

*From Hetfelle to Hatfield - over 1000 years of history*

## **HATFIELD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

NEWSLETTER No. 103 December 2016

### **GROWING UP IN BIRCHWOOD IN THE 1950's**

By Vivienne and Pat Lord

We were a family of three girls living in Heathcote Avenue; Pat, Vivienne and Betty Lord (four when Lorraine arrived in 1956). We spent all our time out of school and in the holidays playing out with friends in the road, games such as Tin Can Alley, What's the time Mr Wolf, chasing up and down the back alleys and hiding so as not to get tagged. I don't remember taking food or drink and we would be out all day!! Pat tells me we had jam sandwiches in a paper bag.



1954: Pat aged 14, Viv 11, and Betty 8 with their parents

In the holidays we would get the bus (fare 1d in old money) to Stanborough to go swimming in the outdoor pool which was unheated, so if the temperature board registered 60 that was considered warm! Sometimes we would walk there across the farm, paddle through the river Lea and catch minnows. Many of us started school at Green Lanes, transferring to Gascoyne Cecil School when it opened in 1950. Gascoyne also used this pool for our swimming lessons. Remember the shirred elastic costumes? We would shiver in the water while the teachers would tell us what to do standing there wrapped up warm in coats and gloves. Once we could swim a width, we didn't have to go. We learned pretty fast!

Most of us young girls attended ballet classes with Mrs Staniforth in Old Hatfield, gaining our certificates for each grade and performing in shows and concerts. We also went to country dancing at the Methodist Church Hall. It was in the grounds of this church that celebrations and street

parties were held to honour the end of the war. There are many photos of all the kids in the street in fancy dress, some covered in boxes so they cannot be identified. Viv was May Queen at one of these parties.

Hatfield Park was always an attraction. We played on the WW1 tank and swung on rope swings over the dip known as Elephant Dell. This was where we sledged in the winter with Dad pulling us down the slopes. The gentle slopes of Heathcote and Birchwood were ideal for roller skating and we drove the neighbours mad as groups of us tore up and down the uneven pavements. Needless to say, there were many grazed knees and broken arms. The boys made go-karts out of pram wheels and pieces of wood which of course had no brakes

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Chairman: **Mrs Chris Martindale**





Pat at Stanborough in 1955

so they would come a cropper too. A skipping rope would be stretched across the road with maybe three or four jumping over it as it was turned.

De Havillands Fair was a major event on the calendar every year and everyone flocked to enjoy the fun. This was combined with Sports Day when whole families took part in the races. There would also be dancing and we three would put on our frilly petticoats to join in. De Havillands was known for its social events as was the Box Factory at the end of Green Lanes (no longer there).

Before Tesco's was built, the corner was known as Jack Oldings (tractor manufacturers) and some of the older kids would sit on the bank and count the cars going by. To this day old Hatfield residents still refer to it as Jack Oldings corner.

Many of the kids also had hobbies, mine was needlework and hours were spent embroidering table cloths and tray mats. We learned to

knit as well and in our teens made most of our own clothes. We didn't have the distraction of television or technology to keep us indoors. But before we could go out to play we had to help with the chores and Mum kept a ladder record of what we had done so we could "earn" our pocket money.

Home entertainment was usually the radio and we would hurry home from Brownies / Guides to listen to Dick Barton Special Agent or Journey into Space. Our first personal radios were crystal sets on which we tried to listen to Radio Luxembourg. Saturday mornings saw crowds of us making our way to the Odeon Cinema. We had to walk through the log field and then down Lemsford Road. The log field was another source of broken arms as we climbed all over the stacks of huge logs at the junction of Lemsford and Wellfield Roads.

As we were growing up, house building was taking place in Chelwood Avenue and Longmead / Homestead Road on Crawford Farm. Under strict instructions to "stay away from the building sites" we sneaked away and clambered over unfinished houses, balancing on the first floor support beams and building dens out of the bricks lying around. In those days there were no fences around the sites.

Teenage came and so did the Breaks Youth Club. Open six days a week it offered a variety of activities under the dedicated supervision of Bill and Rose Salmon. They were like surrogate parents laying down rules of attendance and keeping an eye on those who were a bit wayward. One of the most popular activities was the drama club. Pantomimes and plays were a regular hit and Viv was the principal boy to her sister Betty's princess in Beauty and the Beast. Friendships that developed in those years have lasted for years. The Breaks also built its own hall for performances and this was used on Thursdays for up and coming pop groups. I well remember Brian Poole and the Tremeloes playing there before they made the big time. Many others played there too and the hall would be shoulder to shoulder as we danced all evening to the 'new' sound of Rock 'n Roll.

All in all, childhood developed our stamina and resourcefulness at entertaining ourselves as part of a group. So I imagine those days were the early start of team building and considering others. We remember hot summers when the tarmac roads



Viv aged 19 and Betty aged 15 as bridesmaids at Pat's wedding, St. Etheldreda's 1961

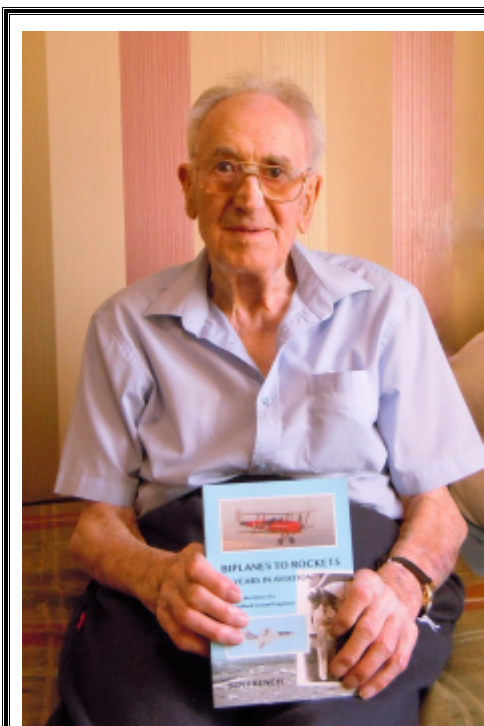


would melt and cover our sandals with black tar. Grass verges became brown and crackled under our feet but amazingly recovered their greenery once the autumn rains came. The merry sound of the ice cream van on Sunday brought all the neighbours out to queue for ice cream blocks to put on their apple pies – nobody had freezers in those days and shops were not open on Sundays!

*Thanks to Viv and Pat Lord for these recollections of their Hatfield childhood - members' contributions are always welcome! Editors*

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## BIPLANES TO ROCKETS: 48 YEARS IN AVIATION



Ben French, now aged 97,  
with a copy of his book

The subtitle of this new book by Ben French is 'The recollections of a De Havilland Ground Engineer'. Ben spent his entire career at De Havilland, starting work with the company in January 1935, and retiring some 47 years later in 1982. Ben takes us through the progression of his career, describing in detail the tasks he carried out and the working practices of his role. The narrative incorporates the war years at the factory, and the development of jet aircraft. In 1938, a year before the war, Ben saw a German Junkers aircraft flying over Hatfield, and wrote in his diary 'was this a spy flight?' He was proved to be correct and much later on, a reconnaissance photograph taken of Hatfield was tracked down as one of 'Hitler's Holiday Snaps' (see our newsletter, edition 86 September 2012).

The book is evocative of a bygone age for Hatfield, when the aircraft industry was the mainstay of employment in the town, and De Havilland's enjoyed worldwide renown. It is an entertaining read, with plenty of amusing anecdotes and illustrated with photographs throughout.

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## HOLLIER'S DAIRY

In 1938 Frank Hollier was born in the large family home on Goldings Farm at the west end of French Horn Lane. Originally built c. 1750, it was largely reconstructed in the early 1800s. It was once known as Goldring or Golby. Shortly after WW1, Frank's granddad, Frederick Joseph Hollier bought it for use as a home and HQ for his business: Hollier's Dairy.

Frank never met him, but he knows he was once a cooper – a beer barrel maker – in Burton on Trent, where he was born in 1874. Frederick moved south and ran dairies in Tottenham (until 1908) and Bushey before coming to Hatfield. He bought the house from a farmer, Mr. Humphreys, and leased land from the Salisbury Estate. When Frederick died in 1934, Frank's dad, Sidney, ran the business and Hollier's came to farm much of the pre-development New Town land south and west of the dairy. This included the fields where the schools of Onslow, Howe Dell and Girls Grammar were built; also Roe Hill playing fields, Oxlease and High Dells residential areas; the Technical College fields and much more. Hollier's also had Ascots farmhouse and fields (near the QE2 hospital).

It appears that most of this land was given over to pasture but wheat, barley and oat crops were also grown. However, Frank was told that, in 1927, his grandfather allowed gravel extraction - near the Hazel Grove (Tech College) area - to be used in the construction of the

Ellenbrook bridge over the old Hatfield - St. Albans railway line whilst the then new A1 road was being laid.

Frank's home at Goldings was also once Hatfield's police station between 1856 -1883 (*see photo*). There were three prison cells underground and, during WW2 when the air raid sirens sounded, his family would retreat down to them. They were sometimes joined by children from the nearby nursery he referred to as 'Miss Norman's School'.

The house also incorporated a large, disused oven, indicating that it may have once been used as a bakery too.

By 1946/7 the Government had plans to populate Hatfield and develop it as a New Town, and much of the farmland was compulsorily purchased for the construction of schools, shopping centres and thousands of new homes.

Frank attended the former Dellfield junior school and then the private Sherrardswood school sited close to the white bridge in WGC. In 1954, aged 16, he left school and worked in the family farming business at a time when the milk carts were all horse drawn. This proved something of a novelty for the town's newcomers – and manure didn't stay long on the roads, it being a benefit to their garden plants.

During the latter 1940's, Hollier's Dairy had its own bottling plant. Their glass pint bottles were embossed with '*Hollier's Dairies...Goldings & Ascots Farms, Hatfield.....Phone 2061*'. The glass was particularly thick and had an opening of 44mm. The bottles were 'plugged' with cardboard stoppers which had advisory wartime slogans on them such as *Make Do and Mend* etc. Hollier's provided two types of milk back then: full cream milk from their own herd of about 100 Guernsey cattle, and pasteurised milk from Friesian herds supplied by about ten local farms.

About a hundred gallons was mechanically milked every day from their own herd via 'Alfa Laval' suction machines at Roe Green Farm. Back then, it was only the creamy colour of the Guernsey milk which distinguished it from the Friesian as coloured aluminium foil tops weren't introduced until the early 1950s – with a reduction to 38mm of the bottle opening. Throughout the 1950s, Hollier's maintained a fleet of 14 milk carts and stabled 16 horses. They delivered 7 days a week to the Hatfield area, which included the De Havilland's aircraft factory and local schools. Hollier's claimed that the milk they delivered had 'only been out of the cow for three hours'. Their main competitor was A1 Dairies with whom they had a gentleman's non-competitive agreement for rounds. Also the Co-op from St. Albans delivered milk to their shops by petrol vans. Hollier's horse drawn carts survived until the late 1950s.

When Frank's dad died in 1965 he took over the business. In c. 1969 he sold it to A1 Dairies who, a few years later, sold it to Express Dairies who, in turn, sold the dairy plot which became the Hollier Court retirement homes.

Frank Hollier now farms in Dorset.



1950s: A Hollier's horse drawn milk cart



c1880s: The police station at Goldings