

SECRETARY: Mrs. C. Martindale
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Editorial

In February Welwyn Hatfield Council launched a new look website. Included in this is a page leading to details of the North Mymms Local History Society. To access this I visited www.welhat.gov.uk then clicked on Site Map > Leisure and Culture > Events > Talks and Meetings > North Mymms Local History Society > Full Details > Further Details > Brookmans Park Newsletter > Local History, and there you have 20 complete books and 40 Historical Features. There is a quicker way, by accessing www.brookmans.com but that bypasses all the Welwyn Hatfield site. Would we have anyone able and prepared to input news and articles about Hatfield Local History? What a bonus that could prove for our Society.

At our January committee meeting the matter of refreshments at Friendship House was raised. It was agreed to open the doors half an hour earlier for members to come in before the start of the meeting for tea and socialising.

The research into Dagmar House School is progressing very well. The genealogical story of the founder and principals together with lists of boarding pupils is virtually completed and 19 of the 21 ex-pupils recorded on

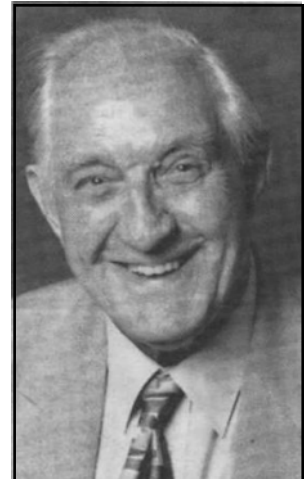
the plaque have been identified. If you have any knowledge of Dagmar and/or Alexandra House Schools I would be pleased to include it in the final version. Specifically I would like to hear of local day boys and girls.

Thanks to Tony Lodge for the interesting article on Great Nast Hyde House and his research into the property. Make sure that you have booked your ticket for our visit on the 14th of May as there is a restriction on the number available.

The interest shown regarding the old chalk mines has created a lot of comments and if you have any further knowledge of this let us know to add to the archive.

A number of visitors and researchers have already used the comprehensive store of archive photographs, local history information files, family tree resources and research library available in the resources room at Mill Green Museum. This free service is available on a drop-in basis on Thursday mornings between 10am and 12 noon when a local history society member will help you find what you need. Alternatively you can make an appointment for another day by calling 01707 271362. In addition to the regular Thursday sessions the museum staff and volunteers are holding Behind the Scenes demonstrations on 7 May, 12 August and 16 September (Heritage Open Day)

Frank Clayton



It was with deep regret that we were informed of the death of Frank Clayton after suffering from his injury on Remembrance Sunday last year.

Elected onto the committee of this Society in 1992, Frank had served continually and supportively until his accident.

He will be sadly missed by his many friends and acquaintances.

Children at risk in mine collapse scare

Fears that a collapsing mine could endanger children forced the closure of a Hertfordshire school this week.

Engineers warned Welwyn & Hatfield district council that parts of the New Briars Primary School's car park and playing field risked falling into collapsing underground mine workings within the next 10 years.

The Briars Lane area of Hatfield has suffered subsidence since the 1960s and investigations that began in 2001 revealed the area was on top of a former chalk mine.

A detailed risk assessment released by geotechnical engineers at Hyder Consulting last week reveals that 11 properties, the main road and the school were at risk.

NEW CIVIL ENGINEER 15/29 DECEMBER 2005

Comment from Jim Page December 2005

The tragedy of it all is that there were people in Hatfield (Peggy Skeggs' grandmother for one) who knew of the existence of the

chalk mine when the houses were first built in Briars Lane in the 1930s. Peggy told her mother and father she wouldn't want to live in the area because the houses would fall down!

From Pauline Hannigan (néé Gower)

Having read the December copy of the Hatfield Local History Society Newsletter I was most interested in the article 'Hatfield's Old Chalk Mines'. I had no idea that such mines existed but wonder if perhaps a childhood memory I have has any connection.

Around 60 (or maybe more) years ago, my father took me for a walk. The weather had previously been very wet but was dry and bright as we went along Briars Lane. At the top of the hill we climbed over a stile and set off across the field on the right. After walking some distance I was told to lie down and put my ear to the ground at a certain place. I heard a tremendous roar coming from below. It seemed to be a long way off but was certainly quite astonishing to me. My father told me

he believed it was an underground river that could only be heard when there had been a lot of rain. He had found the place when he had played there himself as a boy, I guess about the time of the first World War as he was born in 1907.

I have for many years lived in Shropshire, mostly in the Iron-bridge Gorge where the Industrial Revolution began. For over half a century the area has suffered subsidence with many cottages and gardens slipping and large holes opening up at the sites of very old bell shaped coal pits and primitive adits carved into the hillsides. Most of the excavations have never been mapped and cause worry when a garden disappears! In 1952 and again in 1983 large land movement prompted evacuation in this village when ancient mine workings were flooded by natural springs and water courses filling the tunnels and causing the underlying clay to slide. Hopefully, Briars Lane will not suffer the same fate.

I will follow any further news about the chalk mines with great interest.



David Jones' mother remembers the chalk being burnt in Briars Lane at the entrance to the mines to convert it into lime. This photograph (dated 1999) shows the location of the original tunnel entrance.

GREAT NAST HYDE HOUSE

Wilkins Green Lane, Hatfield

Tony Lodge

We are fortunate to still have in Hatfield this fine 400-year-old House, variously described as Elizabethan, Jacobean, a 'manor' house, a farmhouse or a mansion. As we look forward to the Society's arranged visit to Great Nast Hyde (Sunday 14th May, 2.00 p.m.) some random information about the House might be of interest to those not already familiar with it. Much reliable information is available about the present House and it is believed that some sort of dwelling existed on the site from the 14th century. Everyone with an interest in Hatfield and a concern for its history and heritage continues to rejoice that this old House has come again into private and caring ownership and is once more a family home. When it was sold by British Aerospace about 5 years ago there was great local concern that it might fall into 'commercial' hands and fears for what that could mean. During our May conducted tour our hosts, Mr. and Mrs. Bailey, will be telling us about the history of the House and about their continuing programme of restoration of it and its gardens. Many HLHS members - and indeed many Hatfield people - will already know of the House and its role as a VIP guest-house for visiting commercial aircraft buyers while it was for some 55 years in the ownership of de Havilland, later Hawker Siddeley and finally British Aerospace. Few, however, will know much of its earlier history from when it was built in about 1600, since when, up to its purchase by de Havilland in 1946, it had a succession of owners and tenants (including being requisitioned by the government for the duration of WW2) and changed from being a large 'farm' house in the 17th century to become a 'gentleman's residence' in the 1800's, the farming activities having been removed to the (still existing) farmhouse across the road, then known as Little Nast Hyde. One of the owners, up to 1806, was a St.Albans family by the name of Kentish; there is one Kentish in the current telephone directory living in St.Albans who may be a descendant. It is known that at least one direct descendant of the Nast Hyde Kentish family was living in or near Hatfield up to about 1972. Contrary to some references, it was never really a Manor House, though some of its earlier occupants might have boasted that it was. Also, the much-quoted claim that Dickens based his 'Bleak House' on Nast Hyde does not stand up to close scrutiny - it is not 'just outside the town' (St.Albans), it is not 'on a hill', there is no drive with a 'circular sweep leading to a porch', the 'three peaks' (gables) are not visible from the approach to the main

(north) entrance, which has only two gables. As to that last feature, some sources claim that the house is now 'back-to-front', the original 'front' having been the south front, the change having something not quite understandable to do with deluding Cromwell's soldiers as to the way in! - Cromwellian soldiers, wishing to gain entry, would surely have done so via both front *and* back! In any case, the south façade looks immediately onto Wilkins Green Lane, which up to the 20th century was little more than a farm track and hardly a front entrance approach.

For those wanting more detail, there is an interesting file or two of information at Hatfield Library, in the Local History section. Some of this is undated or anonymous (or both) but it is all interesting and informative and with very little contradiction. There are copies of at least two or three printed histories of the House which unfortunately bear no date or author's name, nor any clue as to their provenance. It would take a small book to cover all the information which is available. Our own HLHS Past Chairman, Brian Lawrence, had his most interesting piece on Great Nast Hyde House published in 'Hertfordshire Countryside' of February 1997, which is also worth looking up. The foregoing sources cover many aspects of the House's past, including the origins of its strange name, its links to Hatfield House (built about the same time and with which it shares bits of an old ship's companionway adapted as a staircase), the presence of tunnels allegedly leading to the Bishop's Palace at Old Hatfield and so on. Tunnels certainly have at least twice been discovered apparently running between the two places, once on the line of the present A1M just south of the Hatfield Tunnel and once in the grounds of the nearby house 'Torilla' in Wilkins Green Lane.

Around about 1910 or 1911 there was a very ambitious development scheme which might have caused the demolition of Great Nast Hyde House at that time. The proposals were to build a considerable number of large detached houses with gardens of an acre or more in size on a vast tract of land spreading from Wilkins Green Lane north-eastwards as far as Coopers Green Lane, west of Harpsfield Hall and taking in part of what later became the aerodrome land and also including the whole of the Great Nast Hyde property. Strangely, the leaflet advertising this project called the big House at Nast Hyde 'The Old Hall', though people living locally at the time never knew it by that name. The area which we now call Ellenbrook was apparently called Nast

Hyde 100 years ago. This was to be an exclusive estate of 'country homes' rather than a suburb of semi-detached houses. The architects were Webb & Neilson of Enfield and the builders were C.Miskin & Co. of St.Albans. They were large houses, not quite up to a Lutyens, Voysey or Baillie-Scott quality of design but good enough. The plans included a new roads network, one of these running west from Ellenbrook Lane through the middle of the Nast Hyde lands (and where Bramble Road now is) and named 'Nast Hyde Road' on the layout plan. Fortunately for Great Nast Hyde (though not for the shareholders) the company, Nast Hyde Estate, went bankrupt in 1912 having built only 4 houses in Ellenbrook Lane - this was before Ellenbrook Crescent was built. One hopes the builders were paid before this happened! Only one of those houses survives and is now in use as a Care Home - this is 'Honister' (originally named 'Wild Oak'), at the corner of Ellenbrook Lane and Wilkins Green Lane. Interestingly, one of the other three houses, first owned by a German gentleman, was named 'Bleak House' originally and later re-named 'Roseleigh', then owned and occupied by the Owers family from 1912 up to the end of WW2. Another house, also owned by the Owers, was first called 'Holly Lodge' and then renamed 'Brookside' (because it was by the Ellen Brook) giving its name later to the present cul-de-sac road of houses built on its site. The Owers family gave an evening garden concert on their tennis courts at 'Holly Lodge' in July 1918 to raise funds for the nearby Napsbury Hospital at London Colney and the wounded WW1 soldiers there. This worthy tradition is now revived scarcely 300 metres away down the road at Great Nast Hyde House, where the Baileys hold summer orchestral concerts and firework displays in the grounds in aid of the Menat Trust. The Menat Trust is a registered charity founded by David and Catherine Bailey to provide support for the care and treatment of young children with congenital heart disease, after their own baby son survived this condition at birth in 1997. To find out more about this Trust, look at their internet website, www.menat-trust.org, or telephone 01707 275351. HLHS will be donating the proceeds of our ticket sales for the May visit to the Trust.

There are a few tickets left for the 14th May visit - contact Tony Lodge now. Tickets are £5 each to HLHS members and [include tea & biscuits on arrival](#) and a two hours conducted tour of the House and gardens. The party number is limited to 35. A few tickets might be available for non-members if the allocation of 35 is not fully taken up by members - we will know this in April. There is ample car-parking space at the House - directions will be on your ticket.

TRAGEDY AT HATFIELD STATION

The Eltisley History Society is researching a story related to Hatfield and would be grateful for any information that could be found to assist in this research.

Fourteen men from Eltisley, near St. Neots, died in uniform during World War I. These men are remembered in our War Memorial, the Lych Gate at the church, and in a line of lime trees planted as news of each fatality was received. Because memories fade as time passes and families move away, we decided to research these men and write a small book about who they were and how they died.

Martin Riseley was born in Eltisley in 1878. He became a regu-

lar soldier - twelve years in the Grenadier Guards - and later emigrated to Canada. After six years he joined an Overseas Battalion of the Canadian Army and returned to England on the S S Olympic, leaving behind a wife and two children.

It seems that he was granted a short leave on Saturday 29 July, 1916 and visited his sister at Croxton, a village about two miles from Eltisley. On the way back to camp, he got off the train at Hatfield and disappeared briefly to answer a call of nature. The train moved off and in trying to re-board he slipped and fell between the platform and the carriage. He died from his injuries in Bricket House Hospital on 31 July. We have the report of the inquest

from the Herts Advertiser and St. Albans Times, but no other information about the incident. The Coroner's records have not survived. I am in touch with the librarian at Hatfield House and the Great Northern Railway Society to see if either can find any reference that would add to our knowledge. I have also tracked the GNR's accident reports to Kew and will see if they have anything to offer.

Meanwhile should you have any records of this sad occurrence please contact ;-

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Eltisley
St. Neots
PE19 6TN
01480 880096

For Your Diary

Monday 13 March 7.30

The Life of Emma Hamilton
Terry Pankhurst

Monday 10 April 2.30

Pull Yourselves Together Girls
The Spirella (Letchworth Corset Company) Story
Robert Lancaster
Curator First City Heritage Museum

Monday 8 May 7.30

Annual General Meeting
followed by

A Knight, A Countess And A Packet of Sandwiches
The Irish Rising, Roger Casement and the Countess of Markovitch
Terry Cox

Meetings at Friendship House, Wellfield Close, Hatfield

Sunday 14 May 2.00

Escorted Tour of Great Nast Hyde House

Limited number by ticket only

Booking by Tony Lodge