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HATFIELD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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HATFIELD's 'HOLIDAY AT HOME' WEEK

In Hatfield, during the summer of 1944, a 'Voluntary Committee' was set up to stage a week of activities in aid of the Service Charities. Many and varied events took place; mainly in Hatfield Park, the Public Hall and St. Etheldreda's church.

Programmes were sent out to local servicemen as a morale booster and reminder of home. An album recording letters of reply has recently surfaced. One recipient was a J. Greenham, serving in the Adriatic as a Battery Quartermaster Sergeant who wrote:

"The arrival of mail is always a big moment of the day, and to-day I was one of the fortunate ones....And what a pleasant surprise it was!

J. Greenham

As I sat in my tent turning over the pages of my Holiday at Home (*programme*), I forgot the intense heat, irritating flies, the unpleasant smells; and the pleasing blue of the Adriatic even faded before my eyes. And I was back on the cricket pitch, the Green Hill, the Race-course, the Lime Arcade, the Maze, the New Pond, the picturesque North Front – the place names and also many of the helper's names brought back many happy memories..... I am glad to say that I am very fit and we out here are feeling much relieved that the Flying Bomb dangers have almost passed.

The pages of your programme have given me so much pleasure, I must say a few words about the park.

Hatfield Park, with its happy memories means so much to me. I am longing for the day to arrive when I can proudly take my little daughter, who I have not yet seen, through the park which, thanks to the unending generosity of your President (*Lord Salisbury*) has played so big a part in the lives of so many of us. To walk around the Broadwaters on a Sunday evening and to watch the swans from the Pulpit Bridge among the water lilies, to stroll across the racecourse and watch the rabbits scamper away into the delicate but stately fern, to hear the startled shriek of the pheasant and the pleasant song of the Mavis (*Song Thrush*), surely such joys as these are worth the few hardships we have been asked to face.

I only wish I had the power to translate into words my true feelings but I think I can find rations and clothes for a few hundred men much easier than I can write a few hundred words. I do hope the enclosed photograph assists the Committee in compiling its record. Thanking you all,

I am, Yours in appreciation, J. Greenham



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LIVING IN OLD HATFIELD late 1940s to early 1950s

by Sylvia Price

There was so much freedom compared to what today's children have. We could play anywhere with no worries for us or our parents. There were few cars on the road and always a neighbour available if needed. Everybody seemed to know each other and doors were always open.

In the 1940's we lived in a 300 year old cottage in Park Street, near the viaduct. We were able to run down the garden, through the spinney belonging to builders W. J. Richardson and up into the park where we'd often spend a whole day making dens, climbing trees or playing inside the old WW1 tank – which smelled terrible inside – playing conkers, cricket, skipping and other games. A sandwich and water would sustain us until tea time.

As my story begins just after WW2, there were still some Forces personnel at Hatfield House. We played there too as nobody stopped us. We went in the maze, roamed the gardens and, down at the lake, there was a punt with a long rope attached: some boys would get in whilst others pushed it out and pulled it back in again. We also went in the Old Palace.

On Sundays, we wore our best clothes and had roast dinners (not lunch). There were no shops open and it was all rather quiet. The popular, young Rev Paul Goddard took Sunday School aided by a Mr. Hall, the Verger, who once took 2 or 3 of us up St. Etheldreda's church tower. On Sundays, the bells were rung in the morning and evening. It was lovely. On some occasions after Sunday School, Miss Godfrey, a lovely teacher who lived at the bottom of Fore Street, held little 'socials' for us with tea and cake.

Looking down Park Street away from the Old Town, was a field which we always referred to as the 'Horses field' although we never saw horses in it; but maybe it was used in the 'olden' days whilst carts were being seen to at Gray's Wheelwrights nearby.

After school I went to college, then I worked as a junior short-hand typist for Richardson's Builders in the Old Town. I recall they had a large loft space that was used by their carpenters, but our offices were in the house downstairs.

Next door were two cottages, then a small row of red-bricked Victorian terraced houses with porches. The first of these was lived in by Mr & Mrs Jenkins; he was a milkman for Hollier's Dairy. Every day he came home for his break with his horse & cart which he left outside his house. The horse never moved and had its lunch there too. It was perfectly safe as there was virtually no traffic!

Next door lived Mr & Mrs Kitchener. He was a railwayman, as were most of the men living in the houses behind that front row of terraced homes.

Next door to the Kitchener family lived Mrs Foxlee; then Mrs Povey an elderly white haired lady who was the mother of local ballet teacher Mrs Harvey. Mrs Povey displayed large photos of her daughter as a ballerina with the Sadlers Wells company (I think). Mrs Povey also helped make some of the costumes for the ballet shows we wore. We had to beg & borrow as materials were scarce in the late 1940s.

At the end of the terrace was Berry's, the newsagent. My mother sometimes sent me there to get her a few cigarettes



1954. In the Red Lion Cranbourne Room. Sylvia (in white) stands behind husband, Ron. Ballroom dance teachers Mr & Mrs Hobson are next to them.

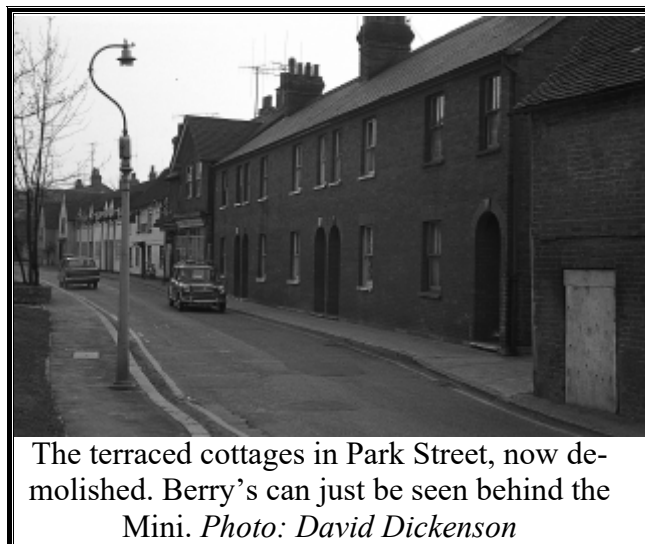
(you could buy them loose back then), and, if I was lucky, I could buy some Tizer – with money back on the returned bottle.

Across the road was the Hatfield Polishing & Plating Company, owned by Bill Lyons. He'd take us youngsters around his small factory, full of big tanks of chemicals for cadmium plating. I think he hoped we'd work for him when we were older. Next to him was Bert Shepherd, the printer, a tall cheerful man. Then Mr Pateman's butchers shop where I was often sent to get whatever was going!

Farther down was a grocer shop run by Mr Hart and his wife. It seemed you could get 'anything and everything' in there. Sugar was sold loose in blue bags; butter in greaseproof paper; biscuits were displayed in big square tins and sold in any weight you wanted – broken ones were sold cheaply in bags. There were earthy potatoes, and paraffin and gas light mantles – as many homes still didn't have electricity back then. Mr Hart also used to organise coach trips to Harringay stadium once a week for the speedway racing. I went a few times when I was older.

From the Horse & Groom pub on there were more old ramshackle cottages. Mrs Bozier lived in one with her two children, Maureen and Dennis – who became a local builder. And next door lived the elderly Mrs Sears with her little Sealyham dog. She loved us children to visit her. Nearby was Mr & Mrs Rolfe's hairdressers shop. They were a lovely couple, but they assumed I was going to work for them after I left school and were cross when I decided to go to college instead. Then came the home of Reg Butler, the sculptor, followed by Hankin's ladies shop which was run by Miss Rumbelow, the Girl Guides captain, who was very strict. After the Eight Bells, there was Steabens the butcher and Hankins the gentleman's outfitters all at the bottom of Fore Street.

On the other side of the road was the One Bell pub, run by Dick Sheerman who also ran a Christmas Club which locals paid into. Mrs Rolfe served there too.



The terraced cottages in Park Street, now demolished. Berry's can just be seen behind the Mini. Photo: David Dickenson

Hollier's also had a shop, as did Simmon's the bakers. Also Taylor's tobacconist where Vera served. This shop sold everything to do with smoking: there was a variety of tobacco in glass jars; pipes; pouches of baccy; cigars and boxes of matches – it smelled of it all.

Mervyn Powell, the photographer, was further down. In the window he had a large photo of the Holland sisters, two local girls who tap danced. It was there for years.

Across the road was Dewhurst's butchers and the International Stores. It was a lovely big store with dark woodwork and lots of marble, and an overhead system of pockets which whizzed above your head transporting cash to a central point. It always felt chilly in there, possibly because of the cold floors and marble counters.

Close by was the Westminster Bank; Walby's butchers; Sweeney's chemist and a china shop where Mrs Harvey worked and paid me 2 shillings to run her errands on Saturdays. There was also another hairdressers shop.

Growing up, ballet gave way to ballroom dancing at the Red Lion Hotel's Cranbourne Rooms. Classes were run by Mr & Mrs Hobson. They were lovely and taught us all to tango, foxtrot and waltz etc. I remember they took us to Hammersmith Palais to see the 'Strictly' finals – but the dancers wore more clothes back then!

All in all, Hatfield was a great place to grow up in the late 1940s and 50s.

FINAL WHISTLE FOR WELHAT SUNDAY LEAGUE

The Welwyn Hatfield Sunday Football League began in 1960 and thrived for decades, but it has now been forced to close. Committee member John Spavins explains why to the WH Times newspaper: "... up to the millennium everything was growing, more often than not. We had 12 teams in five divisions. Players showed commitment for a season, not just the weeks it suited them and players and officials had less distractions. Sunday work was rare. Other than football, there was really only fishing as an alternative pastime. You couldn't go out and buy anything other than bread, milk or a newspaper. Pubs closed at 10.30 or 11pm so, even after a skinful, players could easily get up and play. Local councils were run for the people, adequately staffed and facilities reasonable priced. Factories and other employers had active sports and social clubs, many with superb facilities. Pubs were more than happy to 'bung a few quid' into having a pub team, and players happily went back to the pub afterwards, win, lose or draw, often with the opposition. Then came modern life. Sunday working was often not just a welcome opportunity but now a scheduled routine. People can go and do virtually anything they wish. Pubs are open to midnight or longer and the only reason to leave before closing is to move on to another venue that remained open even longer. Many players think they can get up and play to a reasonable standard on top of that although few were actually able to demonstrate it. Some of those pubs have gone, or current landlords do not wish football teams to be based with them. Players are, these days, happy to take a new kit or other sponsorship, and then go away straight after their match - or go to a different pub because TV scheduling meant they could watch premiership games, or even go to matches scheduled to suit the commercial world of television sponsorship".



Last season the WHSFL started with 14 teams but three dropped out during the campaign. And with few clubs attending a crucial end of season meeting, the sad end was nigh!

RECENT ARCHAEOLOGY AT OLD AIRFIELD SITE

In the December 2012 issue, we wrote an article entitled Roman Hatfield. It drew upon a then recent archaeological report of excavations on the former Howe Dell School playing field. An area of about an acre revealed cultivation trenches which were dated to the late Iron Age / early Roman period. It was thought the trenches were used to grow grapes or olives. A rubbish pit revealed Roman pottery and a roof tile but the remains of a local villa still elude us. But hopes were raised last year when archaeologists investigated 165 'evaluation' trenches to the western area of the old De Havilland airfield. These trenches each averaged about 20 metres x 4 metres to a depth of about 18 inches.

Further to the kind support of HCC's Archaeology Dept, a map of the airfield area revealed finds of Roman pottery by Astwick Manor and a 1st century cremation on the new Business Park. (Early Saxon pottery had also been found there).

Although 19 of the trenches investigated revealed 26 post-medieval and modern features, only 'a single sherd of pre 19th century pottery was recovered' – which was a bit disappointing! Whilst Roman coins have been found in Birchwood and the Red Lion area, we are only aware of a possibility that there could have been a 'Roman building' somewhere in the Old Town. Nowadays, archaeologists are able to evaluate sites before building work commences, but in the early 1950s when Hatfield underwent a massive - and speedy - house building programme, very little archaeology was done. And so, for all we know, that elusive Roman villa could be under somebody's back garden!