

# HATFIELD THIS CENTURY

Hatfield People Explore Their History from 1900

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Secretary D. Jenner

Editor

F.cox

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## NEWSLETTER

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The AGM was held on the 25th May at Oxlease Centre when Brian Lawrence, as chairman reported on the activities and achievements of the Association over the past year. It was reported, with regret, that due to personal commitments Dennis Jenner can no longer undertake the office of secretary. Brian expressed thanks to Dennis for his contributions as secretary and previously as treasurer and looked forward to his continued support as a member of the committee.

As all the retiring committee members were prepared to serve for a further period and no further nominations has been received your committee for the next twelve months will be:

Frank Clayton

Reg Coleman

Frank Cox

Isobel Cox

Stan Huckle

Dennis Jenner

Brian Lawrence

John Pennington

Ron White

Officers will be appointed from the committee but as no one had offered to be secretary the chairman would be pleased to consider co-opting a volunteer from the general membership. If you think that you could help, please ring Brian.

At the conclusion of the business a talk on the "Use of Bells Through The Centuries" was given by Stan Huckle. This evoked some interesting discussion both generally and locally.

**Visit** On the 11th May a party of members visited the Hertford Brewery of McMullen and Sons. This complemented a talk we had last year on the Red Lion and the McMullen family. The tour took about two hours and we were shown all aspects of the brewing processes under working conditions in addition to the equipment as used in days gone by. The knowledgeable commentary and quips provided by Mr. Dennis Rutledge ensured a most enjoyable afternoon.

**Members' meeting** About 25 members assembled at the Breaks Manor on the 30th March and amongst artefacts of wartime memorabilia spent a pleasurable afternoon reminiscing on experiences of wartime Hatfield. Photographs were passed around and taped music of the time provided background to VE memories. Thanks are expressed to those members who helped prepare and serve tea.

**Park Street Chapel** A most interesting article on this chapel has been received from the secretary of Christ Church (UR). An abridged version will be prepared for a later article. Reference is made to the Railway Mission in the First Right of Way which was later taken over by the Salvation Army. Search your memories and archives for this!

Poor Law legislation was originally enacted during the reign of Elizabeth I. Wellfield Hospital was erected in 1783/1788 on land donated by the then Earl of Salisbury who paid the building costs of £2,077. 15s.0d. and Architect's fees of £51. 17s. 0d. On completion the building was taken into use as a workhouse.

In 1835 a change in legislation placed control in the hands of the Poor Law Commissioners who united the parishes of Hatfield, North Mimms, Northaw and Essendon under the title "Hatfield Union". It meant that people in any of these parishes could be placed in any of the local workhouses whereas previously they had been restricted to that in their own parish.

At this time the Commissioners agreed to pay an annual rental of £110 to the Parish Council.

As a result of the Local Government Act 1929 the Hatfield Union's Poor Law function was transferred to the Hertfordshire County Council who continued to pay the rent. Exactly when the building ceased to be a workhouse is not known but it became a hospital for chronically sick and infirm elderly ladies. There were 72 beds.

In 1948 legislation introduced the National Health Service and the Area Health Authority took control of the hospital. The HCC continued to use part of the building until 1984 when it ceased occupation, handed the keys to the Parish Council and stopped paying rent.

At this stage the Area Health Authority took over the whole building and stopped paying rent on the grounds that the legislation which brought it into existence gave it ownership as it had with most hospitals in the country. No deed of sale or lease could be discovered and, if they had ever existed, probably had been destroyed.

In the latter part of the last century a curate at the Hatfield parish church burnt a large number of documents to provide storage space. The documents were not listed but it was deduced that they included pre 1835 Overseers records, pre 1843 Vestry minutes and pre 1871 church records.

The control of the building seems to have been dealt with by exchanges of letters, many of which are missing. It is possible that they were stored in the Public Records Office in London and were lost when that building was damaged by enemy action in World War II.

After considerable negotiation it was agreed that ownership was vested in the Hatfield Parish Council. The Area Health Authority bought the property paying the Council the amount of £680,000, which could not be used for general parish expenditure but had, by law, to be used for the relief of the poor in Hatfield.

The Wellfield Trust. was formed on lines approved by the Charity Commissioners, one of the conditions being that the capital sum must remain intact and only the interest dispersed. The Trust has been able to give financial help to individual parishioners and provide local communal facilities for people seeking work, By permission of the Charity Commissioners the Trust maintains the Coronation Gardens in Hatfield town centre.

**Jim Flegg's Garden** Noticed in the Daily Telegraph of 23 May this year by Anns Elkins. "One of my 'finds' was a little finger of a garden, long and extremely thin, on the hill leading to the church in Hatfield.

It was like an elaborate sponge cake. A brilliant display of old fashioned flowers was planted beside the narrow path. Then came, just above that, inverted bottles on sticks, from the hollow bases of which grew more flowers, some trailing, some upright. Above that, on bird-tables, were a dozen or more model houses. It sounds grotesque but it was glorious. Recently in the area, I went to remind myself of it, the garden had vanished without a trace."