

Hatfield Local History Society

Formerly Hatfield This Century

No. 36

NEWSLETTER

March 2000

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

Editorial

Our open meeting in December was well attended by members who favourably expressed interest in the projects displayed. Brian had copies of Beresford Johnson's drawings, Reg had items related to the Lone Star factory and Frank had the oral interview tapes on show together with background items on the Tingey family. Caroline Rawle from the museum had a collection of photographs submitted for identification and other members had brought their interesting photos for discussion. Brian had prepared a local quiz which, together with the light refreshments, provided quite a party atmosphere and members requested further such meetings.

The River Lea

Our illustrated talk on the 10th April will be an interesting supplement to the exhibition running from the 8th April until the 25th June at the Mill Green Museum, following the River Lea downstream. Eight panels on loan from Hertford Museum will cover the length of the river from Harpenden to Waltham Cross.

Carol Rigby, previously Sue Kirby's deputy, now manager of the Museum Service, and Caroline Rawle the new Curator will be pleased to meet members visiting the exhibition.

NORTH MYMMS MANOR HOUSE

The recorded history of North Mymms Park goes back before the Norman Conquest. It was divided into two or more parts from the middle of the 13th century until re-united in 1529-30 by John Conningsby.

The present house was probably built by his son Sir Ralph in about 1599. It deteriorated considerably during the civil war when it was forfeited due to the family support of Charles 1. It later reverted back to the Conningsby family and in 1658 the house and manor were sold to Sir Thomas Hyde of Aldbury.

In 1733 the Duke of Leeds inherited the estate and carried out considerable repairs and refurbishment. In 1800 the estate was bought by Henry Browne who possibly had the lease of the house before this. He restored parts of the house and gave it a stuccoed and generally Tudor appearance.

Baron Greville became the owner about 1824, although then still a minor. He made some alterations adding turrets and corridors about 1846. In 1850, when he was Sheriff, his household was listed as himself, his wife and four children, a cousin, a tutor in classics and fifteen indoor servants. In 1870 the house was purchased by Coningsby Sibthorpe and remained in his family for twenty years until Hamilton

Bruce, a property speculator moved in for four years before selling to Mr. and Mrs. Walter Hayes Burns. They made extensive alterations to both the interior and exterior. Most of their additions were removed in 1947. The estate remained in the Burns family until 1981, when, following the death of his mother, Sir George Burns, then Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire, sold the house, since when it has changed hands a number of times and has undergone extensive structural repairs.

It is currently in the hands of Glaxo Welcome who have kindly offered to show us around. Our visit will take place on Saturday 24 June and we will be met at the War Memorial at the main gate at 10.30 a.m. For those wishing to join the party please notify Frank Cox on 321812. We will try to arrange transport for those members who need it.

WANTED

parts 3 and 4 of
Hatfield and its people,

The original WEA
booklets published
in 1960

Possible swaps available

BERESFORD JOHNSON (1905 - 1991)

By Brian G. Lawrence

(Based on an article published in Hertfordshire Countryside - December 1999)

Beresford Johnson was a Suffolk man by birth but very much a Hertfordshire man by adoption.

Having completed his education in his home town of Ipswich, he progressed to the Birmingham school of Art. Thereafter he decided on a career in the developing aircraft industry taking up a position with Airspeed in Portsmouth. It was the acquisition of Airspeed by the rapidly growing de Havilland Company which brought Beresford and his wife, Doris, to Hatfield in 1937.

Within two years of the Johnson family's arrival in Hatfield war had broken out and the de Havilland factory was heavily engaged in the war effort. By then Beresford was employed in a reserved occupation working for the company at Salisbury Hall as a design draughtsman involved in the development of the world famous Mosquito aircraft.

Despite the demands of his work and his responsibilities as the father of a young family he managed to find time to relax by pursuing his lifetime hobby of painting, working in oils, pastels and watercolours. When asked which medium he preferred he replied "watercolours, it's so easy to wash out your brushes and I'm

lazy".

He became a member of the Guild of Aviation Artists and formed the de Havilland Art Society, serving as its chairman and secretary. In the early 1960s he was also instrumental in the formation of the Hatfield Art Society and played a prominent role in its development over many years.

His works covered a diverse range of subjects, seascapes and landscapes, portraits and the aircraft which played such a large part in his life. However, his most important contribution to posterity must be his paintings and sketches of scenes in and around Hatfield.

Many of these date from the 1960s and 70s when parts of Hatfield were being transformed with the demolition and redevelopment of much of the Old Town and the Town Centre.

Beresford had developed a great affection for his adopted home town over the years and viewed many of these changes with regret. He was quoted as saying "Hatfield has lost its soul", a view shared by many local residents.

However, we are fortunate that he went around the town with his sketch book and recorded the streets and buildings as they were at that period of great change.

He continued his hobby of painting well into his 80s, holding one man exhibitions of his works and having his paintings displayed at exhi-

/I Lived There ,,,,,,,,,,3

The air raids on London had started so my family decided to move to No. 6. Chapmans Terrace, in Old Hatfield. It was a two up and two down double fronted terraced house with gas lighting, an outside flush lavatory and the bath hanging on the outside wall. One downstairs room contained a coal fired kitchen range for cooking and a round stone boiler for the washing, and a sink with cold water tap. Despite the cramped space, we used that as our living room and called the other downstairs room the "front room", to be used only on Sundays and special occasions.

At the front of the house was a very small garden and a footpath separated, by a fence, from the large rear gardens of Fore Street. At the back was a path - no garden - and a wall beyond which was the graveyard of the long-gone Park Street Chapel.

Reg. Coleman

Continued from previous column

bitions both locally and in London.

Beresford Johnson was a much loved character with a keen sense of humour and a gentleman in the true sense of the word. Examples of his paintings and drawings hang on the walls of houses both near and far as a testimony to his artistic talent.

MY VIEW FROM THE TOWPATH

A Talk With Slides by

John Higgs

Navigation of the River Lea
from Bow to Hertford

Bill Salmon Centre

Monday 10 April 7.30 pm

THE CECIL FAMILY & HATFIELD HOUSE

A Talk With Slides by

Robin Perkins

Guide at Hatfield House for 12 years

Will Follow the AGM

Oxlease Hall, Travellers Lane

Monday 8 May 7.30 pm