicked off with the annual, and well attended, "Gurkha Remembrance Day" and a visit by Thurrock Acorns Amateur Radio Club.

May:

My poor old car took another bashing in May with presentations being delivered to:

Romford Probus Group - Life of a bomber crew in WW2



WALKS, TALKS, PRESENTATIONS AND GROUP VISITS

Willows Lodge are Home - WW2 Evacuees (Operation Pied Piper)

Havering U3A - Animal Heroes of WW2

Leigh Conservation and Heritage - Animal Heroes of WW2

Grays Towns Women Guild - How we Lived

UPS College - Overview of the Centre and its goals



We also opened our doors to a number of visiting groups for personal tours of Magazine No 5, including; Belhus Park Beaver Group, Gateway Cycling Club and the Rayleigh - Royal Navy Association. All of the above have contributed towards a very eventful start to 2026.

A new revenue stream, that is proving profitable are our Ghost Hunter Paranormal Nights. The next one with Essex Ghost Hunters is on 25th July.

Interest is growing, we have just over thirty bookings in the coming months from now till December.

EVENTS

APRIL

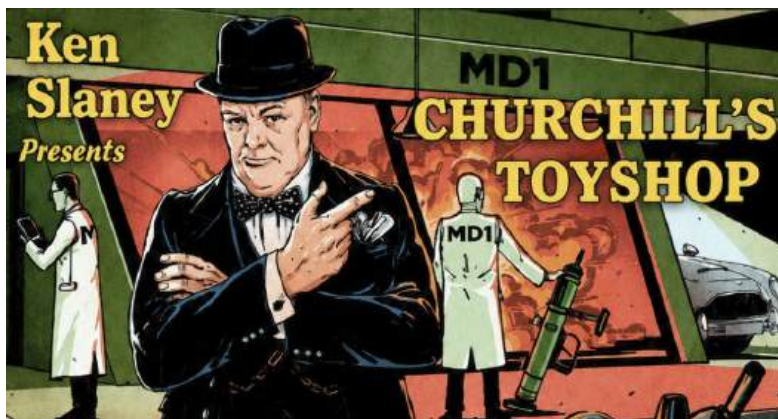
The first main event of the year after our re-opening on 26th was the annual **Gurkha Memorial Day**. Mayor Sue Shinnick was guest of honour. Bikers & scooterists attended and Ensignbus provided transport for members of the Gurkha community. Bugler Dave Honey sounded The Last Post. Refreshments were provided by TNGC at our tea bar.



EVENTS

MAY

On the 10th we held a **Classic Car Event** on the green. There was quite a good turn out with many vehicles lining the river front. The green is a large area and it was spread out. Bikers and scooters added to the event.



Ken Slaney gave a talk in the Centre about **Churchill's Toyshop** on 24th, outlining Britain's secret weapons of WW2. It was a precursor to MI6. The talk was well received and more talks are planned

UP AND COMING EVENTS

June:

17th - Remembering Len Milledge

July:

19th - The Silence of the Past - Lecture by Ken Slaney

August:

9th - Remembering Thames Board Mills

16th - SALUTE!, incorporating the Gurkha Festival

30th - RSPB & PH&MC Military Walk

September:

5th - Heritage Centre at the Orsett Show

12th - Ghost & Folklore Walk

13th - Battle of Britain Bike Show

October:

24th - Heritage and Horror Films

25th - Dracula Day

November:

1st - Purfleet-on-Thames Remembrance Day

8th - National Remembrance Day

15th - PH&MC AGM

December:

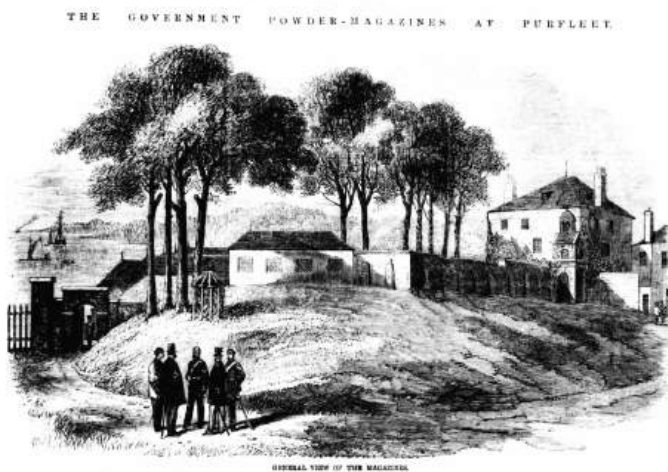
5th - Ghost & Folklore Walk

Please see our website & media sites for details of forthcoming events!

THE GARRISON IN COLOUR



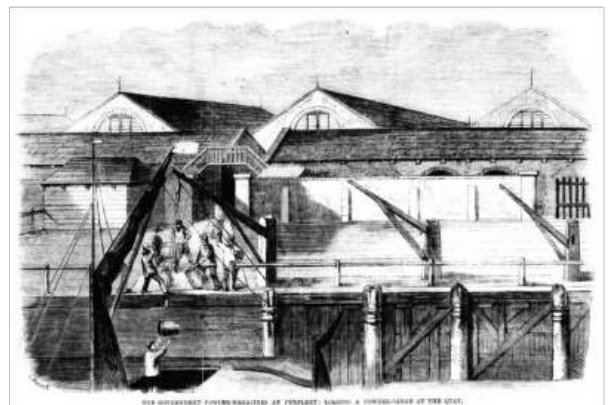
Advances in technology allows us to bring the past alive in colour. The wonders of AI make this possible. Accuracy is not guaranteed, but you are able to see detail that is easily overlooked on a black and white photo. Shown here are 21 soldiers from the 80 strong guard, standing in front No. 28 to 35 Married Quarters of the Garrison in the 1890's. Between 34 and 35, the gap on the right is the original water tank. The later water tank gave it's name to Tank Hill Road.



New technology allows us to transform drawings of the Garrison from The Penny Illustrated in 1868



Kings Quay





OLD PURFLEET IN COLOUR



The Victorian Station at Purfleet from 1908 shown with 'The Rock', the last remaining landmark from the old chalk quarry. Dung carts seen in the foreground were a frequent sight.

MEMBERSHIP

We are updating when renewals are due by changing to a rolling membership. In the past, renewal payments became due in January. Now, the day you join or last paid, will be the date when your renewal is due. It is a fairer system for new members and will take the pressure off Jeff, our new membership secretary. Each month he will email any members whose renewal becomes due.

Other changes we are making is to make sure members are notified of all of our events and walks by email. Hopefully, you have received one or two already. If not let us know so we can tell Maureen, our Secretary. During the year we are looking at ways to add benefits for our members. For members without an email address we will be happy to send updates to a friend or family member to pass on.

We would like to offer a very warm welcome to Thurrock Nepalese Gurkha Community as our first group member. Their members are now our members. This will create a tighter bond between us. If you have any ideas to help us improve membership, let us know.

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Trustees: Mick Botton - Chair , Trevor Batchelor, Steve Newman, Jeff Skillman
Committee: Trevor Batchelor - Chair, Mike Wainwright - Vice Chair, Ollie Mills - Treasurer, Maureen Mills - Secretary,
Paul Hounsell - Booking Secretary, Jeff Skillman - Membership Secretary, Hi Ching, Keiron Trebilcoe, Steve Blaker