

Hatfield This Century

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 1991

The AGM on the 3rd of September at Hatfield Library was a great success with 27 members able to attend. Highlights of the evening were the talks by Messers Cox & Holton on their studies of Mill Green & Puttocks Oak. We hope that their studies will support a larger presentation during 1992, but in the meantime, they have kindly produced the two articles on the back of this newsletter.

Following the failure to obtain a grant of £1000 from three large companies, Sue Kirby launched the subscription scheme to raise the money, and many members present responded quickly to participate. For £5, the subscriber will receive an acknowledgement in the booklet in addition to their own copy. All councillors who live in and/or represent Hatfield have been approached. The local shops and businesses are next in line, with the Three Valleys Water Co starting the scheme running by a £20 grant. Lynn Smith reports that the latest total is now £405.

Welwyn Hatfield District Council's Windfall Lottery has provided a grant to the Museum Service to purchase a professional tape recorder and microphone for loan to the Group, Stella Cunningham's group of oral recordists are starting to record the social history of De Havilland.

Brian Lawrence has started to study the North Road to the north of the Red Lion and reaching up to Jack Oldings.

The Group had a very good response at the two presentations during half term at Roe Hill Pavilion and were pleased that Cllr. Appleby, Chairman of Hatfield Town Council, could attend. There were 35 people for the afternoon session and 41 in the evening. Mention must be made of the very hard work carried out by members to make such a success of the occasion. It was sad that in spite of special invitations to schools by Cllr Appleby, no young people attended an event specifically arranged for the half term holidays.

Discussions have started with Hatfield Town Council regarding a patchwork/collage project, possibly leading to an exhibition of possible designs during Hat'Fest 92.

Members may be interested in going, to Hertford on the 19th of November to hear the County Archivist, Dr Kate Thompson, on 'A Treasure House of Local History' at 8pm at the Hertford Museum situated at 18 Bull Plain. There will be a small charge but we may find some new sources of information. The use of the 1910 maps and documents stem from a lecture by one of Dr Thompson's staff.

County Library report that they are urging the conservation company, Chivers, to return the Kelly's Directories for St Albans as quickly as possible, in response to an appeal from this group that much work is held up.

RECOLLECTIONS OF MILL GREEN by Sid Holton (Part One)

My personal recollections of Mill Green are of a pleasant small hamlet, little changed during the time I have been living here. However, several events have affected the area and its inhabitants and I feel a few are worthy of mention.

As a small boy, the first change was the closure in 1936 of one of the two public houses - The Crooked Billet - situated on the left-hand side of the old Hertford Road. At this time it was owned by Benskins, who closed it in order to transfer the Licence to The Comet Hotel, and shortly afterwards The Crooked Billet was demolished. The reason for pulling it down, so they said at the time, was to allow room to widen the old Hertford Road, but this was never carried out and this piece of land, strangely enough, is still awaiting development although of course a completely new road to Hertford was built in the mid-60's taking in part of the Hatfield Park boundary. There was a first mention of this pub in 1773, and for the last 50 years of its existence, it was in the hands of three members of the Russell family. This was a sad loss as I spent most of my pocket money on sweets, sold from one of the pub's front windows!

Another highlight in my young days, was the building of the new pumping station during the late 30's. The old allotment gardens situated between the Mill and Bush Hall Lane were taken over for this purpose, the old pumping station with its out-of-date engines, being situated on the edge of Mill Green just within the boundary of Hatfield Park.

PUTTOCKS OAK by Frank & Isobel Cox

Early maps show the triangle of land now bounded by St Albans Road, School Lane and Beaconsfield Road as Puttocks Oak, a name that has now disappeared, together with the adjoining area shown as Whitewash Alley. This parcel of land forms part of the larger triangle, St Albans Road, French Horn Lane and the railway which is the subject of our research. Up to 1864, the St Albans to Hertford road followed School Lane with a level crossing over the railway to the (now) Old Hertford Road by the Red Lion.

At this time, the only habitations were the Rising Sun public house and its adjacent cottages and Goldings, used as police headquarters up to 1883 when they moved to the new buildings, now used by Social Services, opposite the present courthouse. Between 1887 & 1889, Lord Salisbury had built Primrose Cottages. Beaconsfield Terrace, Endymion Road and Lothair villas were also built and named after Lord Beaconsfield, formerly Benjamin Disraeli. The National School for boys was built in 1906 and a year later, the original Malting Mead was built for people afflicted by T.B. on a bank of French Horn Lane overlooking Glebeland. Following enlargement of Police Headquarters to provide living accommodation, the Surveyors Office and Mortuary were added to the site around 1908.

Much development took place around 1923 when the Co-operative Store and Hall were built along with the garage for the National Omnibus Transport Company. On the southern side, Bury Road was built and named after a director of the Great Northern Railway. Tingey's Corner House was erected about the same time. Cranborne road was developed in 1933 with Christ Congregational Church and the Lord William Cecil Memorial Hall. We are hoping to interview people who lived in these houses or can help with their reminiscences to bring life to the story of Puttocks Oak and Primrose Cottages.