

HATFIELD THIS CENTURY

Hatfield People Explore Their History Since 1900

No. 28

NEWSLETTER

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SECRETARY: Mrs. C. Martindale.
EDITOR F. J. Cox.

CHILDHOOD DAYS

The trains were chuffing and tooting around the floor with Mickey Mouse driving his little scooter with flashing lights, clockwork London buses, gaudily painted model boats and trains. Famous names such as the Lines Brothers with their Triang, Frank Hornby and Meccano and Die Cast Machine Tools with Lone Star toys. Not a child in sight but a fascinated audience who had been entranced by the story of tin plate and moulding resulting in the toys of our childhood presented by Ron Kingdon at St. Michael's Hall on the 11th of March. Thank you Ron for a nostalgic afternoon.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Do not forget to attend the AGM at 7.30 on 12 May at Oxlease House followed by "Tingey Tales" a talk by Janet Robinson.

RAILWAYS AROUND HATFIELD

Another presentation by Ron Kingdon at Oxlease House at 7.30 pm on Tuesday 9th June. Admission free to Hatfield This Century Members.

MUSEUM EXHIBITION

Hatfield Railways by Ron White. Mar. 7 to June 14.

HATFIELD'S FIRST COMMUTERS?

Research and conclusions of
Eric Sherrard

Delving into the results of the 1891 National Census for the Newtown area of Hatfield, I was surprised to find three people who could have been commuters to London.

Daniel Birch (29) who lived in Union Lane, where the Post Office Sorting Office is now, was a wine cellarman. He had a wife, Agnes (30), and a four month old son, Percy. Although there were large houses in the area, it is unlikely that any of them would have employed a full time cellarman. Wines were imported into the UK and London docks were important for this trade so it looks like Darnel's probable place of work.

Archibald Austin (33) who lived in the Rights of Way with his widowed mother was a tram car conductor. His mother, Emma, was 61 and she had a lodger, Edward Clout aged 22, who was an artesian well engineer. Light railways/trams were not widely used in Hertfordshire in 1891 as the Tramways Act of 1870 was very harsh on operators, but the Light Railway Act of 1896 offered more help to companies

although it was not originally intended for tramways. In Hertfordshire this led to a great deal of activity at the turn of the century using a 4ft. gauge which is quite wide for trams. This raised a great deal of opposition from local traders who saw their customers going elsewhere to shop. For this reason, I think Archibald went to London to work.

Fredrick Trundle (45) was a port night watchman who lived with his wife Hannah (47) and two daughters, Harriet (20) and Annie (10) who was at school. Their house was where Barclays Bank is now. I remember workman's tickets on the railway but Fredrick would have been travelling in the wrong direction and at the wrong time to avail himself of these concessionary fares. If he could afford to keep Harriet at home, he might have been more than just a night watchman, particularly as the family had moved from Hitchin within the last ten years.

It is important to remember that the train was paramount for transport needs at this time and Hatfield was a very important station. Lord

Continued overleaf

HE CAME TO BLOW UP DH

Dropped by parachute in December 1942, Eddie Chapman was equipped with a wireless, automatic pistol, cyanide suicide pill and £1000. Trained in Germany he had been offered £15000 to blow up the factory producing the Mosquito. On 29 January 1943 he scaled the factory fence and laid charges around the power plant. The explosion blew off part of the roof and pieces of transformer were found scattered around the area. The action was reported in national newspapers at the time and Chapman's Abwehr controllers sent him congratulations. Unknown to the Germans, when he landed he had surrendered to MI5 and offered to work for the British. The explosions at Hatfield were a hoax made to appear a far more serious attack. It was planned by MI5 with the assistance of the celebrated illusionist Jasper Maskeleyne.

Chapman had been arrested in 1939 for safe blowing in Glasgow but escaped to Jersey where he was apprehended. While awaiting return to Scotland the Germans occupied the Channel Islands and recruited him for sabotage work.

After his exploits in Hatfield he was given assisted passage to Lisbon to enable him to return to Germany. Awarded the Iron Cross he was sent back to Britain on another mission in 1944 but again surrendered.

Due to his involvement with the criminal fraternity MI5 dispensed with his services.

An excerpt from an obituary seen and sent in by Peggy Tomey.

The Rev. Richard Mason

Born on April 26 1929, the only son of Vice Admiral Sir Frank Mason, Richard Mason was curate at St. Michael's and All Angels at Birchwood from

THE BOX FACTORY 1937 - 1998

"The Box Factory" as it was usually referred to by local residents was one of three major new industries to be set up in Hatfield during the 1930s though its origins go back much further. The Company formed as M.Cook & Son, was founded by Mrs. Matilda Cook in 1860 to make boxes for the embroidered pin cushions which she produced. The firm operated from various premises in London as it continued to grow and by 1926 was based in Islington.

With further expansion over the next decade the company decided to purchase a "green field site" at Hatfield and its new factory was opened in 1937 producing corrugated paper, cardboard boxes and envelopes. Soon after, with the outbreak of war, the production line was adapted to produce paper cannon shells and reserve fuel tanks for aircraft but the post war years heralded a period of sustained expansion under its long-standing chairman and managing director, Mr. H. F. (Frank) Warbey, a descendant of the founder. However, in

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1958 to 1964. He became Domestic Chaplain to the Bishop of London until 1969 when the Bishop of Rochester, (the former Rector of Bishop's Hatfield, David Say) appointed him as Vicar of Riverhead with Dunton Green, near Sevenoaks where he stayed until 1973. In 1977 he became Archdeacon of Tonbridge until his retirement in 1995. His death was reported in the national press recently.

1956 the company accepted a takeover offer from Hygrade Corrugated Cases Ltd., who had other factories at Southall and Nelson.

1963 saw a further change of ownership when a Canadian group, MacMillan Bloedel purchased the company. The new owners built on the success of their predecessors but after the recession of the early 1980s MacMillan Bloedel merged their operation with the Jefferson Smurfit Group and SCA (Svenska Cellulosa Aktiebolaget) to form UK Corrugated in 1983. The merged company continued to flourish and during the early years of the 1990s Smurfit Group bought out the interests of its two partners and the factory traded under the title of Smurfit Corrugated UK Ltd. As the decade progressed market conditions, forced the group to re-examine its operation and this has led to the closure of the Hatfield plant and end the 60 year link with the town

Brian Lawrence

COMMUTERS

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Salisbury as Prime Minister had a precise way of getting from Whitehall to Kings Cross in just enough time to catch the train. His guests also travelled from London to Hatfield by train and needed to get back to London late at night. The railway line from Hatfield to Kings Cross needed to provide a very good service and so the local population benefitted from all this attention and allowed the growth of commuting.