

# PORTCHESTER MATTERS

Issue 17

The Newsletter of the Portchester Civic Society (Founded 2000)

Winter 2019

## A Picturesque Portchester House | where Sir John Millais Painted 'Bubbles'



by Paul Woodman

“One of the most interesting of the old residences of Portchester, situated in the main thoroughfare of West Street, preserving a quiet dignity and sense of retirement”, was the description the Hampshire Telegraph and Post wrote of Turret House in 1933. This remarkable building stood on what is now the site of Portchester’s Library and Health Centre. The house was L-shaped, and the portion which flanked West Street rose almost sheer from the narrow pavement,

creeper clad, and with high windows, above which were frescoes reputed to be of Adams origin.

There is a lack of documentary evidence to assign an earlier date than that of the French prisoners at Portchester Castle and it was then that the turret, from which the house takes its name, was built at the east end c1769. Owing to serious outbreaks of infectious diseases among the hundreds of prisoners, the then Governor at the Castle removed his household to Turret House where, from the turret which commanded a magnificent view of the surrounding countryside he could, with the aid of signals, keep in touch with the Castle garrison. At the same time a similar turret was erected at St. Vincent House

in Castle Street, which acted as a relay station. This was later removed to the back of the garden, where it still stands.

Originally a broad strip of garden separated Turret House from the road, but this was later built upon, and the front rooms widened, so that the whole character of the house was altered. Deep old-fashioned fire places, thick oak beams in the ceilings, panelling, later exposed to the light of day after its concealing plaster had been stripped away, and passages that twist away at odd angles are all part of the older portion of the house. The latter are in keeping with the suggestion of a lost secret passage!

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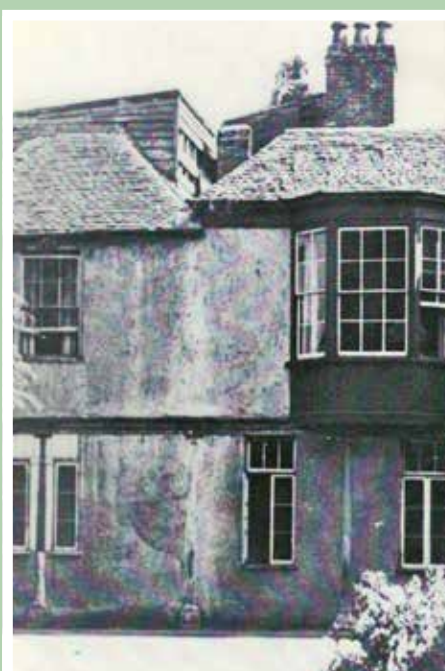
Among the earliest notabilities who resided there was Lord Hill, a governor of the Castle, and the Rev. Dr. Spurgeon had a school there for a while. Major Thomas Hurdle died there in 1875 in his 100th year, while his son, General Sir Thomas Hurdle KCB, who died in 1889, was a Peninsular War and Crimea veteran, and accompanied Napoleon on the *Bellerophon* when he went into exile to St Helena. The tomb of the Hurdle family stands in St Mary's churchyard.

Another interesting resident was Captain James, who married a daughter of Sir John Millais RA. Millais used William, one of his grandsons, as the subject of 'BUBBLES', which subject was painted in the beautiful grounds of Turret House. The large stone on which the child was posed was in the kitchen garden. This picture was famously used as an advert for Pears soap. William joined the Royal Navy and rose through the ranks to become an Admiral who, throughout his naval career, was nicknamed Bubbles. Admiral Sir William James was Commander in Chief, Portsmouth during World War 2.

For a while the house was used as a hotel and posting house, and renamed "White Star Inn". In 1933 many of the traces of this period still existed.



Demolition of Turret House, September 1956



Southwick House



Mrs Elsie Pellow's class in the grounds of Turret House, 1949

Stables, harness racks and hooks, and the wide drive for the coach and horses, while at the bottom of the garden was a large gateway, later bricked up, through which coaches left, making a wide sweep round the house to reach the road again. At that time the owners were Major and Mrs Atkinson.

In 1935 Turret House was acquired by the Portsmouth Diocesan Authority, with a plan to build a new Parish Church, Hall and Vicarage, all at the centre of the Parish. The building was then used to accommodate an assistant Curate, also a Sunday School and various youth activities. Tennis courts were available in the spacious grounds and the ballroom was a popular venue for village dances. The 1939 – 45 War prevented any further action. After the war the house was temporarily used for school classes. The building was demolished in September 1956. Plans for the church buildings were abandoned and the site was sold for the construction of a new Health Centre and Library which opened in 1984.

Research for this article included the Hampshire Telegraph & Post and the memories of the late Edgar Long, a founder member of our Society.



Admiral James 'Bubbles' at HMS St Vincent playing grounds, 1943



## Wartime in Newtown

This article is courtesy of the BBC WW2 People's War web pages and written by Joan Offord and contributed in 2005

We lived in Newtown, Portchester. I remember some of the bombing raids when the Fire Engine came round telling us to 'take cover'. Mum and Dad would gather all the kids and take us out to the air raid shelter which was built in the back garden about 20 feet from the house.

Later on, another shelter was built into the ground close to this one so we had a choice of which one to go in – the most preferable was the one built into the ground as we felt there was a bit more cover. These were furnished with wooden boxes, rugs, sleeping bags that we made out of old sacks, a gas burner for the



Portchester Fire Brigade outside East Street Fire Station, 1935

kettle, a bucket of water, a food tin which could contain biscuits, tinned milk, sugar, tea, cake etc. which we would replenish the following day. Outside the shelter we kept two buckets, one as a toilet and the other to rinse your hands. We could be in the shelter all night and even all day long depending how bad the raids were. Eventually Dad made some bunk beds

from bits of wood he had in the greenhouse but these were not comfortable at all – many times the kids said we didn't want to sleep down in the 'dungeon' as we all called it but would prefer to sleep in the greenhouse amongst the frogs jumping around, tomatoes and chrysanthemums Dad would grow to sell at Portsmouth or North End markets. What money he got from selling these he would use for buying extra clothes or food. We had to wait for the 'all clear' signals. I was in household service nearby and would often spend all night in the shelter to come out in the morning to go straight off to work and on the way see what places had survived the night. Sometimes we spent the night in Portchester Fire Station (At that time the Fire Station was on the A27 East Street, adjacent to Newtown. Ed.) because Mum knew the Worly's who owned the Fire Engine she thought we would be as safe there as anywhere else. Life was hectic but people were all very friendly and willing to help your neighbours even though you probably did not get on with them before the war.

## A Milkman's Tale

by Alec Morgan

I started working at the Portchester dairy, on the site of the old Merjen Engineering works, in 1949 as a boy. Then, after leaving the Army in 1954, I joined the Co-op as a 'proper' Milkman.

Portchester was my depot in Station Road and our start time was 7am, but got earlier as time went on, mainly due to the amount of traffic around then. There was hardly anything on the roads when I first started, but more cars were around as time went on. The finish time was about 12 to 12.30pm, or whenever we had delivered all the milk, barring any



An electric milk float

break downs. The dairy was a bit on the small side compared to the other dairies around, just about enough space for all the floats and carts, but only just! Payment was mostly by tokens then with some paying at the end of the week and others putting their tokens out. We would deliver however many tokens or pints they wanted, gold or silver top, sterilised or sterilised skimmed.

The Foreman then was Tom Bloomfield, other milkman from this time were Jim "Chippy" Carpenter, Alfie Bates, Herbie Coplestone, Charlie Tobin, Fred Croad, George Arnold, George Ayling and some others who I cannot recall their names. My round at the time was more south west Portchester, starting in West Street, then Westlands Grove, White Hart Lane to the old School playing fields (where Shrubbery Close is now), then back to King John Avenue and Kenya Road. Along to Cranleigh Road, where I delivered the small bottles of milk to the old Wicor Infant School, then back to Orchard Grove, Sandport Grove and Seaford Road. Down Wicor Mill Lane to Windmill Grove, along to Harbour View then up to Coral Close, Norgett Way, Foxbury Grove and lastly Carberry Drive (long before this road was made up, so a nightmare in the rain and snow, full of potholes and very uneven). I had a couple of "stops" for a cuppa tea in White Hart Lane and Coral Close, but I had to be careful not

to drink too much as there were no public toilets around then.

I used an electric cart, so not so hard to move around, but it gave no protection from the wind, rain and snow. The milk crates were metal so some people may have got woken up by the jangling of the bottles against the crates. The covered electric floats came along later giving us more protection. Once, while out working in Seaway Grove, a horse bolted on one the Tom Parkers' floats, but I managed to stop it from running off and causing damage. The winter of 1963 was a "fun" one for us milkmen. The snow was so thick we could hardly get around. White Hart Lane was only partially open and Westlands Grove was blocked off for me until a colleague with a shovel came along to help me. I still see people around Portchester who say "you used to deliver my milk". It's nice to be remembered still!



Alec Morgan

# A Portchester Childhood

Malcolm Cooper

Like a great many Portchester residents, I was not born in Portchester. My family moved here in October 1945 after we had to vacate our rented house in Cosham. My first recollection was being taken by my mother to Castle Street School to register. She was told that, as we lived west of Neville Avenue, I would have to go to Wicor Farm School.

This was sited at the end of Cranleigh Road by the entrance to what is now Wicor Marine. My recollection of the school, which was built with timber and lined inside with the 1930's equivalent of chipboard, was that it was out in the countryside. There were no houses anywhere near it, just a few at the start of Cranleigh Road. If we went to school by bus it usually terminated at the junction of Cranleigh Road and Orchard Grove, where we then had to walk the rest of the way, whatever the weather. Very occasionally the bus driver took pity on us and took us right up to the school. The winter of 1947 was quite harsh with some heavy snow falls, but we still went to school. No days off for us! The classrooms had their own heating. A black pot-belly stove which the caretaker would light before we arrived. The bottles of milk for our mid-morning break were in crates put alongside the stove to thaw. By break time the milk was still frozen and protruding above the neck of the bottle! Some days we kept our coats on as it was so cold. The surrounding fields were used for growing crops and at this time prisoners of war were still in the area, employed working in the fields. They could be encountered



Prisoners of war from east cams camp strolling through Portchester, WW2

walking around the area. It seemed to be a very benign form of imprisonment!

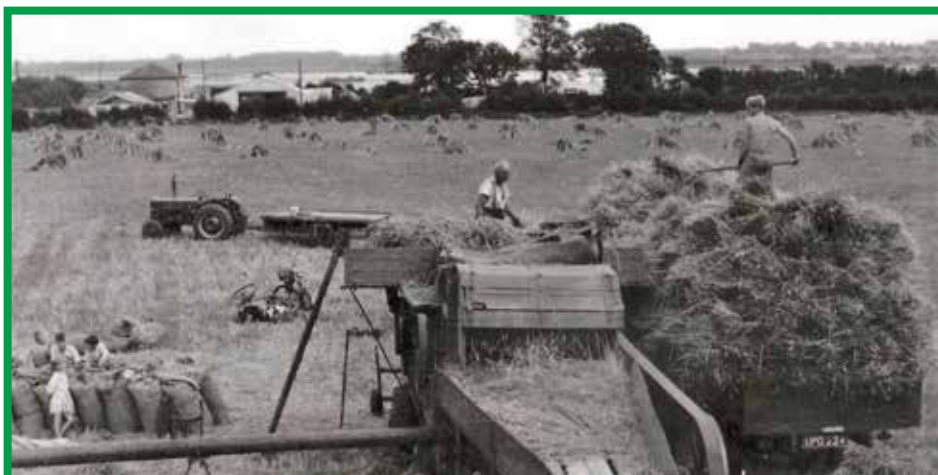
Portchester was then quite rural with a lot of open space. There were no estates at Seaway Grove, Kenwood Road or Red Barn. The original Red Barn was still in position and nothing in the Dore Avenue area. There was also nothing much along the shore from Hospital Lane to Cams School, apart from the small holdings market gardens in the vicinity of the Condor roundabout. At this time most of the land south of the A27 was still being farmed. Harvest time was a wonderful time for us youngsters as we could watch the wheat being put through the threshing machine and play with straw after threshing was finished. Great fun was had playing on the stacked bales of straw and sometimes disappearing down the gaps between the bales, which was a sign for all the others in the gang to pile more bales on top of the unfortunate body! Other times of the year brought different activities. As it was still a relatively short time since the end of the Second World War there were a lot of things around from the era that would attract the attention of boys looking excitement. There were air raid shelters to

climb on and an old pillbox on the shore near to the bottom of Wicor Mill Lane. In the fields south of Wicor School there were some scrap armoured vehicles, such as Bren gun carriers and other light armoured cars. Desert Rats eat your hearts out! Much time was spent along the shore from Hospital Lane to what is now Cams Golf course. The main attraction just to the west of Hospital Lane, where the new sea wall is now, was that after a south-west gale, bones would wash out of the bank. These were the remains of French prisoners of war who had died while being held in the Castle. It didn't happen often but caused a frenzy of searching the area by groups of boys. On the shore line between the end of Grove Avenue and Seaway Grove there were a series of small ponds which would be filled with fresh sea water during high spring tides, especially when they coincided with a south west gale. Ideal



A corporation bus heading west along White Hart Lane (before road widening!), c1950s

for sailing model boats and falling in when engaged in that activity. Coming back to the area at the bottom of Wicor Mill Lane there was the bone factory and its surrounding area. Because the business there was the manufacture of bone meal garden fertiliser there was an abundance of rats. They would hide in all sorts of places as the area by the shore was a dumping ground for the factory. Well, we were all budding Nimrods, mighty rat hunters, or would be pest control operatives. These activities kept us occupied for hours over the years. Just west of the Bone Factory there was a pillbox, built in 1940 to repulse any invasion attempt. It was built on a slight promontory so you had a good view towards the Castle and towards Cams Bay. This was put to good use; you didn't waste anything in those times. A number of boys would be divided into two teams, one to defend the pillbox, and one to attack it. Both sides were armed with catapults; home-made of course. As it was on the shore the attack squad had the slight advantage of



Threshing on Wicor Farm



a steady supply of ammunition, whilst the defenders had only what they could carry. As a defender appeared over the top of the pillbox to shoot at an attacker they were met with a salvo from the attackers. As far as I am aware this game did not supply a steady stream of casualties to A&E.

Going a little further west to what is now Wicor Marine, between the shore and Wicor School, there was the newt pond, wherein resided common and crested newts and dubious assorted junk. A friend and I thought it would be a great idea if we caught some newts that we could sell to other children. Why we thought anyone would like a newt for a pet I do not know. We managed to catch about 20 to 30 of them. Chris Packham would have been ecstatic! Now, what to do with that number of newts? The obvious answer is you take them home and put them in the kitchen sink. As newts are good climbers, they didn't stay in the sink but climbed all over the kitchen walls! Needless to say, we were ordered to take them from whence they came. The pond edge was lined with trees. Now with a piece of rope and a tree endless fun can be had imitating Tarzan. The scenario; a rope hanging from a tree over the pond, about six feet lower than the bank of the pond and a recent shower making the rope wet. Two boys racing towards the rope, first one there will jump at the rope, grab it and swing out over the pond. Result; yours truly won the race, grabbed the rope and it being wet slipped off the rope straight into the pond! Another trip home wet through and covered in mud! A few years after this the pond was filled in. A little further to the west, where the recreation ground is now, was used as a dump. All the rubbish



Malcolm Cooper, aged 11

from the area was dumped there as a land reclamation process. This presented endless opportunities for recycling discarded items that might be of some dubious use. Considerable time was spent gather anything that might come in handy. You must remember we had just come through wartime, when nothing much was thrown away that could have been put to another use. Items of special value were pram wheels. These were especially valuable as they were made into go-carts, giving endless fun hurtling down any slope we could find. This included trekking to the slopes of Portsdown Hill via Station Road. We seemed to get back a lot quicker than we got there! Sometimes on our way back from playing on the hill slopes or further afield we would be feeling a bit peckish. This was sated by a visit to Wheelers bakery in West Street, approximately where the Red Lion is today. There we

could get a freshly baked roll for one old penny. If no rolls were available the baker would cut us a thick slice off a fresh baked loaf. Wheelers Bakery was something of a misnomer as there were goats and rabbits running around the bakehouse leaving their calling cards all over the place. You had to watch where you put your feet! The bread was delicious. Further west, where Cams Bay is, was all open space and you could walk along the shore all the way to the Delme. The trees in that area came down to the water's edge roughly due south of where Cams School is today but there were some ditches there containing brackish water. In this area it wasn't uncommon to see a kingfisher, and in the woods were lots of other birds plus a rookery which is still in use today. It can be seen in the trees behind the bus stop at Cams School. Because Portchester then was semi-rural there was a lot more wildlife than today. In the fields west of Wicor Mill Lane we would see hares that we had disturbed and sometimes partridges. We grew up being able to identify a large number of common birds and animals and know where we could see them. Sadly, there are not the number of species in the area now as there was then. We were acquainted with birds such as skylarks, linnets, yellowhammers, tree sparrows and thrushes. Many of these I have not seen for a long time. So, to conclude, Portchester was a wonderful place to grow up in with its countryside and seaside position. We wandered all over the area without a care in the world. Unfortunately, that's not possible anymore. I could go on about some of the other escapades we got up to, but space is limited.

Happy Days

## Summer Litter Pick

John Morgan

We decided to have another litter pick up making the most of a "hopefully" nice summer evening, so we chose Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> June, at the Wicor Recreation Ground and we all kept our collective fingers crossed for a fine, dry and sunny evening.

That evening we did indeed enjoy a lovely sunny and warm time, so we were lucky there. On meeting up there were only five people who turned up, but we were duly given our equipment and a nice new high visibility jacket with our Society



Corrine, Hazel and Geraldine modelling our new high viz tabards at June's Wicor Litter Pick

name on it, a new acquisition after our Spring raffle. This way we were easily noticed and useful for promoting the Society. After a quick rundown of do's and don'ts we set off in all directions around the recreation ground to clear the area of any litter. After an hour and a half of searching and picking up we joined up again to collate the bags. In total we collected five bags of assorted rubbish/litter. It was good not to see that much litter at the recreation ground this time but it made us wonder though if it had been "litter picked" recently by another group, or were people dropping less litter. We hope it was the latter! All in all, we had a good evening and enjoyed the view after we had finished. Thank you to all those who helped.

# Secretary's Report

Paul Woodman

## Planning Issues

An application has been presented to Fareham Borough Council Planning Department to build a large detached house in Wicor Path, which runs close to the Cormorant public house, through to Roman Grove cemetery. This proposed dwelling is situated in a field in the Conservation Area and the buffer zone separating the historic village area from the more modern developments. This buffer zone was only adopted by Fareham Borough Council in 2014. We wait to see if Fareham Borough Council will ignore their own recommendation! We strongly oppose the possible loss of even more green space.

The Co-op store in Portchester precinct will be closing in February 2020. The site, which includes some of the smaller shops on West Street, is for sale for £2million. One of the proposals on the sales site is to retain shops below, possibly smaller units, and build two floors of apartments above.

The Merjen Engineering site on the corner of Station Road is again subject to a planning application for 17 sheltered housing apartments. The previous planning application of 2016 has now expired (a 3-year time limit), hence the new plans. We opposed this development primarily because of the dangerous access and



Eling Tide Mill

exit point for vehicles, being just off the corner of the A27, Station Road, Castle Street roundabout. An accident waiting to happen! We would like to see a hatched 'no stopping' area on Station Road at the entrance/exit to the site, and solar panels installed on the south facing roof.

28 Flats above the shops and flats on the north side of the Precinct. The Portchester Civic Society support this outline planning application as we believe it will enhance the street scene both from the Precinct and the A27 at the rear of the block. These one and two bedroom flats would be built above the existing ones, resulting in a four-storey building. We would rather see properties built above the block than use up anymore of our precious green field sites.

Your Chairman attended the three-day appeal by Miller Homes against Fareham Borough Council's decision to refuse planning permission for 350 homes on Winnham Farm, accessed from Down End Road. Our objection is centred on the narrow railway bridge, south of the access point to the estate. This road leads from the traffic lights at Cams School, north to proceed along the top of Portsdown Hill. Unfortunately, Hampshire Highways see no problem with this bridge even though there is no pavement and two large vehicles cannot pass there.

Plans have been presented for a one storey house in the paddock next to Turret House, accessed via Hospital Lane. This would be situated outside the conservation area.

The argument over nitrate pollution is still stopping any further housebuilding work from proceeding; even those with planning consent. Two government departments at loggerheads!



Society members enjoying a tour of Eling Tide Mill

## Other News

Unfortunately, due to heavy rain, our involvement in this year's Marine Conservation Beach Clean event had to be cancelled. We will continue to do litter picks around Portchester, which will be advertised on the Society's website.

During the summer the Society organised a visit to Eling Tide Mill. The Grade II\* listed tidal mill dates back to c1785 and we were given a guided tour, followed by a demonstration of the power of the tide to turn the water wheel powering the millstones. Bags of milled flour were a popular purchase in the gift shop.



## In pictures...



Bryan Jerrard leading a heritage open days walk through the conservation area, September 2019



Portchester Gala 2019 - Photo John Morgan



A recent addition to the Society's photo collection

## Chairman's Report

Dear Members,

Next year the Portchester Civic Society will be celebrating our 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. It seems incredible how time flies and what we have managed to achieve over the years. We have battled many planning applications, often in association with the Fareham Society. Portchester is a small area, compared with the number of applications across the

whole Borough that the Fareham Society has to deal with, so we diversify and include recording the history of Portchester and community events in our activities.

With the help of Heritage Lottery and Fareham Borough Council funding we undertook an oral history project recording the memories of members of the community and produced a book 'Portchester in Living Memory'. We also provided the majority of the illustrations for Bryan Jerrard, a Society member, who recently produced 'Portchester, a Community History'. Our annual photographic and memorabilia exhibitions in the Parish Hall and the Portchester

Library/Health Centre foyer create great interest and always unearth even more images of the village. The Society organises regular litter picks and takes part in the Great British Beach Clean event. During the September Heritage Open Days, we conduct walks through the Castle Street Conservation area.

I would like to take the opportunity to give Bernie Lendon a vote of thanks for his work as our Programme Secretary over the last seven years. I believe he has been on Committee for eight years and has always been very supportive of the Society. Thank you Bernie, a very special person who will be missed.

Hazel

# Chichester Yacht Club Visit

by Paul Woodman

A request from members of the Chichester Yacht Club for a talk to a few of their members resulted in Bryan Jerrard and myself meeting them at Port Solent Marina.

The crews of three yachts from the club planned a weekend sail to the Hamble and on the return a visit to Portchester Castle, and requested a speaker from the Society



to give them a guided tour. Unfortunately for them the weather took a turn for the worst and they took shelter in Port Solent for the morning aiming to catch the high tide to return to Chichester.

So, Bryan and I were treated to coffee and cake whilst entertaining them on the history of the Castle and some of the significant maritime related graves and their occupants. An enjoyable morning for all, resulting in a generous donation to the Society.

## PROGRAMME OF EVENTS 2020

### Tuesday 21 January

The Work of the Queen's Harbour  
by Rebecca Walford

### Tuesday 18 February

The Women of the RAJ  
by Brian Freeland

### Tuesday 17 March

Women on the Railway  
by Dr Becky Peacock

### Tuesday 21 April

Life and Other Problems  
- 30 Odd Years in the Media  
by Judy Theobald

### Tuesday 19 May

The Life of James Lind  
by Professor Ken Shaw

### Tuesday 16 June

Jane Austen and Her Clergy  
by Reverend Ian Meredith

### Tuesday 15 September

Strawberry Fields Forever  
- A History of the  
Local Strawberry Industry  
by Mary South

### Tuesday 20 October

Commander Buster Crabb  
- What Really Happened?  
by Ann Bevan

### Saturday 7 November

Memories of Portchester  
- An Exhibition of Pictures  
and Memorabilia  
Parish Hall, 10am - 4.30pm

### Tuesday 17 November

AGM and The History of the  
Portchester Civic Society

### Tuesday 15 December

Flora & Fauna  
of Farlington Marshes  
by Chris Lycett

WE WELCOME  
NEW MEMBERS  
AND VISITORS

PARISH HALL  
CASTLE STREET  
PORTCHESTER  
PO16 9PY

## PORTCHESTER MATTERS

The Newsletter of the Portchester Civic Society

Founded 2000 | Registered Charity No. 1090509

Member of:

CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England); BTCV; NCVO; Solent Protection Society;  
Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust; Portsmouth Harbour Conservation Group

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[www.PortchesterCivicSociety.co.uk](http://www.PortchesterCivicSociety.co.uk)