

From Hetfelle to Hatfield - over 1000 years of history

HATFIELD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER No. 108 MARCH 2018

DOWNS FARM

For many folk who lived in South Hatfield from the late 1950's, Downs Farm was a youth club. Previous to this it was, of course, a farm. One early owner of it was none less than Sir Thomas More, Lord Chancellor of England during the the 1520's.

In 1878 it was acquired by Lord Salisbury, and his tenant, Will Jones, was the last person to farm there before it was procured by the Hatfield Development Corporation in 1956.

Rod Jones, Will's grandson, recalled some of his childhood memories of visiting Downs Farm in the years running up to its closure:

My grandparents, William (Will) and Winifred (Win) Jones, were farming tenants of the Marquess of Salisbury for approaching 20 years from 1938. I was born in 1946 and grew up in Hadley, Barnet, in sufficient time and proximity to have enjoyed the great outdoors on Downs Farm.

Will, a Welsh speaker, left his native mid Wales as a 15 year old in 1908. Like many of his compatriots, brought together in London through the chapel network, he found his way into the dairy business and farming. He met and married Winifred Merrison in Edmonton where they established a successful dairy concern, W. Jones and Sons.

They had four children, Jack, Fred (my father), Gwen and Molly. Jack's desire to be a farmer was one of the reasons for the move to Downs farm, the farmhouse, and out buildings being in what is now the Hilltop area. The farmhouse, built c1920, is still there and occupied by a Youth Centre. The two farm cottages, where Jack and his family lived in one and a cowman next door, also survive.

It was an arable and dairy farm with the Friesian milking herd numbering around 20 and the total area being just over 160 acres in part stretching down to the railway

on the east side. Various ponds were scattered about but I don't have good recall of these. The outbuildings comprised an office/storage/dairy area, in practice an extension of the house, together with, a milking shed, a barn, a mill and some further sheds where animals were reared.

There was an extensive garden with vegetable and fruit areas and a separate orchard. The front lawn was out of bounds,



Cattle gathering behind the mill building in the 1950's

Contact the Editors:

c/o Mill Green Museum, Hatfield, AL9 5PD
Chairman: **Mrs Chris Martindale**



maybe to keep us out of the way when my grandfather was shooting rabbits! Sacks of grain were fed from the upper level of the mill into a thresher producing a coarse flour which was mixed with water to make a porridge-like fodder for the pigs, reared in small numbers as I recall. Having come from mid Wales, where cobs lived alongside the sheep, there was always a horse on the farm – I remember Star - named after the only marking she had, a star shaped white flash on her forehead. There were also two shire horses, Prince and Duchess at one time. As with all farms there was always a dog.

I can still remember the sounds and smells of the milking parlour as the machines sucked and hissed, the smells of the cow cake, silage, fresh hay/straw and the leather of saddles and general clutter mixed with small cigars and a paraffin heater in Grandad's office/den, where rifles hung on the wall!

In the kitchen were the sounds of leather chair casters on the tiled floor, of Nana beating the batter in a bowl tucked under her arm and the smell of the resultant coffee sponge and a host of other goodies. To this day we eat small currant buns known to us as "little Wins" in her memory. A notable sound was the bell, rang vigorously outside the kitchen, to summon Grandad in from whatever he was doing. He was rarely on time but what was he doing? His advice was always to carry a sixpence, a piece of string and a penknife. He prided himself on never having bought a new broom; 3 new handles and 20 new brushes didn't count! Maybe clues as to what he *was* doing however!

During the war the farm, being near de Havilland, was overflowed by German aircraft on more than one occasion. There is also a tale of evidence of people in local woods suspected of guiding planes in the right direction. Less threatening were the two Italian PoW's, working on the farm, who didn't want to go home! During and after the war there were two land girls, Doreen and Margaret.



**Will & Win Jones
outside the farmhouse**



**Feeding the chickens at
Downs Farm**



**Far right: The red bricked farmhouse, built in 1913
Centre: The milking shed which became a billiard
room. Photo by Ken Wright**

My father signed up for the RAF during the war and whilst training in Edinburgh he met a young Scottish lass, whom he later married, and who continues to have vivid memories of travelling by train from Edinburgh to Hatfield during the black out. On one occasion she was at Hatfield when he went missing over Germany!

After the war the farm was very much the centre of the family with Win being a generous and hardworking hostess. There are still a number of family members and friends who will

remember Christmas, Easter and family parties. Cousin Judy, daughter of Gwen and Owen, had a christening party I remember well. Having the only television set, it was where the immediate family gathered for the coronation. To me, Grandad was a quiet, fastidious man getting on with what he needed to do although he was not short of a word or two when he went off to Holliers Dairy in French Horn Lane or was amongst fellow farmers at the live-stock market in Barnet.



Howzat! Rod Jones batting at Downs Farm while his sister Chris fields at fine leg

In the latter years, on Sunday walks, we witnessed the growth of the new town as the development crept inexorably towards the farm, eventually extinguishing part of my childhood, but not the memories, and bringing to an end the 500 years plus of the history of Downs Farm. The farming tradition was continued by son Jack and his wife May— chickens in Baldock. Daughter Molly with husband Norman continued with a small-holding in Cornwall and their son Clive with his wife Judith, have built a renowned combined yoghurt and beef business in Somerset — Brown Cow Organics. Will and Win would be proud of them.

Meanwhile back in Will's Welsh homeland many of the family continue to farm.

Happy Days!

A personal recollection by Rod Jones, January 2018

A 1734 ALMANAC FOUND IN THE EIGHT BELLS

During building work at the Eight Bells pub in 1970, a miniature almanac, measuring just 2 x 1.25 inches, was found secreted away inside a dowel hole in a timber beam. In December 2017 it was taken from its display case inside the pub by HLHS member Jon Brindle and given to historians of the University of Herts, who carefully scanned every page.

The results are to be uploaded on the ourhatfield.org.uk website.

Kind information from Shannon Struble, an antiquarian bookseller in the USA, described it as "*an uncommon London Almanac*" which was printed in 1734 by the Company of Stationers. It recorded such things as the church calendar; astrological dates; sunrise and sunsets; lists of monarchs from 1066; London Lord Mayors from 1709 and Sheriffs. There are a few illustrations including one figure wearing a large, winged hourglass on his head, perhaps to denote the passage of time. There were also depictions of King George II and the publisher's own coat of arms.

The page for March (see picture) shows that the week beginning March 6th was an 'Ember Week'. These were four weeks in the church calendar, spaced equally throughout the year - one for each season. The Wednesday, Friday and Saturday of that week were set apart for fasting and giving thanks for the gifts of nature. The modern day Harvest Festival perhaps has a connection to these largely forgotten Ember Week traditions.

Unfortunately the almanac's cover was missing but 38 pages are still intact.

Ms Struble noted that it had been "...disbound and sewn back together.." rather than glued, as it originally would have been. And this was the likely reason for some intermittent blank pages inside. But it is on these pages that we learn something about its past owner.

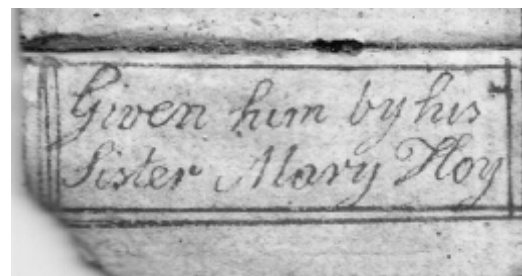
Handwriting on a blank page informs that this tiny book was given to Edward Hoy by his

sister Mary Hoy in 1754. By then, the book was 20 years old. There were also a couple of childlike drawings of animals on other blank pages.

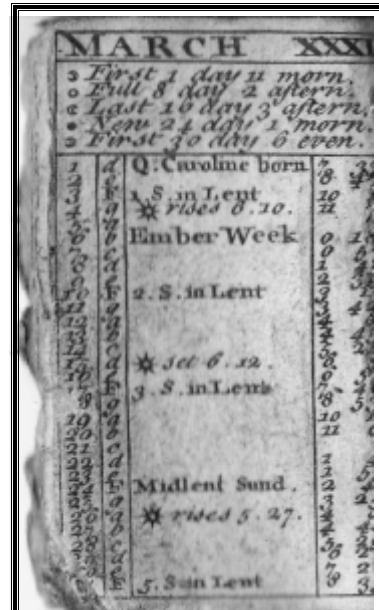
A part history of the Hoys is also interesting. The grandfather of the above children was an Edward Hoy who died in 1728. He was a fellmonger – a dealer in animal skins for tanning. He would have obtained them from a local butcher or abattoir in the Old Town and prepared



Page 1 of the scanned Almanac



Pages 32 and 33; "Edward Hoy His Book December 11th 1754. Given him by his sister Mary Hoy".



Page 10; information for March 1734

them at his shop in Batterdale - which street also had a tannery.

The original Batterdale was about 50 yards south of the pub and opposite Church Street.

A 19th century conveyance relating to earlier details of a property in Fore Street refers to:

"...all that messuage or tenement adjoining to the Brewhouse in the possession of Edward Hoy, fellmonger, together with the barn and outhouse, piece of garden ground and two stables adjoining to the great barn and yard in common".

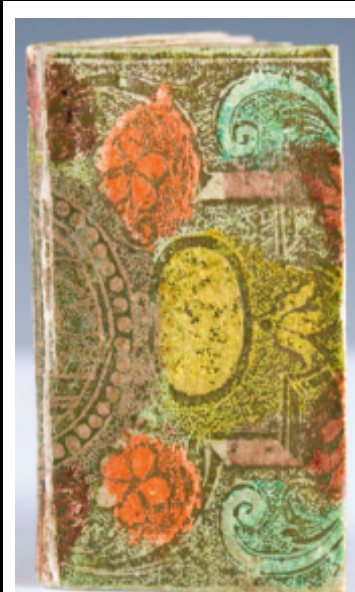
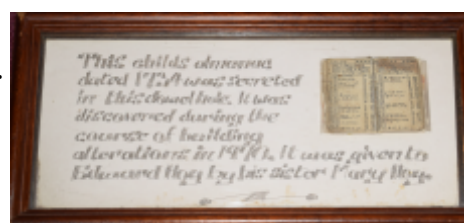
Is it possible that old Edward's brewhouse provided the beer for a pub? His pub?

And if so, was that pub the Five Bells (later known as the Eight Bells)? Did he live there?

We don't know, but it is tempting to think that there was some family connection which resulted in the almanac being found in the pub. But we do know he had two sons: Edward Jnr and Charles, also that Charles and wife Elizabeth's children - Edward and Mary - were baptised in 1741 and 1744 respectively; and these must be the siblings referred to in the almanac. They would have been aged 14 yrs and 10 yrs when Mary gifted it to her brother in 1754. They both died relatively young, predeceasing their father, Charles, who died in 1782 and their uncle, Edward Hoy Jnr, who lived on until 1783. He was a breeches and glove maker, operating from his father's old fellmonger workshop in Batterdale.

With thanks to: Robin Harcourt Williams, Prof Owen Davies, Shannon Struble, the WEA and Eight Bells landlord Andy Parish.

The 1734 almanac can be seen in a small cabinet within the pub.



Above: The cover of a 1736 London Almanac - two years after the 'Eight Bells' edition.