

From Hetfelle to Hatfield - over 1000 years of history

HATFIELD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER NO 83 December 2011

2011: ANNIVERSARY YEAR FOR HATFIELD

2011 saw the anniversaries of four notable Hatfield events; three 60th's and one 400th!

Hatfield House: This year saw the wonderful 400th anniversary celebrations for Hatfield House. On September 10th, the weather was kind as over 10,000 people flocked to stately Hatfield House to enjoy the momentous occasion.

The event was held in the South Avenue deer park; a wide swathe of grassland leading to the 'proper' front of the House from the Great North Road.

Bordering the Avenue were lines of vendors' vehicles providing a great range of foods and drink. At the far end was a funfair and, in between, were entertainers and actors in period costume mingling with the crowd.



The great House looked beautiful bathed in light that periodically changed colour. And all this was set to the enchanting music of The Sixteen, a period instrument playing ensemble whose performance in the Old Palace was broadcast live to the crowd.

A magnificent firework display started just before 10pm, and set to Handel's classical Royal Fireworks music.

The display was justifiably spectacular befitting the world famous history of the place, and spotlights adorned the House with swirling patterns with the construction date of 1611 projected on to the west wing, with 2011 on to the east.

The Hatfield Youth Centre - more famously known as the Breaks Youth Club - opened its doors in 1951. A day long celebration was held at the club on October 29th. Hundreds of members - past and present - came to visit and reminisce.

On display were the scrapbooks of original leader Bill 'Skip' Salmon. The books were made up mainly of newspaper cuttings that chronicled so much of the wonderful activities provided by the club since opening in 1951. These scrapbooks, a recent donation, will shortly be returned to the archives at Mill Green Museum.

There were exhibition boards too, with photo's and posters showing much of the kind of entertainment staged in the main hall over the years; from pantomimes to some of the top pop groups performing there in the mid 1960s.

Continued overleaf.....

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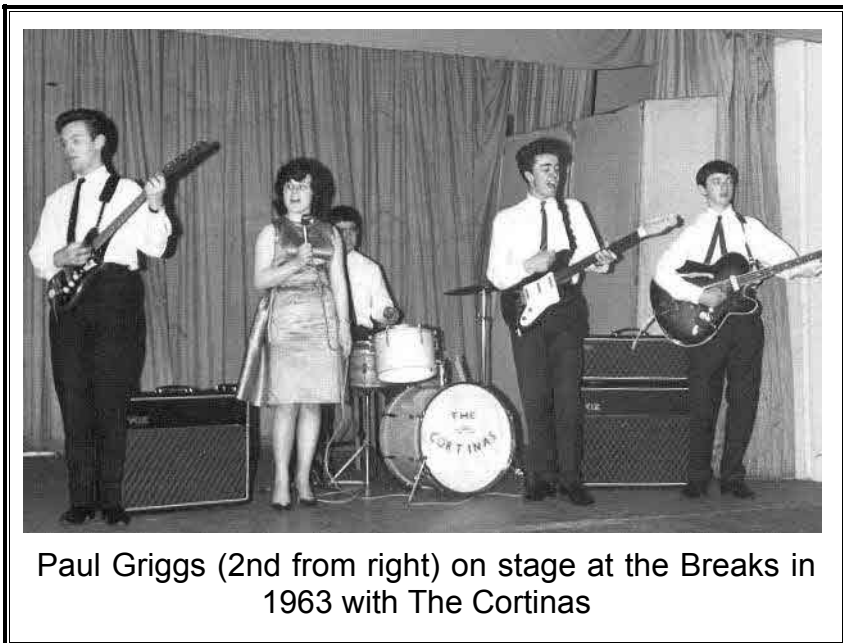
Chairman: **Mrs Chris Martindale**



Breaks Manor continued.....

One of those attending was Hatfield's 1970s star, Paul Griggs, of Guys and Dolls fame. Paul, guitar in hand, leapt on stage to give an impromptu performance with other veteran 'Breaksonian' musicians. One of his first bands, The Cortinas, regularly played at the club.

Another highlight of the day was a 1958 movie, showing members assembling the Exhibition dance hall and, in the adjacent field, the Breaks motorcycle display team practising the kind of helmet less dare-devil stunts that would give modern day health & safety zealots apoplexy!



Paul Griggs (2nd from right) on stage at the Breaks in 1963 with The Cortinas

Shown too, was the dance hall being assembled at the former Downs Farm Youth Club in South Hatfield; the rolling fields around it now all built over.

The evening was another success, with live 60's music from tribute band The Runaway Boys. In attendance were Lady Salisbury and former borough mayor John Hawkins.

*Breaks Manor was named after two nearby fields; Little Breaks and Great Breaks.

'Breaks' is a corruption of bracken in this case.

Branch Line: The next 60th anniversary was the closure, to passengers, of the Hatfield - St.Albans branch line railway on 1st October 1951.

Musician Lew Badham writes:

I started work at the De Havillands in 1942. I lived in Barley Mow Lane, Tyttenhanger, in a bungalow built by my father in 1928. It was about a mile from Smallford. I cycled to work mainly, but as my social and piano playing activities were in the Hatfield area - particularly the De Hav Sports & Social Club - I would sometimes finish quite late and, on numerous occasions, I'd walk back from Hatfield. To save walking the extra mile home I would stay overnight at my Grandmothers house in Springfield Road, Smallford. This happened over a three or four year period.

In the mornings I would catch the 7.40am train at Smallford Station. It's first stop was at Nast Hyde Halt (in Ellenbook) then at the newly opened

Lemsford Road Halt, where I got off, at 7.50 am.

This station was built in 1942 for particular use by De Havilland aircraft workers during the war.

Upon leaving the train I would make a dash across the field towards the Harpsfield Broadway shops (which then consisted of a Post office, a café and a hairdressers, I recall). I can't remember the fare, but it wouldn't have been much as my weekly wage was only 15 shillings (75p) back then.

I believe the train only had three carriages plus a guards van, which took cycles if necessary. Sometimes, when the train was to receive a lot of passengers, the engine had to stop and start, nudging forward as the carriages were longer than the platform.



This Photo shows the last scheduled passenger train at the Lemsford Road Halt on 30/9/1951 (Picture kindly provided by Hatfield Library)

1951 also saw the closure of the Public Hall, once Hatfield's main venue for entertainment. It was sited just 20 yards south of the Hatfield Arms pub (once the Great Northern) opposite the railway station. The Hall opened c1910 and was used as a cinema, theatre and dance hall. But, by 1951 there was too much competition around and, just down the road the Red Lion's two spacious Cranborne Function Rooms were nearing completion. However, pianist Dick Whittingham recalled those dancing days during the 1940s:

Bert Freeman seemed to have the monopoly over dates at the Public Hall, Billy Hill rarely seemed to play there in my time but was more often found playing at functions in surrounding villages. I only played with him once or twice. On one occasion I'd just finished playing at an afternoon wedding reception at the Salisbury Hotel in Old Hatfield when Billy called round to ask if I could help him out at Colney Heath that evening - which I did. My diary tells me the date was Saturday 24th July 1943.

Bert Freeman, though, was more of an organiser. On one rare occasion when we had a gig in St Albans he said "he had arranged for me to go by omnibus!" Although sometimes I had to walk back to Hatfield!

But most of his Saturday night bookings were at the Public Hall. There was no sheet music so we all busked, and went through all the well known tunes of the day, one after the other. Whenever the person who was playing wanted to go into another tune which was in a different key, he would just turn towards me on piano and give a hand signal while playing. The number of fingers held upwards signified how many sharps in the key; similarly, the number of fingers pointing downwards meant the number of flats, i.e. three fingers pointing downwards meant he wanted me to change key into three flats, or the key of E flat! We would normally get through 30 or 40 different numbers during an evening. Popular tunes that the Mosquitoes would have played in 1943 would have included: *A Sin To Tell A Lie, Who's Sorry Now, We'll Meet Again and Who's Taking You Home Tonight.*

The Public Hall was always packed with dancers on a Saturday night, more so during the early days of the war when it attracted many from the army who were stationed locally. We were paid cash on the night, and during the war when I lived with my wife in Bury Road, Hatfield I could finish the last waltz, cross the road and go over the railway footbridge, and be in bed within five minutes! When I was playing with the Syd Rumbelow Orchestra in 1945, we would have been playing the same numbers as Berts' Mosquitos but also: *Woodchoppers Ball, I'll Be Seeing You, Deep Purple, Two Sleepy People and Tea For Two.*

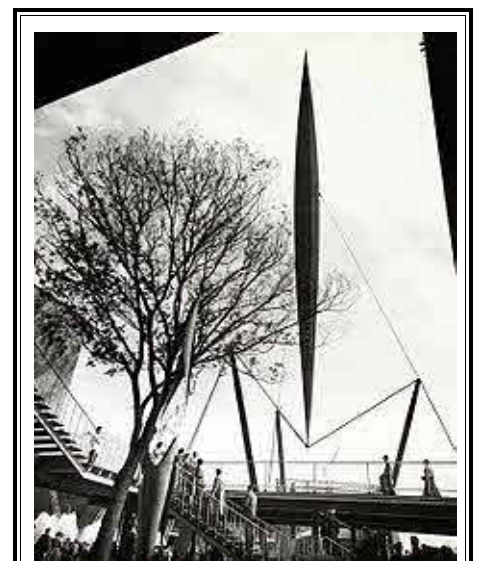
As mentioned above, occasionally us musicians would help each other out and "dep" in another band.

Hatfield's Event for The Festival of Britain

This year marked the 60th anniversary of the Festival of Britain, a national exhibition which opened in London in May 1951, and continued for the rest of the summer. It was the idea of the Labour government, and their Deputy Leader Herbert Morrison described it as a 'tonic for the nation'. The main exhibition was on the South bank, and was designed to show the people of Britain a 'brave new world' of science and technology, and raise their spirits after the austerity of the post-war years. The Royal Festival Hall was built for the exhibition, along with several other buildings and structures. Attractions included a funfair, pleasure railway, 400 seat cinema, and exhibitions about the sea, space, the earth, and the sky, housed in the Discovery Dome.

Around Britain other events took place, and Hatfield held its own event to commemorate the festival. The Festival of Britain 1951 Air Races event was to be held at Hatfield aerodrome on Saturday June 23rd. Several competitions were to be fought, including the Kings Cup.

Continued.....



The Skylon Tower at the Festival of Britain
(*photograph from Wikipedia*)

Hatfield's Event for The Festival of Britain continued

This was a race for British subjects, in British - built aircraft. The contestants would fly a cross-country course from Hatfield to Southend, Cambridge and Luton, and back to Hatfield, a total distance of 169 miles. Entrant no. 91 was H.R.H Princess Margaret, the plane (a Hawker Hart) to be piloted by war hero Group Captain P. Townsend; with whom, of course, she was in love at the time!

Almost 20,000 spectators arrived at the aerodrome, on what turned out to be a day of extremely bad weather. 'Flight' magazine reported that the organisation of the event rivalled, if not beat, that of the Farnborough air show, with the marquees, flower beds, and scores of loudspeakers.

Due to the weather the running order of the day was changed, with the displays to come first. The Society of model Aeronautical Engineers gave a display; a Bristol Sycamore helicopter flew, watched from the royal enclosure by Princess Margaret and Princess Elizabeth; and the crowd were entertained by Flying Officer Murphy in a Meteor (jet fighter). However, disappointingly, the weather was so bad that the racing had to be abandoned for the day. The decision was made in the afternoon; visibility was down to 1 mile, making flying quite impossible for the high speed aircraft. The London exhibition continued until the autumn, attracting 8 million visitors. All of the buildings constructed for the festival, with the exception of the Royal Festival Hall, were demolished the following year by the incoming Churchill government.



G-ABMR Hawker Hart, modified to single seater for race. Entered by Princess Margaret, to have been flown by G/C Peter Townsend

(From the Aviation Forum, 1950's archive website)



High security as Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret are shown around DH.106 Comet 1 G-ALYR

(From the Aviation Forum, 1950's archive website)



THE BEACON MAKES A QUIET RETURN

The iconic Beacon that once stood tall and proud on the De Havilland airfield site has made a return, without ceremony, to Hatfield. In 1930 the London Flying Club set up in Hatfield - 5 years before the manufacturing company. The Beacon originally sat atop the clubs' squash courts building. It stayed in place for nigh on 60 years before being relocated to the North Weald airfield. It has now been sited on the ground near an entrance to the University's De Havilland Campus. Unfortunately it seems to blend in with the fabric of the buildings behind; as the photo shows. There are also concerns about vandalism to its glass panelled dome, which has been expensively restored.