

H7 Workers at Oare Gunpowder Works

Read through this information about some of the people who used to work at Oare Gunpowder Works. Choose your favourite and

either **write a day in the life of...**

or **an interview with...**

Working in a group you could **prepare a play** about working at Oare.

Charles Stewart

It's July of 1780 and I've just been to ask my boss for a pay rise of one shilling more each day. I work in the mixing house; mixing the gunpowder. I was only being paid two shillings per day, but I have been working so many extra hours, as we've been busy that I felt I should be getting paid more. My boss agreed and gave me the rise, so I am really pleased.

The widow of Clark Rook

My husband used to work at Oare in the Corning House, where he ground down the gunpowder into small corns or pellets as they sometimes called them. The smaller grains would be used for muskets and the bigger ones for cannons. He asked to be transferred to the Royal Powder Mills in Essex. It was here where he met his death; drowning near the water gates one cold morning when he tried to clear the ice so the water wheels could work. I now get a shilling every day to help me out with the children an' all, but it won't bring him back to me.

John Salmon

I have only been working for a few months at Oare. I'm only 16. I work on the sailing barges. They take the gunpowder from Oare to its next destination. Edward who I work with always laughs at me, because I have really fair hair but by the end of the day it is usually black-from where I carry the gunpowder and the dust falls in my hair.

John Claggett

Yeh I worked at Oare. I was a general labourer and did things like cleaning out the ponds and spreading the mud from here on the land. After fourteen years of that I moved inside to the dusting house. I like it better here, as it's warmer and I don't go home smelling of pond water. We have to put the powder into a gauze cylinders, where the dust is removed and the rest is then taken back to the press house to be used.

Mary Dowdle

My husband John had only worked at Oare for 2 years, when there was a huge explosion in one of the gunpowder stoves. It was heard for miles. John was in there at the time. He was employed in 1785 as a labourer glazing the gunpowder. He had to put the granules into the huge glazing drums, where they were given a final polish of lead or graphite. This helped make them more resistant to moisture. I remember the morning of the explosion he nearly forgot his sandwiches and I had to run down the road after him, with them. That was the last time I ever saw him. He was only 30.

Friend of William Hayes

Just seen William. He works at Oare as the crushing mill keeper. Although I should say worked, as he has just been dismissed for wetting the gunpowder. The stupid fool could have caused an explosion; he can be so careless at times. Don't know what has happened to him lately. About ten years ago, in 1760, he was so diligent and sober that they gave him 3 weeks wages, when he was ill and could not work.

Dutton Higgins

Today was my last day at work earning 2 shillings 4 pence a day. I've been here for 45 years. I've seen so many changes and the odd explosion (laugh) but at 73 I felt it was time to stop, I'm getting old and my eyesight is fading. This was making it difficult to carry on with my duties, which included removing mud and then driving the gravel carts or carts of gunpowder about. I will miss working at Oare as it has been part of my life for a long time.

Samuel Knowler

I completed a 7 year apprenticeship in 1822, where I became one of 7 Saltpetre refiners at Oare. This meant a pay rise, from six shillings a week to £33 16s a year. My job involved me refining the saltpetre. Saltpetre is decayed organic matter, which we refine by boiling it in water. Then we clear any scum off the top and let the salt recrystallise, during which the mixture is stirred to form fine flour. I was able to get some extra money, by working as a watchman to guard the gunpowder works at night. Its now 1834 and finally I have been promoted as the Master refiner of saltpetre, where I have become the fourth highest paid member of staff earning £118 13s 7d a year. All my hard work over the past 19 years has paid off, I started at the bottom, and have worked my way up to the top, in charge of the other saltpetre refiners.

Neighbour of Richard and Margaret Finch

I found out the other week that Richard and Margaret have been stealing from the gunpowder works. It was between the January and March of 1650. He'd managed to steal 285lbs of gunpowder! How he got it home without anyone finding out or realising it was going missing I don't know. Apparently he was then giving it to his wife who was selling it on to grocers in Faversham and Canterbury. She was getting either fourpence or sixpence a pound. Then she got caught and she's just been convicted of theft. Her punishment was being branded on her left hand with a red hot iron, which must have hurt.

Joseph Beardsworth

It's 1787 and I have been working in the mixing house, weighing the gunpowder. But I have just been suspended by my clerk as some people complained about my behaviour in the mixing house.

This text has been derived from
Faversham Papers No 84 (2003)
Faversham Gunpowder Personnel Register 1573 – 1840
By Raymond Godfrey and Arthur Percival. ISBN1 9000214 35 0
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