

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

Editorial

With the sudden and unexpected snowfall on the 8th February it was not possible to notify members of the closure of Friendship House. We would apologise and thank those people who did brave the elements and turn up. It is hoped to arrange for Tony Rook to come and tell us about the drains at another time!

Your committee has been very active since December when a most convivial open meeting was well attended. The success of the various quizzes and displays with the informal chats has induced the committee to repeat the event as a special meeting on Thursday 12 July. Come along with your interesting items and talk to other members.

With the closure of the town library for refurbishment the Hatfield Local History Collection has been temporarily transferred to Welwyn Garden City. Our request that it be held in Hatfield at Barnfield Library was not taken up.

Chris Martindale, Miriam Gaskin and Joan Cobern attended a HALS Recorder Scheme Symposium where it was proposed to bring together ordinary people in the county who have specialist material which is not generally known about.

It is proposed to hold displays of the Society's archives and artefacts at the district Kaleidoscope meeting at Stanborough Lakes on the 14th July.

Another display will be held at Hilltop on their open day, date to be announced.

Reg Coleman is hoping, with the Museum Education officer, to visit Stroud Green School to talk about WWII evacuees.

Concern has been expressed at the proposed demolition of the Cranborne Rooms to be replaced by flats. Also about the demolition of the Hatfield cinema. It is hoped that photographs of the interiors of these buildings can be arranged.

Chris and Joan with Brian Lawrence have started work in preparation for this year's Heritage Open Days to run from the 6th to the 9th of September.

It is encouraging to receive letters and queries from members no longer living in the town. Not only does it help to keep in touch but it revives old memories. Answers and comments on these are always passed to correspondents and often have renewed old friendships and acquaintances. Please keep them coming, apart from creating interest they help to fill up the Newsletters!

Letters

Hay on Wye

I am hoping - with an old friend of mine in Australia - to put together some notes on Newtown House. I note that Hatfield and its People lists the school as being run by a Mr Hempsall in 1900 and then Miss Thomas had it in c1940 - 1943.

I myself was there till it closed having gone in 1941 (I think). My friend in Australia lived there after the school closed when it was put into flats.

I know nothing about its earlier history but I thought that if we got some notes together someone might like to run with it.

Janet Robinson

Ashford

I am researching my family history and discover that my Great Great Grandmother was born in Hatfield in 1814. She married and brought up her family in Hatfield until c1845 when they moved to Orpington in Kent. In the 1941 (sic) census the family were living in Pond Hill, Hatfield. My Great Great Grandfather was a carpenter. I would like to learn about the sort of lives they led in Hatfield. Would the children have attended school and was there much work in the area at that time?

Do you have any publications or maps of Hatfield for this time?

Any information you can give would be gratefully received.

Frances Eccleshall

More letters inside

MORE MEMORIES OF ERNEST JONES

Extracted from his life story (concluded)

On Sunday the third of September 1939 the Prime Minister Mr. Chamberlain, gave the news to the country on the radio that we were at war with Germany. About an hour after his speech the air raid sirens sounded. It came as quite a shock to everyone so soon after the news not knowing just what might happen. Previously everyone had been issued with a gas mask, we were told to seal all air vents etc. in the home, no lights to be shown after dark. I made black-out frames for our windows out of cardboard sheets given free by Cooks Box Factory in Hatfield.

We settled down in our new home during that first winter of the war and made the best we could of life as it was with the rationing of food etc. The Council built a wall in front of our sitting room window, and supplied a steel table (a Morrison shelter) which was assembled in our sitting room. It was there in case of air raids. Most nights we slept under this table with the children, a wire guard was fixed at the sides. It was very claustrophobic at times, but would give us protection in the case of bombing other than a direct hit. Children were being evacuated from London. Quite a few came to Hatfield, we had two boys at first, but later Jess had evacuees throughout most of the war. I joined the firm's Fire Service, we did our training during the night getting prepared in case of air raids. By March 1940 I had to register and have a medical for military service. In April I was called up and I had to report to the Infantry Training Centre Suffolk Regiment at Bury St Edmonds.

There followed nearly six years of military service when I travelled to India via South Africa, then Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Gaza, Egypt and North Africa. In September 1943 we took part in the assault at Salerno where my unit was taken prisoner. We were transported by train right through Italy into Austria then into

Germany to various Stalags then across Czechoslovakia to Poland. Eventually in May 1945 the Russians took over our camp and told us where to find the American forces who then flew us out in a Flying Fortress. To freedom.

I went home for 10 days leave. It was good to be with my family again. I was able to go home for Christmas which was the first Christmas at home since I was called up. I returned to my unit on December the 27th. In Feb 1946 I spent four weeks at Hatfield House which was used as a Military hospital and a rehabilitation centre for ex prisoners of war. Living in Hatfield I was allowed a sleeping out pass so was able to go home at about 5pm until the following morning. It was a very interesting month, we were taken to some factories and also places of interest every day and lunch was always provided.

At the end of the four weeks I reported back to my depot and was demobilised in March 1946. I was fitted out with new clothes, ration book, demob papers and money that was owing to me and returned home as a civilian after six years as a soldier.

Returning to my old job at the de Havilland aircraft factory in Hatfield, I found that the wood mill where I was previously employed was closed down so they gave me a job in the sheet metal department. I got on well and really enjoyed the work.

In March 1947 another daughter was born to us. We named her Patricia, having been born on St Patrick's day.

The winter of 1946-7 was very grim, shortages of almost everything, the worst being the shortage of fuel. The aircraft factory had to close for weeks so we were allowed to go into Hatfield park to collect wood to keep our fire going. Things gradually eased and returned to normal.

In 1955 Christina was born, now known as Tina, she was a big sur-

prise after such a long time but she was loved by all.

In September 1966 I suffered a severe heart attack which kept me in hospital in St Albans for eight weeks.

When I returned to work after about three months off sick I was promised a lighter job but I did not get one (need I say more).

As the family was getting married and leaving home we moved house again in 1978 to 22 Howe Dell. It was a smaller house with a little garden which suited me as I was suffering from angina so I was not able to do a lot of gardening. Travelling back and forth to work became too much for me and then after working at the factory for well over 39 years I was made redundant which came as quite a blow, but possibly a blessing in disguise because from then on my health gradually went down hill.

ERNEST JOHN JONES PASSED AWAY
ON THE 25 JULY 1993
AT THE Q.E.II HOSPITAL W.G.C. AGE
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PREFABS

I see from the last Newsletter No. 63 December 2006, that Brian Lawrence has now completed his research into the Prefabs and that he has written an article, accepted for publication in a future edition of Hertfordshire Countryside.

As both my husband and myself grew up in Hatfield, we would be interested to know if this article will appear in a future Newsletter. If this isn't likely to be the case, would it be possible to be advised when the article is likely to appear in the Hertfordshire Countryside. I know often this can be a long wait.

Mary Moore

Just to let you know that my article on the pre-fabs is published in the January 2007 edition of Hertfordshire Countryside. It might be of interest to those people who kindly contacted me.

Brian Lawrence

LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK

As time passes I am sure I am not alone in wondering if Hatfield will ever have a busy, vibrant Town Centre again. For several years we have heard of elaborate plans and seen presentations of the promised "regeneration" of the Town Centre but still there is no sign of practical steps being taken to transform this run-down part of the town. The fanfare of trumpets, which heralded the new "super" hospital, is still fresh in our minds but the dream proved to be no more than a mirage!

As someone who was born in Hatfield I would like to reassure those who have arrived here more recently that the town really did have a heart in former times. During the first half of the twentieth century the streets of what we now call the "Old Town" were a hive of activity but that was before Hatfield fragmented and began its inexorable march westward. Visitors to this deserted part of the town now could scarcely envisage its bustling streets in those far off days. The railway, a busy junction serving three branch lines and the long-established brewery had been major employers a century ago and although their influence had begun to diminish the narrow streets were lined with a wide range of shops and tradesmen, catering for the needs of the townsfolk, whilst innumerable pubs and beerhouses provided for their limited leisure hours

The number of public houses had declined with the closure of the brewery in 1920 but plenty more remained, sufficient to suit all tastes. As the years passed several of these former hostel-

ries, such as The East Indian Chief, The Green Man and The Bakers Arms have been converted into desirable private residences while others, including The Dray Horse, The One Bell and The Platelayers Arms disappeared completely. Inevitably several were victims of the cull that took place in the 1960s/70s during the "re-development" of the Old Town; a scheme that many would more accurately describe as "destruction"!

One would be hard pressed to make out a strong case for the preservation of some of these very basic public houses with their sawdust-covered, stone floors and external toilets, open to the elements but there were some, such as The One Bell and The Great Northern which were equipped with substantial function rooms above, providing a popular venue for local clubs and societies and thus were very much an integral part of the community.

I have always found it interesting to reflect on how it came about that particular pubs managed to survive the demolition work of the 1970s. Bearing in mind its history it is no surprise that The Eight Bells was a survivor. The Horse & Groom was also one of the fortunate ones despite the fact that the adjoining row of buildings was re-developed. However, for me the most surprising survivor is The Great Northern, now standing in isolation on the edge of the car park and re-incarnated as The Hatfield Arms.

Its history as licensed premises can be traced back to the 1850s though it was re-built in about

1900. It is believed to have begun life as The Douro* Arms but, due to its proximity to the railway station, it was re-named The Great Northern a few years later.

I recently came across information indicating that one of its landlords during the early part of the twentieth century, Mr William Lane, was a most enterprising individual whose promotional and marketing skills were way ahead of his time. An illustration shows that he was very alert to the fierce competition he faced further along the road in those days and his enterprise contributed, at least in some small way, to the continuation of this establishment as a local hostelry into the twenty first century.

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January 2007

* One of the titles bestowed on The Duke of Wellington

THE BOAR AND CASTLE

*Dorchester
Dorset*

My association with Hatfield goes back to c1933 when my father, Joe Hanlon, took over the tenancy of the Boar and Castle pub in Newtown. He was a very much travelled man having spent 9 years in the army in such places as India, Middle East and France.

During WWII when a lot of local lads were called up he organised a club named 'The Little Rays of Sunshine' to raise funds for gifts for the troops and he kept in touch with them with newsletters, parcels etc.

Photographs of some of these boys on pub outings have been deposited at Mill Green Museum.

George Hanlon

AGENT ZIG ZAG

I don't know if you listen to Radio 4. Just in case you do NOT listen last week they read a book called Agent Zig-Zag by Ben Macintyre which was about a double agent called Eddie Chapman, one of whose exploits was to do a dummy explosion at DH to convince his Nazi masters that he was genuine.

I expect I am telling my grandmother to suck eggs but....

Must say I do not remember hearing about the event but perhaps I was too young!!

Janet Robinson

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 and printed in March 1998 Newsletter



OLIVE LUSTY'S SHOP, GRACEMEAD, HATFIELD, c.1935 Open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. seven days a week, this small lock-up shop stood near the present Gracemead House (DHSS). Beloved by local children for its sweets, pop and small toys, it was opened in c.1924, was sold in 1930 to Miss H.A.Sheldrake (seen in the photograph), again in 1938 to the late Charlie Moore and closed in the 1960's.

Dates for Your Diary

Monday 12 March 7.30

Thames Sailing Barges

Their Past and Present

By

Ken Cain

Thursday 12 April 2.30

The Royal Gunpowder Mills

A History

By

David Sims

Monday 14 May 7.30

AGM

Followed by

Leaving No Stone Unturned

A Talk on Monumental Inscriptions

By

John Pearson

Thursday 12 July 7.30

Open Meeting

Saturday 14 July

Kaleidoscope

6 - 9 September

Heritage Open Days