

HATFIELD THIS CENTURY

Hatfield People Explore Their History from 1900

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NEWSLETTER

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I was sore tempted to present this edition edged in black, but we are here to explore and record Hatfield's history so let us note some of the changes which have occurred since our last Newsletter.

In the January edition of the Hatfield Parish magazine, Mary Padget tells us that "another bit of old Roe Green history has been demolished. I saw daylight where the Mission Hall stood for more than the 57 years I have lived here."

The hall was given by Lady Salisbury in 1889 for the use of the scattered inhabitants of Roe Green. At first only morning service was held for lack of lights, but Mr. Camp of Roe Green farm gave a present of these, and chairs loaned by Hatfield House brought the seating capacity to over 100.

It was widely believed in the Church of England at the end of the nineteenth century that members of the working class were deterred from attending conventional churches because they had no smart Sunday clothing, but that they could be attracted to worship in unostentatious buildings like this one.

Another historic name has passed in the cause of progress. Grays of Hatfield has now become Diamond Rover. James Gray acquired the coach and van works in the 1880s. Although it had not been owned by a Gray since the mid 1930s. James' daughter Daisy, of toy shop fame, remained a director of the firm until she died.

We still remember Sid Rumbelow serving in his music and radio shops and also teaching the children of Gascoyne Cecil School how to play the violin. Although sold out to the Radio Maintenance Company in 1953 Sid's name was adopted by the new chain and retained by Thorn EMI when they took over the business. Sadly with the closure of all Rumbelow shops we have lost another link with the past.

I am informed that "Topsy" Cull who kept the sweetshop on the corner of Salisbury Square and the Great North Road died on the 6th December.

The County Surveyor's Office in St. Albans Road, in more recent years used as the office of the local Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths, has been demolished to make way for more office premises. Whilst regretting the passing of this stately Victorian building it is pleasing to report that the terra-cotta plaque so prominently incorporated in the facade has been salvaged and, after restoration, will be displayed at Mill Green Museum.

Many thanks to the members who sent in items regarding street names. It will be possible to compile a list of these but more are required to complete the

directory. For instance, why Wellfield Road after so many years of Union Lane?

Thanks also for offers to help with other projects. Information has been passed to project researchers.

Your committee has arranged for a visit to McMullen's brewery on the 11th May commencing at 2.30 pm. The party is limited to 12 persons and, although protective clothing will be provided, suitable shoes to cope with uneven and possibly wet floors must be worn. The tour will last for nearly two hours and will include negotiating stairs so only able bodied members may be included. Places will be allocated on a first come first served basis. Transport may be available. Names please to the editor.

Oxlease House, Travellers Lane has been booked for the Annual General Meeting to be held on the 25th May 1995 at 7.30 pm. Stan Huckle has agreed to give a talk on bells and bell ringing after the business. You will be receiving formal notification nearer the date.

It is hoped to hold an open meeting for members and friends at the end of September with a talk on the Hertfordshire Home Guard given by Colonel Sainsbury.

Extract of a letter from John Taylor of Ashford, Kent published in the Hertfordshire Countryside of Dec. 1977:

"Being a member of the 20th County of London Territorials I was called up on August 4, 1914. During its training period the "20th" was billeted at Hatfield. Here I slept in the skittle alley of a small pub called the Robin Hood - opposite a row of country cottages. Our HQ was at Hatfield workhouse, not far from the Robin Hood. At the house I had the doubtful pleasure of sleeping in the casual ward, just inside the main gate. Here it was that the tramps were accommodated for their one night stay.

For a while some of us slept on the floors of the front rooms of the cottages; no beds, no pillow, no pyjamas, no sheets, only your kitbag and four army blankets to keep you warm.

I remember that, after receiving her first payment of billeting money from the army, the landlady invested in some new floor cloth. The smell was a bit overpowering when it warmed up during the night with the heat of your body, and your nose only inches from it!

In the Robin Hood public bar was a game called "Ringing the Bull", which consisted of a metal ring suspended from the ceiling by a length of cord, just long enough to reach a hook in the ceiling at the other end. By skillful handling the ring could be made to swing on to the hook. We all tried unsuccessfully to do it. Only the landlord was proficient and it must have earned him many a pint.

I daresay there are a few folk in Hatfield who have memories of the Territorials of the 5th London Brigade they made so welcome in those distant days."

Did you live in the Beaconsfield Road, French Horn Lane, St. Alban's Road triangle? If so your memories and knowledge could help in the compilation of the Puttocks Oak area history. Will you talk to us to help preserve the story of this part of Hatfield. Interviews can be arranged or letters will be gratefully received.