

The Royal Gunpowder Mills – Update report by Cllr. Helen Kane, EFDC representative

Dear Members,

The Royal Gunpowder mills trustees have been working very hard behind the scenes to prepare for the opening of the site at Easter this year.

Helen Hamlyn, the newly appointed Site Manager and Geoff Hooper (Trustee) have been attending the Waltham Abbey Town Partnership meetings, to make a tighter partnership with the Town.

As part of the Platinum Jubilee celebrations the Lord Lieutenant of Essex launched a project to celebrate and commemorate inspirational Essex women who may not have received the public recognition that they deserve.

One such woman is Philippa Walton. Philippa Walton was born in 1674, the fourth of five daughters. She married William Walton, a London merchant who in 1702 took over the powder mills at Waltham Abbey. Following his early death in 1711, Philippa, at that time 36 years old and with ten young children, took over the enterprise.

She ran the mills independently until 1723, when she took one of her sons, John, into partnership with her. Under Philippa's ownership the Waltham Abbey Mills became one of the most important gunpowder mills in the country. It established itself as one of the major suppliers to the government, during a period of limited conflict between European powers.

Philippa died on 7 December 1749 at the age of 74, and various members of the Walton family subsequently ran the Mills until they were nationalised in 1787. For a woman to successfully occupy a senior position in business was an unusual phenomenon in Georgian England. It was even rarer for a woman to run an industrial organisation; most of the others were in artistic businesses such as silver-smithing or commercial such as textile trading.

The idea is to mark the achievement of Essex women with a Blue Plaque, and they have procured one for Philippa Walton.

They plan to have an unveiling ceremony at some date close to, but not on, the Jubilee weekend; there will be too many events at that time throughout the country.

I will keep you all updated as their plans develop.

If anyone is interested in volunteering please note that the contact of the Volunteers manager name is Liz Went . Her email address is: ewent@royalgunpowdermills.com

Cllr Helen Kane