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Editorial

THE HISTORY OF WELFIELD HOME FORMERLY HATFIELD WORKHOUSE

Abridged from a transcription of a talk given by Margaret Tyler to Hatfield Local History Society in September 1999.

It had been proposed to hold a WWII exhibition in 2009 in conjunction with the museum. Brian Lawrence was to edit a book in support of this, but due to loss of venue, work load and large amount of work needed to collect suitable material this has had to be shelved.

Reg Coleman has been photographing local scenes which it is intended to produce as sets of post-cards. WGC Library are taking part in this project to which £30 will be donated by each.

The Old Hatfield display boards have again been held up due to the cost of planning application.

Chris Martindale is working with the WEA on updating Book 10, Houses, of the Hatfield and its people series which should be published by the end of this year.

Terry Pankhurst is hoping to produce a cohesive account of the 3rd September 1940 bombing of de Havillands. So many versions of the affair have been produced with lots of varying details.

As this will be the last edition of the Newsletter, which I have produced since 1992, I must take this opportunity to thank everyone who has helped with providing articles, suggestions and encouragement in what has been a most pleasurable task and to thank you all for allowing me to get to know you as friends even though we may not have met.

Not being a Hatfield person I feel that I have been accepted. Best wishes to you all.

The building in Wellfield Rd was a workhouse from the time it was built in 1789 until 1929 when it became a home and hospital for the elderly, administered by Herts County Council.

There had been a workhouse previously in Hatfield at the bottom of Church St. near to the site now occupied by the Salisbury Hotel.

The building of the new workhouse in 1789 was on Stockbridge Common and some distance outside what was then Hatfield.

Why was a new workhouse built? There are three possible reasons.

1. Increased accommodation was required. The existing building could only house 60 inmates whereas the new one could accommodate double that number.

2. The residents of Hatfield found the presence of the existing workhouse in the centre of the town to be obnoxious and wanted it moved to out of town.

3. Lord Salisbury wished to rent out the existing workhouse as cottages.

The cost of the construction was about £2,000 and was supervised by an architect, John Donowell, who was currently engaged on some extension work at Hatfield House.

The main building had eleven rooms on the ground floor, ten good bedrooms above and two long attics in the roof. There were also three cellars. There was an entrance hall, three sitting rooms, a dining room, kitchen and two store rooms.

Discipline was strict and the Session Records of 1797 report that as

a punishment for misbehaviour, three inmates were to be kept in solitary cells for one month and whipped each week.

In 1820, Lord Salisbury recommended the appointment of a permanent professional overseer to improve discipline. John Bridgens, a former drill sergeant in the Coldstream Guards was appointed and proved to be very strict and efficient. By the end of the 1820's Hatfield Workhouse was regarded as one of the most efficiently managed workhouses in England and a model for others.

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 removed control from the Parish Vestry to a Board of Guardians. The smaller workhouses in North Mymms, Essendon and Northaw were closed and their inmates rehoused at Hatfield.

The number of inmates increased from 27 in 1828 to over 170 in 1843. Thereafter it fluctuated between 70 and 130. Tramps were accepted provided they only stayed one night and helped to clean up the next day.

The use of a silk winding shed was made available to Mr Woolams, a silk merchant of St Albans providing he employed the workhouse children. This came to an end in the late 1830's when Mr Woolams got into financial difficulties. In 1843 a person was employed to teach knitting and plaiting. It was also arranged for a tailor and shoemaker to be employed to give instruction so that the inmates could make their own clothes.

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HATFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIRMEN (3)

**The Reverend George Garlick
1841 - 1909**

By Peter C. Clark

Son of a Gloucestershire labourer, George Garlick was born in 1841 in the Cotswold Village of Great Barrington. Having studied for the ministry at Nottingham Congregational Institute in 1870 he accepted an invitation to the pastorate of the Congregational Church at Wickford, Essex where he served for twelve years.

His ministry continued at Rushden, Northants which he left to undertake public work in London, during which time he championed the cause of open spaces for the people. Following two years as minister at Boxmoor, Herts, and a further two years at Deddington, Oxon in 1892 he accepted the position of minister of the Park Street (Congregational) Chapel at Hatfield. Here he remained thirteen years during which time "his strong personality, his winsome character, and his loyalty to conviction, won the esteem and friendship of all parties and people."

Active in the local government of Hatfield, he was a member of the Board of Guardians as well as being a member of the original Parish Council of which he was Chairman from 1902 -1904. He retired on account of ill-health in 1905, he and his wife residing for a short time at St. Albans before moving to Brecon where his daughters ran a private school.

He died in Brecon on 30 May, 1909 and is buried in Brecon Cemetery

THE BELL THAT DOES NOT RING

The bell was given to St Michael and All Angels Church, Birchwood by the Misses Caesar, sometime members of the congregation.



How the sisters came into possession of it remains a mystery.

In 1999, two Buddhist Nuns from the Buddhist Monastery of Amaravati, near Great Gaddesden were invited to come and see if they agreed that the Bell was Burmese. They confirmed its origin and gave a translation of the inscription. It reads in two different Burmese variants:

"This bell was donated to the Venerable Lake Pya Kan in the year 1183 (Burmese Time), by Saya (Teacher) Man Ywa Mawy from the township of Pegu, for the purpose of attaining Nirvana. The weight of the bell is 50lbs".

On top of the bell are two figures with Buddha like human heads, and the bodies of lions. These are apparently 'Devas', heavenly beings, who can manifest themselves in either animal or human form.



The Buddhist Nuns stated that these particular images are of the King of Devas. They are placed on top of the bell for its blessing and protection. The bell is not cracked and seems in good order. The flat tone is simply the way Burmese bells are made.

MEETING DATES

2009

THURSDAY

5 FEBRUARY 2.30PM

Tony Rook

'I've come about the drains'

*A new look at Roman
Architecture*

MONDAY

9 MARCH 7.30PM

Paul Chamberlain

'Hell Upon Water....

*The Infamous Prison Ships
of England'*

THURSDAY

16 APRIL 2.30PM

Christine James WHBC

'Do the Right Thing'

Nature Conservation in Hatfield

MONDAY

11 MAY 7.30PM

AGM

Speaker to be announced

*All at Friendship House
Welfield Close
Hatfield*

*Refreshments available
approximately 30 minutes
before the start of the meeting*

MY SISTER AND I

An extract from 'Early Childhood'

By Jean Marie West

Born on 21 March 1935, the first day of Spring, so named by our Grandad because 'she greeted Spring', Greta was a premature baby kept alive in those early days by her maternal Grandma in whose house she was born. An exceptionally pretty baby, admired by all, she thrived and at a year was the same weight and development as any other child. Fair skinned and flaxen-haired she was just 3 when we moved into Ground Lane. Outwardly passive but with a stubborn streak, despite an age gap of 4 years we played together in the spare bedroom and invented games as children do, one of which we played on and off for years, called 'Neighbours'. Half the room would be her 'house' and the other mine. I think she had several dolls who became the 'family'; I had only one china doll called Doreen, with eyes that closed, limbs that moved and an extensive wardrobe run up by our Aunt Elsie - a dab hand at dressmaking

I had my 7th birthday party shortly after we moved and they were very traditional affairs with sandwiches, cakes, biscuits, jelly and tinned fruit and a birthday cake and candles. We invited our schoolmates plus a child whose mother was a friend of ours at that time. We planned what we'd do in the way of games and sometimes used the bay window of the front room that had long curtains that drew in front to perform plays we'd written. Presents were brought which were welcome but rarely cost a lot. Relatives were generous at both Christmas and birthdays although one grannie preferred to give us clothes which were necessary but a bit dull we thought. Greta of course invited her own friends to her party which was a few days earlier than mine. I had tea with them and if asked, would plan some games but otherwise kept out of the way. During wartime Mum could make only one cake and this was a source of much argument as Greta's guests got the first bash at it.

War came suddenly it seemed one Sunday. We had no indoor or outdoor shelter as our Dad said he'd rather die in his own bed than of pneumonia in a garden shelter. Some families had a steel ugly looking indoor shelter used as a table and everyone was supposed to cower under it during an air-raid. The cupboard

under a stair case was supposed to be the safest place in a house but ours was the larder so that wasn't suitable. Us two slept downstairs for a while in the front room.

Greta and I went to the same school but I don't recall us walking home together, I was with Jane and she with Pauline. Our brother was born in 1942 so eventually the 'spare' bedroom was no longer ours to play in. We then used the shed but that was too small to be satisfactory. We were both in the Brownies and then the Guides, though Greta wasn't quite so enthusiastic as me and didn't go on many camping holidays. We both went to the same Grammar School in St. Albans but as I was in the senior class for School Certificate or Matric. when she came, we didn't see much of each other at school. Greta was more able at maths than I was and enjoyed art which I didn't. She always had a pleasant speaking voice and joined the Speech Choir whereas I was better at singing and in the choir. I left when she was in her second year.

Our house was damaged by a rocket falling on a nearby school in October 1944. The roof was badly damaged, upstairs ceilings fell down and all the windows at the rear of the house were blown out. Soot came down from the chimney and covered the table which was laid for breakfast I recall. Apart from a cut thumb while I was extracting broken glass, nobody was hurt. Dad had a lowloader fetch a huge tarpaulin from the factory to stretch over the roof which kept the rain out. Trauma - forget it, counselling - never heard of it. Everyone just got on with it and many were bombed out of their homes entirely. Whenever we came back from being away, crossing Red Lion Bridge I used to send up a silent prayer, "Please, let the house still be standing".

Greta learned to knit, including Fairisle, at an early age taught by the old lady next door. We both joined a local Amateur Dramatic Society which put on plays in the old Public Hall. Greta was much in demand as a juvenile lead as she was good at learning lines fast. She was also a bridesmaid to a family our parents knew which took place in the coldest March anyone could recall, Piles of heaped up snow formed a backdrop to the photos in 1947. She wore a blue silk dress which became a

party frock when shortened and was worn when she was asked to present a bouquet to the Dowager Marchioness of Salisbury who came to see one of our productions.

We both belonged to the local tennis club; neither of us learnt to swim when young. Our Dad, who was a very proficient swimmer, lost patience with us when he realised we were frightened of the sea and waves. I don't think Greta ever learnt to swim and she disliked getting her hair wet!

Was it a happy childhood? On the whole, yes, but being kids neither of us understood what a strain wartime, relatives being in the armed forces, shortages, rationing, must have put on parents. Dad worked all hours as his Plant Dept. as it was called, supplied power to all parts of the factory to build aircraft and engines 24/7 throughout the war. Often called to the factory during the night if a problem arose, he was also in the Home Guard which did night exercises at weekends.

Looking back, we had much more, freedom than parents can give their children now. My friend, Sylvia and I used to roam all over Hertfordshire for cycle rides lasting all day as apart from military convoys, roads were quiet. We had freedom to roam in Hatfield Park anywhere, played in the Tank a WWI model now in Bovington Tank Museum and as long as we were home before dark [we had double summertime] and were with other children, nobody minded.

We had lots of kind aunts and jolly uncles who visited us when they could. They were largely generous relatives who always put their hands in their pocket and gave us two-bob or even half-a-crown.

Was it frightening? War, as my husband used to say, is 90% boredom and 10% terror; I was terrified in September 1944 at King's Cross Station when I was on board a train completely full for York while my Mum was still on the platform trying to get on. Flying bombs were exploding outside the station and the sound of smashing glass was heard. But she turned up and I knew that with every turn of the engine's wheels we were leaving London and chaos and we all survived. Our parents did their best in very difficult circumstances and for that we are grateful. And grew up.

The education of children was considered and in 1837 a gratuity was paid to a schoolmistress to teach the children. By 1840 this education was considered poor and it was proposed that the rector should select boys to be educated at the parish school.

Church attendance was strict and the rector or curate held two services in the workhouse on Sundays and also attended once a week to give spiritual instruction.

After Mr Bridgen's death in 1842, an advertisement for 'a middle aged, steady, active man and wife', at a salary of £50 a year plus rations, resulted in 25 applicants. A Mr and Mrs Kite were appointed and they remained in post for a number of years. Mrs Kite continuing as matron after the death of her husband until her own death in 1870.

The number of permanent inmates declined towards the end of the century and in the early years of the twentieth century averaged about forty. There was however an increasing number of tramps and vagrants who were given overnight accommodation.

In 1895 the Report of the Royal Commission on The Aged Poor had criticised some of the harsh regimes in some workhouses. However the Rev George Garlick, Congregational Minister of Newtown defended Hatfield and in a letter to the national press said, 'if the poor of all the towns and workhouses were as well and tenderly cared for as those of Hatfield, poor law reformers would not have strong grounds of complaint.

A Ladies Committee was concerned in 1898 that there was no separate room for the dying and people near to death continued to be kept in the same room where other persons lived and ate. A separate room was then provided.

During the 1914 - 18 war soldiers were billeted at the workhouse and some of the able bodied inmates were moved to Hertford. Food shortages during the war affected the population at large but the diet for inmates laid down by the Local

Government Board was considered too lavish by some of the Guardians. One of them declared, 'It was ridiculous that Guardians go short of meat and bread and the inmates have plenty'

After the war there was difficulty in recruiting and retaining nursing staff and one ploy was to improve the standard of nurses' accommodation.

There was an increase in overnight vagrants in the twenties and for some years the policy at Hatfield had been to never turn away anyone seeking overnight accommodation even when it was legally permissible to do so because of the lateness of the arrival or because the workhouse was full. This had dated back to an incident in 1903 when two labourers tramping north from Greenwich in search of work had arrived late and were not admitted. They were sent to the police station who could not take them in as they were not offenders. The two men duly committed an offence by damaging a lamp at the police station and were then put in the cells for the night.

They came up before the magistrate next day. He was horrified that two decent but destitute men had been forced to become criminals because of the rules followed by the Guardians. As a result of these criticisms the Guardians resolved that in future no one would be turned away and if the workhouse was full then money was to be provided from the funds for them to have beds at the Church Army Rest or at a lodging house.

The number of overnight vagrants increased dramatically during the 1920's and reached a peak when 1,471 were accommodated in April 1926. Men had to sleep on the floor and the overcrowding was such that an army hut had to be purchased as a temporary measure.

In 1929 the workhouse was closed and the building became a home for the elderly and responsibility was transferred to Herts County Council.

Over the years various outbuildings and extensions were constructed before the HCC took control. The major part of the building was used as a home for elderly women and the

rest of the building was a hospital for physically affected patients.

When the NHS came into being in 1948, hospitals were transferred to the Ministry of Health, but as the larger part of the building was not a hospital the local authority kept control of the home and made the hospital facilities available to the Health Authority.

Following the reorganisation of both local government and the health service in the early 1970's the control of the home part of Wellfield was separated from the hospital side. In 1983 it was decided to cease operation of the Home. Strong objections were raised at the time as the site was considered to be ideal because it was central to the shops and in the midst of the Hatfield community from where the majority of the residents came.

The District Health Authority continued to operate their 19 bed elderly care ward. Following the vacation of the site by the HCC there was a dispute as to ownership between the Parish Council and the Regional Health Authority.

The Health Authority proposed that a new psycho - geriatric hospital be built on the site, but they decided that new facilities could not be built to an acceptable standard at a reasonable cost other than by demolition of the buildings. A planning committee was set up to supervise the plans for the new hospital and substantial progress was made down to the choosing of furniture and equipment.

The original building had been Grade II listed so permission to demolish had to be obtained. There were objections so a public inquiry had to be held. At the inquiry conducted by Mr F Cosgrove BA ARIBA FRTPi on 13 February 1985 he concluded from the evidence submitted that the building had no historic or architectural merit and recommended to the Secretary of State for The Environment that the building be demolished. The hospital patients were transferred to East Herts Hospital in February 1989 and the demolition of the building was carried out shortly after that.