

SECRETARY: Mrs. C. Martindale  
EDITOR: Mr. F.J.Cox

**MEMORIES  
OF ERNEST JONES (DEC'D)**  
Extracts from his life story

I was born in Hatfield in 1915 during those dark days of the first Great War, in Union Lane now renamed Wellfield Road. The house was beside the Hatfield and St Albans Railway branch line, this line was closed during the 1950s. My father was employed by the London North Eastern Railway, as a steam engine driver.

I started school at the age of five years at the Countess Anne's Infants in Back Street (now Church Street) Hatfield. It was quite a long walk twice a day backwards and forwards from my home to school. My sisters were responsible for taking me to school, as they attended the girls' school in the London Road, old Hatfield. On one occasion there was a bad storm, the school was flooded and we had to be lifted out of the class rooms by the teachers and firemen.

Each Christmas a party was organised for all the school children, held in the Old Palace at Hatfield by the late Lord and Lady Salisbury. When I was seven, I was transferred to St. Audrey's School, situated in Endymion Road, Hatfield. It was a good school, but discipline applied, also the cane which I felt at times, but I must be honest it did a lot more good than harm, one left school well disciplined and with great respect for one's elders.

I used to get a lot of fun with my friends down our lane, most of us children used to play in a field just beyond the railway.

Our parents could not afford to spend money on toys but I think we were just as happy, perhaps more so. We made our bikes and scooters etc. out of old orange boxes and pram wheels, and in those days parents could allow their children to play out without the fear of harm coming to them. The winters seemed much colder with more snow, we had great fun sliding on the ice of frozen ponds. Xmas of 1925 I shall always remember, we had a severe blizzard. The snow drifted across the open fields, into the lane and was at least six feet deep. Our house was half buried on the north east side, the snow had drifted over the railway bank onto the building. When father opened the door there was a wall of snow so he had to get out of the front window and dig his way round to the back door, also to a barn about ten yards from the house, where the coal for the fire and the lavatory was. The lane was completely blocked so a cutting had to be made through the deep snow to the houses in the vicinity.

Our lavatory was just a bucket placed in a box arrangement which one sat upon, the toilet paper was made out of newspaper cut into squares. The bucket was emptied each week by the local council, but on occasions this was not so, and father would have to do the emptying by digging a hole at the bottom of the garden. We had no bathroom, gas, or electricity, our lighting was of candles and oil lamps.

To be Continued .....

Letters

I was teaching in Newtown Junior School when war conditions evacuated Stroud Green school from London to Hatfield. We shared the day of teaching – Newtown did mornings and London did afternoons, the teachers and children being found homes for the duration. For half day teaching the Newtown staff got full pay! I don't know about the London staff.

Mary Padgett

Prefabs.

I am trying to do some research into the post war prefabs, particularly those which were built in the Hatfield district in the late 1940s.

I would be most interested to hear from any members of the Local History Society or other local residents who lived in one of the three different types of prefabs which were erected in the Birchwood area or possibly visited relations who lived there at that time.

If you could include a brief plea on my behalf in the next edition of the newsletter I would be pleased to hear from them, either by telephone or by writing to my home address.

B G Lawrence

## HATFIELD AERODROME NAVIGATION BEACON

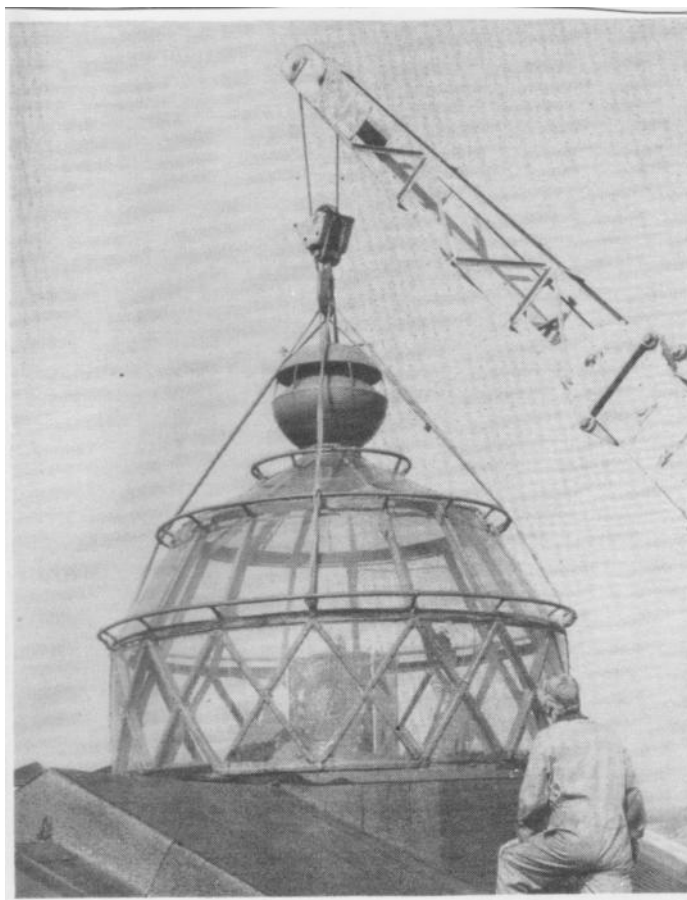
In the early days of flying there were no navigational aids. Pilots flew by looking out over the sides of the cockpit and followed roads and railway lines with a map strapped to their knee. By day these visual landmarks were fine but as nightfall approached it was best to find your airfield and land quickly. Various schemes were tried. In 1919 the USA had experimented with bonfires, as I am sure we did. The bonfires were the first artificial beacons to help night navigation. Fires were lit by Post Office staff, farmers and the public. Not the most satisfactory arrangement, you must agree. By 1923 lighted airport boundaries, spot-lit windsocks and rotating beacons on towers had taken hold.

Within a few months of moving to Hatfield de Havilland had built a new club house, squash courts and swimming pool. On top of the squash courts stood the new navigation beacon. Or was it new? Even now its origin is uncertain, it may well have come, second hand, from Croydon airport. The beacon seems to have been operational in 1934. Notice to airmen issued in March that year says: "An aerodrome beacon has been installed in the SE corner of Hatfield Aerodrome. The light is operated nightly for one hour from half an hour after sunset and shows a white flashing light of 0.92 seconds duration every five seconds. The range of the beacon in clear weather is approx 38 miles"

The light seem to have been run on the same lines as coastal light-houses with the duration and spacing of the flashing light acting as identification. At some stage after the war, some civil aerodromes flashed a Morse identity in green and military airfields in red. Aircraft flying in darkness could identify their position from the Morse

code. Heathrow certainly had a flashing green light. It was removed after some of the local residents objected to the flashing green light which kept them awake at night.

Hatfield aerodrome was only a nine to five operation other than for



emergencies. Therefore it may not have been necessary to have a Morse signal, other than for "after hours operation and then only on request". Even now opinion is divided as to whether it was green and white or just a white light. I am sure someone will tell me.

The navigation beacon stood in the centre of the British Aerospace site, a lasting symbol of its past history. What a story it could tell, from the days of the Moth aircraft through the war years and the Mosquito production. It stood close to the 94 shop and would have felt the blast from the bomb that devastated that department. It watched over the development of the world's first jet airliner and the troubles that brought. Not a hundred yards away it would have seen the building of British nuclear

deterrent, the first stage rocket of Blue Streak. It would have been viewed by the many Chinese visitors who came to buy and learn to fly and operate the Trident. It would have watched over the final phase of the site, with the

development of the business jet, the 125, and finally the 146 passenger jet. The dome which topped the building so proudly was removed in 1988 to make a new sales centre. The dome was rescued and put on a lorry, destination Salisbury Hall and the Hatfield Heritage Centre. It dearly did not want to leave because it fell off the lorry as it left the factory

gate and was damaged. Lack of space prevented it remaining at Salisbury Hall and it moved on to North Weald airfield, and became just another small part of Hatfield's heritage quietly rusting away.

The old de Havilland site, as we know, is given over to housing. As a well known feature of that site, the navigation beacon may return and form the centre piece of an art work depicting the historic nature of the once innovative aircraft site. Quite what it will look like and how it will be set as a work of art is yet to be decided. I understand the University art department is working on designs.

The picture shows the removal of the beacon in 1988.

*Terry Pankhurst*

## SAVE THE BEACON

Jim Parker

I saw the much discussed beacon at North Weald Aerodrome yesterday – it sits on a small grassy mound alongside a Clubhouse called 'The Squadron' which is housed in a camouflaged replica nissen hut and was doing a good trade in snacks. A number of the beacon's (it really is just the glass framed dome) panels are cracked and it has a bare earth interior without fittings. A notice board attached tells us that it is 'Hatfield's Aerodrome Beacon 1932-1984, Kindly donated by British Aerospace'

I would suggest that if it is to become again a feature of the Hatfield site it should be rescued ASAP!

## NO CHALK MINES IN LEMS FORD ROAD

Following the investigations to establish whether the problems with subsidence arising from the old chalk mines in Briars Lane extended to Lemsford Road and the old Forum car park, the Borough Council have been advised that this is not so.

Developers carrying out the rest of the town centre regeneration project, will be responsible for building the Healthy Living Centre on this site.

The centre will house a health clinic and groups which were formerly in the Bill Salmon Centre in the town centre.

Building work should start at the beginning of next year.

## WHAT HAPPENED TO THE STONEHOUSE?

Around 1930 the Barnet-By-Pass was constructed to ease the volume of traffic on the old A1 road through Hatfield. The founders of Waters Garage, George and Fred Waters, hired to the road contrac

tors three tipper lorries. All were chain driven, a Fiat (Italian), a Saurer [Swiss], and a Hallford (built by Hall & Co. of Dartford). The tipping gears were all hand operated screw drive. Gravel was supplied by steam driven lorries from the Herts Gravel Co. pits at Welwyn Garden City, now occupied by the Gosling Stadium and Police Headquarters.

At the same time as the road construction, on the site later occupied by the Stonehouse, Waters built the first petrol filling station on the new road. Soon afterwards a cafe, followed by a licensed restaurant were built. This led to a demand for a hotel so the filling station was transferred to its new site a few yards to the north. About this time, George Waters in conjunction with Tom Oakley, the demolition contractors from Luton, bought for demolition, a disused brewery at Hoddesdon, a mansion at Putney and Knutsford prison (near Manchester). Various objects from Hoddesdon, Putney and Knutsford were used in building the Stonehouse.

The front door and porch came from Putney together with a plaque fitted adjacent to the Hotel entrance. The plaque read "Come when you mind, a welcome find." It was claimed that when the wife

of the owner of the Putney mansion left him - he had the plaque made and erected outside his front entrance in the hope she would return. She never came back! From Knutsford prison came the Stonehouse clock complete with bell used when some poor devil was hanged! The original clock was single faced - it was



converted here at Hatfield. The weather vane and scroll work was also designed and constructed locally.

The stone sets from the Hoddesdon brewery yards and roads were used to build the Stonehouse Hotel. These stone sets were transported by the same chain driven Saurer and a horse and cart.

Because of the clock it was originally called The Clock House Hotel. However, following legal objections from the Clock Restaurant, Welwyn, the name was changed to the Stonehouse Hotel.

It was subsequently sold and was finally pulled down to make way for the Galleria.

It is believed that the building was not demolished but dismantled and rebuilt on another site. Can anyone confirm this and tell us where it is now?



## **A LANDMARK - BUT WHERE WAS IT?**

Not the usual AA Box but one installed by the RAC with adjoining Red Cross facilities.

This photograph was recently received by Mill Green Museum.

Can anyone recall where in Hatfield it was situated?

Autumn/Winter Meetings 2006

Monday  
11 September 7.30

Anne Grimshaw  
**THE WORLD OF THE WORKING HORSE**  
A Quick Gallop through the past 200 Years  
Showing how Vital the Horse was to Britain

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Thursday  
12 October 2.30

David Pearce  
**A JOURNEY ALONG THE RIVER LEA**

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Monday  
13 November 7.30

Member of Staff  
St Alban's City Museum  
**VERULAMIUM**

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Monday  
11 December 2.30

**CHRISTMAS OPEN MEETING**

All at Friendship House  
Wellfield Close