

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

Editorial

Following our chairman's report at the AGM of a quiet year – June Newsletter – your society would seem to have taken on a new lease of life.

With the formation of the Welwyn Hatfield Heritage Forum, on which we are ably represented by Chris Martindale, various projects have been undertaken or are in hand which have the support of your committee.

An Archive Awareness Campaign was proposed by Dr. John Beckerson of Mill Green Museum and Terry held discussions about a Family History Event as part of this and provisional arrangements were made. The main speaker was to be provided by the National Archive but unfortunately this could not be arranged so the project had to be cancelled. Perhaps another opportunity will present itself at a later date.

The proposed WW2 exhibition in 2009 to mark the 70 year anniversary of the start of the war will now probably include the result of Reg Coleman's evacuee project.

The promotion and advertising of Hatfield Heritage Open Days was considered by the Heritage Forum who wished to be associated with the project. A small sub-committee comprising Chris, Joan Cobern and Brian Lawrence have worked hard to prepare the weekend and to

produce the leaflets. One of the main exhibits will be the Comet Hangar in which will be displayed photographs and information on the DH/BA Research Initiative compiled and prepared by Terry and Reg.

The Old Hatfield Walk arranged and guided by Brian Lawrence would seem to be the precursor of another project he proposes, to erect notice boards aimed at visitors to Hatfield House illustrating and explaining the history of the town. At an estimated cost of about £2000 Brian will be seeking grants and support in the name of Hatfield Local History Society.

The Kaleidoscope Festival at Stanborough Park was well attended and thanks are extended to Chris, Joan and Miriam Gaskin for arranging this.

Unfortunately the Hilltop Festival was abandoned due to bad weather but thanks to Reg and Jim Parker for their preparations.

Our special meeting on July 12 was a great success and enjoyed by all attendees. New members were recruited and subsequently relevant articles for inclusion in the Newsletter were received. Thanks to all who brought along photos and artefacts.

Terry is initiating appeals for grants towards the cost of a digital recorder to enable recordings of memories of local people to supplement the tapes currently available in the library and museum.

Letters

Hatfield

Last Thursday I came along to your open meeting and finding it very interesting joined as a member. I have lived in Hatfield since September 1931. Perhaps you might like to use My Journey to School in one of your future news letters .

A.Giblenn

According to the 1891 census my great grandad lived at 30 Primrose Cottage, Beaconsfield Terrace, Hatfield. His name was John Woolmer and he was a Passenger Guard for the GNR.

I should be grateful if you could let me know if you have any information about the area.

Thanking you.

Julie Mearing (Mrs)

Walkerville, Australia

In your Newsletter No. 49 you said that the WEA was proposing to update and reissue the series of 12 booklets to celebrate its centenary

My wife and I are ex Hatfield and would like to obtain copies if this has been achieved.

Would it be possible for you to advise on this matter or who to contact.

Yours sincerely

R.G.Joyner

A JOURNEY TO SCHOOL

Tony Giblenn

I still remember that slight feeling of anxiety as my mother called "Come along" and lead me on this new venture. My first day on the way to school. My home was in Cecil Crescent, the house next to Payne's the printers, and turning left into the St. Albans Road, where in those days the red post box stood right on the corner, I could see the buildings to the right; the Co-op grocer; the Co-op butcher -the bus garage with the tall sliding doors; Kemps off-licence; Tingey's small shop and Austin's the hair dressers. All of which were busy concerns in 1936. Onwards then over the railway bridge, where as children we would sit on the fence, note books in hand, to record names and numbers of the fast and majestic brutes and checking how many bogies each train had, etc, etc. turning right into the Great North Road, no traffic lights in those days for it was only a T junction. The Hertford Road being just after the Red

Lion opposite Sheriff's shop and the horse trough which I believe is now at Mill Green. Sheriff's had that smell of corn and balancer meal, a musty odour only to be found these days in some old wind-mills. In bygone days, I don't know why, but I'm sure the summers were hotter and longer than now, and if we had to take macs or coats, we only used them as cloaks fastened by the top button in wild attempts to imitate Flash Gordon. Along the road, past the dreaded school clinic, and the post office - to the park entrance, which faced the station with the Royal Waiting Room. I think this was only used when royalty visited Hatfield House. A place steeped in history and surrounded with 81 square miles of beautiful woods, scenery and walks etc. and just the place that we could be Robin Hood or any one of his merry men. Continuing passed the gas offices, Priory House, the Public Hall down Brewery Hill as it was once known, we

passed Drury Brothers, (outfitters) Dollimore's, (Greengrocer) Mervyn Powell, (Photographer) Holliers, (Dairy shop) and other that I've forgotten which faced the International Stores and the Westminster bank. I'm sure someone will kindly jog my memory of those I cannot bring to mind.

Well, nearly there - on past Daisy Gray's (Toy shop) and Charlie Taylor (Barbers) and up Church Street to Countess Anne's School, which I attend for about five or six years. I see that at sometime the building has been shortened to allow access to the rear, and in doing so one of the front doors is no longer there. In the middle of the play ground stood an oak which, weather permitting, the whole class would be treated to a lesson in the sunshine, in the hope that there would be no air raid warning. Were any readers of this letter at Countess Anne's at this time? To be continued perhaps.

Autumn Meetings

Monday September 10 7 pm for 7.30

Martin Copping

THE CITY OF LONDON - its people buildings and history

Thursday October 11 2 pm for 2.30

Peter Clark - **HATFIELD TOWN COUNCIL**

Monday November 12 7 pm for 7.30

Tony Rook

I'VE COME ABOUT THE DRAINS A new look at Roman architecture

Thursday December 20 2.30 pm Open Christmas Meeting

LADIES WORKING AT DE HAVILLAND AIRCRAFT COMPANY DURING WORLD WAR II

Daphne Hickson

I was still at school when WWII started, but on leaving I obtained a job in the Mailing Department of de Havilland Aircraft Co. Ltd., There were 5 of us teenagers and we all had a 'Round' to do - about 4 times a day. This consisted of delivering all Mail, Memos, Notes, small parcels etc., to the various departments throughout the Company, and also collecting same which was to be delivered to other departments.

My Round included the Restaurants, First Aid Department and the Service Department. The Service Department Round included the A.T.A. Women Team, which was stationed there. These A.T.A. Women (Air Transport Auxiliary) were taken on as Ferry Pilots (replacing men pilots who had joined the Forces.) I believe there were about 8 of them and in charge of the group was a Pauline Gower. They were all qualified flying instructors and had several years flying experience. Their jobs were to deliver small aircraft from factories to various squadrons and stores in the U.K., and also ferry members of de Havillands to other aircraft factories, including our Chester Branch. Amongst the A.T.A. women was Amy Johnson, a very nice person who always greeted me with a smile when I handed over her mail.

After a few months in the Mailing Department I was transferred to the Buying Department as a Copy Typist, mainly typing Purchase Orders for all the items needed for an aircraft factory, from nuts, bolts, screws to the fabric and dope needed for the structure of the aircraft wings of aircraft. This Dope Department was manned mainly by women.

Many women in the vicinity of Hatfield who had no home-ties, were asked to help the war effort by joining de Havillands and

some were allowed and able to make parts for the "Mosquito" aircraft in small sheds and backyards. This was most useful in terms of security as this method of construction prevented the possibility of production being stopped by the enemy.

de Havilland had many sporting teams and I joined the Ladies Keep Fit Team and we had about 30 members at one time. We all loved the classes taken by Eileen Fowler. Eileen taught Keep Fit Classes at many other large firms employing women in Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield. They included the Shredded Wheat Factory, Norton Grinding Wheels, Roche Products, Nivea Cream Factory, and the Box Factory in Hatfield. Each year Eileen would give a massed Keep Fit Display in Welwyn Garden City on the Campus and one year she had over 120 girls all performing exercises.

In 1949 I left de Havillands to get married and moved away to Barnet, but 2 years later I was phoned and asked if I would like to return and do part-time work. I agreed and was employed in the Sales Department, most interesting. Later that year I was allocated a flat in Hatfield and asked to do full time work as Secretary to the Chief Accountant. Shortly after this D.H. was taken over by Hawker Siddeley Aircraft and the original directors of de Havilland Aircraft were moved to Great Nast Hyde House with the Company Secretary and Chief Accountant. Although sad at leaving the Aircraft Company again, working with the directors was most interesting. Just before I left Great Nast Hyde House (Hatfield) to have a baby, I was asked to 'stand in' for Sir Geoffrey de Havilland's secretary, who was ill, which I did, so I started in the lowest department for girls and ended up my career working for the man at the top - Sir Geoffrey de Havilland.

Old Fiddle Cottages



In our last Newsletter Mary Moore enquired if anyone had photos of the Old Fiddle or the adjoining cottages.

Unfortunately we were unable to find any photos of the pub itself but we did find these photos of the cottages.

It appears that very few people remember the pub in Roe Green, now College Lane and referred to the New Fiddle now renamed the Cat and Fiddle.

MARY PADGET

It is with regret that
we have been told of the death
of

Mary Padget.

A long time member of the
Society she was a prolific
writer of articles for the
Parish magazine and national
papers as witness her publica-
tion which we were
pleased to call 'Dreams'
Condolences have been sent
to her family.

BANKING IN HATFIELD

The picture of the former Barclays Bank in the June edition of the Newsletter took me back over 50 years as it was there that I first ventured into a bank premises in 1955 to enquire about the possibilities of employment at the end of my school career. I was greeted by the Manager who, on hearing that I was likely to be called up for National Service sometime within the next few months, patted me on the head and suggested I came back to see him in two years' time. Undeterred by this polite rebuff I walked a few yards across the Great North Road and made a similar enquiry in the office of their competitors, the Westminster Bank. The Manager immediately telephoned the Head Office in London, arranged for me to attend an interview there the following day and within two weeks I was a junior clerk in one of their North London branches. After a varied career I retired from the National Westminster Bank 37 years later and leave others to decide which of those local Bank Managers made the right decision on that fateful day in September 1955!

To return to the history of banking in Hatfield, notes that I have show that a branch of the Hertfordshire Hitchin Bank was opened in Hatfield in 1877. The Bank had been formed in 1820 as part of Bassett, Grant & Co. of Leighton Buzzard but later two of the partners, John Sharples and William Exton broke away and formed a new firm to be known as Sharples, Tuke, Lucas & Seebohm or the Hertfordshire Hitchin Bank. The new Hatfield branch opened in a room in the house of Wm. Groom, a plumber in Fore Street (next door to the butchers shop, later occupied by Butlers). The dominant employers in Hatfield at the time were the brewers, Pryor Reid & Co., a family of former Quakers from Baldock, and it is likely that it was their influence

that brought the new bank to the town. The bank, a sub-branch to the Hertford office, was open on Thursdays from 10.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. each week and became one of the founder banks of Barclays Bank in 1896.

In about 1910 the bank moved to a room in premises on the Great North Road between the old Post Office and the Salisbury Arms Hotel and was then open for two days each week. A further move took place in 1921. The long-established brewery closed following its purchase by Benskins in 1920 and Barclays purchased the brewery offices, and remained there until 1986. This building was only just over ten years old when Barclays moved in as it had been built after the extensive fire at the brewery in 1908 which had destroyed their former imposing office building*.

For over 30 years Barclays or its predecessor was the only bank in the town but in 1909 opposition arrived in the form of The London County & Westminster Bank who opened an office for two days a week on the opposite side of the Great North Road in single storey premises (later to become The Broadway Café) as a sub-branch to Hertford. When, in 1929, a block of shops was built a few yards further along the Great North Road towards the station the bank moved to new, larger premises, having by then become The Westminster Bank. Barclays and Westminster remained the only two banks represented in the town until after the Second World War though Barclays opened a sub-branch in 1938 on Harpsfield Broadway, along the Barnet By-Pass to service the needs of Hatfield's new dominant employer, de Havillands.

Following the designation of Hatfield as one of the New Towns, the shopping centre along the St Albans Road, that had developed

between the Wars, grew in importance and it was not long before the banks recognised its significance. Midland Bank (now HSBC) opened an office there in 1948, initially a sub-branch to Welwyn Garden City, Westminster Bank followed in 1951 with its own sub-branch in the next door premises and Lloyds Bank opened a "clerk in charge" office in 1956. With the continued expansion of the New Town it was not long before Barclays followed the trend and opened up a branch in a new building on the opposite side of St Albans Road. Thus the town was represented by all the major banks of the day as National Provincial Bank, the only one of the original "Big Five" not to have moved in, was involved in merger discussions with Westminster to form National Westminster Bank in 1970. Not surprisingly two of the largest building societies, Abbey National and Halifax, also sought a presence in the town centre, establishing branches along the same parade of shops. These organisations both subsequently converted into banks and are now direct competitors of the "traditional" banks along the road. With the demolition and re-development of the Old Town, business continued to ebb away from that part of the town leading to the downgrading and subsequent closure of the two banks represented there. With the dramatic changes that have taken place in the financial world in recent years the distinguishing features of banks have changed out of all recognition. No longer are they the somewhat daunting buildings they were a half a century ago but for many they are simply one of those necessities of modern life that people love to hate!

Brian G Lawrence
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*described in detail in Hertfordshire Countryside magazine – July 1995