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## Visit to the Royal Gunpowder Mills Waltham Abbey VE Day Celebration Saturday 1 May 2010

Ivy and Ron Parr have organised many fascinating outings for The Friends of St Nicholas, and it was therefore with high expectations that we set off to the Gunpowder Mills at Waltham Abbey, about which I knew absolutely nothing.

The day started well, as the sun shone and our coach driver jumped the long queue of cars at the entrance, much to their frustration!

I had little idea of what to expect, other than perhaps a few run-down Victorian factories, and perhaps a museum of old artefacts of British weapons and gunpowder manufacture. But what a surprise – the site covers around 170 acres, and is criss-crossed with old and functioning canals along which gunpowder was moved around the site – water transport was smoother than pathways, and thus less likely to blow up the driver and his horse!

The site is a haven for wildlife, as whilst much has been sympathetically preserved to a very high order, much has been left





to nature, with signed paths through old Victorian buildings and woodlands teeming with plants and wildlife.

To add greatly to the fascination of the day, the VE celebrations included around 100 men and women dressed in full military uniform, both Allies and Axis, all camping around the site for the Bank Holiday weekend. Camp fires were burning, bacon was frying, and to cap it all, the day finished with a re-enactment of the first military operation in France where British and American paras jointly attacked a German stronghold. The commitment of the opposing forces was all too real, and one or two servicemen narrowly avoided an over-enthusiastic bayonet or two!

The visit far exceeded our expectations, and Ivy and Ron are to be congratulated on organising yet another fascinating outing.

**Richard Rae**

