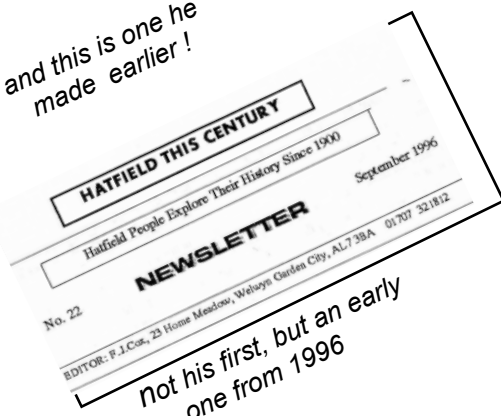


Hatfield - over 1000 years of history HATFIELD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER NO 72 MARCH 2009

and this is one he
made earlier!



For many years Frank Cox, amongst his many duties, has edited and produced our quarterly newsletter. Now he has decided to take a well-earned rest from that - although he remains an invaluable member of the Society. Jon Brindle and Sheila Whittingham have jointly taken on the task of writing the newsletter and Maurice Richardson is doing the layout for printing. You see, Frank - it took three of us to replace you!

THE AGE OF STEAM

The glory days of the streamlined trains and then came World War II

The Mill Green museum is mounting an exhibition called "The Age of Steam". Hatfield Local History Society is complementing this exhibition by gathering reminiscences of those who worked on, or travelled, on the branch lines which have been closed. The response was so great that



we have decided to publish them in a separate booklet, which is being sent free to all our members, but will also be available for sale. The exhibition includes the long distance trains to the North. The years before WWII were the glory days

of British steam. Streamlined trains, the "Coronation" to Edinburgh, the "Silver Jubilee" to Newcastle and the "West Riding Limited" to Leeds/Bradford introduced a new era of speed and comfort. The Gresley A4 Pacific "Mallard" established the world speed record for steam, taking advantage of the long straight stretches of East Anglia.

World War II and the aftermath

World War II brought a drastically curtailed emergency timetable (a copy of which I was fortunate to acquire) in which there were only about 20 trains stopping at or passing through Hatfield on their way to Peterborough and beyond or to Cambridge. How different from today's busy tracks! Services on the Luton and Hertford branch lines were reduced and the St Albans service was suspended but re-introduced in December 1939, when services generally were improved.

MAIN LINE—LONDON TO SCOTLAND

Table 1		LONDON (King's Cross), PETERBOROUGH, GRANTHAM, DONCASTER, LEEDS, BRADFORD, HULL, & YORK																			
		Week Days																			
Miles		mra	mra	mra	mra	mra	mra	mra	mra	aft	mra	aft	aft	aft	aft	aft	aft	aft	aft	aft	aft
24	8a LONDON (King's Cross) dep	..	..	..	..	7 0	9 0	10 0	..	10 30	12 30	..	3 0	..	4 0	4 40	5 0	5 15	..	7 0	9 30
17	8a Hatfield .....	..	..	..	..	..	9 34	..	..	..	..	..	3 36	..	..	..	..	6 3	..	9 40	10 40
11	11 CAMBRIDGE .....	..	..	..	..	..	8 45	..	..	..	..	..	2 30	..	..	..	..	5 15	..	..	..
32	Hitchin .....	..	..	..	..	7 57	10 27	..	..	..	..	..	4 0	..	..	..	..	6 35	..	..	..
35	Three Counties .....	..	..	..	..	8 31	10 27	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	6 45	..	..	..
37	Arlesey and Henlow .....	..	..	..	..	8 7	10 12	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	6 45	..	..	..
41	Biggleswade .....	..	..	..	..	8 15	10 20	..	..	..	..	..	4 15	..	..	..	..	6 55	..	..	..
44	Sandy .....	..	..	..	..	8 22	10 27	..	..	..	..	..	4 23	..	..	..	..	7 0	..	..	..
47	Tempsford .....	..	..	..	..	8 29	10 34	..	..	..	..	..	4 35	..	..	..	..	7 15	..	..	..
51	St. Neots .....	..	..	..	..	8 36	10 41	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	7 21	..	..	..
56	Offord and Buckden .....	..	..	..	..	8 43	10 48	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	7 21	..	..	..
57	37 CAMBRIDGE M 36 .....	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	5 10	..	..	..
58	Huntingdon (North)	8 54	10 57	4 48	7 31
63	Abbots Ripton	9 3	11 6	7 40
62	9 13	11 16	7 50

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Geoffrey de Havilland jnr

Test Pilot

I got to know Geoffrey de H quite well during the war years, as from the middle of 1942 until the end of 1945 I carried out daily inspections on the experimental aircraft that he flew and signed them out as being safe for flight. This was a great responsibility and privilege as I was only 22 years old when I was first assigned to this position. The first time that I had the opportunity to speak to him was on the first day that I had cleared his aircraft for flight. After he landed the Mosquito I asked him



if he would be flying it the next day. he replied "yes, the crack of dawn." When I told this to the flight test foreman I said "whatever time will that be" and he said "twenty to ten!" Geoffrey was a brilliant pilot, the ultimate professional. A man of few words, modest, private and unassuming, like his father and also his brother John who was also a test pilot. He was utterly focused on his job and because of that had no time for jokes or small talk with those who worked with him, although I am sure that other pilots and friends who socialised with him in the evenings when he relaxed would have seen another side of his character. He would never blame anyone if mistakes were made, and once when due to the failure of a ball-race on a Vampire that nearly caused him to crash I tried to explain to him what caused the problem he merely said "but when will it be ready to fly again?" Very occasionally one would catch a glimpse of his more "human" side. He had a passion for model steam engines, and once said to me "if you had a model steam engine, would your wife let you start it up in the kitchen?" I said "of course she would." To which he replied "they won't let me do it at home." I only saw him get really annoyed on one occasion. He was flying a Mosquito locally when part of the perspex canopy broke off and his precious hacking jacket that he always wore and stowed behind his seat was sucked out and blew away. He got as many of his pilots as possible into the air and we watched them circling round and round somewhere near the "Crooked Chimney" looking for it. It was never found! In 1942 Geoffrey visited Canada and the U.S.A. This was in order to

hand over a Mosquito to the U.S. Army Air Corps and also to test the first Canadian built Mosquito. Whilst in Toronto he gave demos to the workers there, and it gives one a good insight into his character when reading his report on his time at the Canadian factory when he writes....."this was my most unpleasant day out there as three speeches were required from me: they were short speeches." Before leaving Canada he flew the Mosquito in a demonstration flight over Toronto in aid of a War Bonds sale drive. He wrote...."This was a truly amusing show to do, and one gained a fine impression of speed going well below the tall skyscrapers with 400 (m.p.h.) indicated." He then toured the U.S.A demonstrating the Mosquito to Army and Naval Air Staff who gave him an opportunity to fly many of their aircraft. It is worth recording a meeting he had with Howard Hughes. Geoffrey wrote....."He is at present engaged on the design of, and construction of a 30,000lb wooden-plastic transport for the Army Air Corps (the Spruce Goose?). This plane was to have been the very acme of simplicity in construction, but Hughes was dumfounded when he looked at the Mosquito. Turning to me he said "I guess I'm going to give those goddam designers of mine holy-jeeze." Sure enough the following day there arrived at the field half a dozen long faced gloomy looking individuals, members of the Hughes design staff. They enjoyed several hours inspecting the Mosquito and asking questions. In sympathy, Burrell (his observer) and I stood them lunch in the fine Glywayo restaurant. On occasions, I had the opportunity to fly with Geoffrey in the Mosquito. It was always an exhilarating experience. In the air he was always focused on the job in hand and was completely unflappable. Once we were diving almost vertically through thick cloud and suddenly broke out into sunlight, just missing a Catalina that was flying past just below the cloud-base. It was so close that I could see the horrified expression on the gunner's face, looking at us from his perspex blister. Geoffrey was completely unmoved by the incident as if it was nothing unusual. When on the ground however, ready for take-off he would not move until you assured him that there was no plane about to land on top of us. (The Mosquito had no rear view mirrors!) The only time I saw him enjoy a joke was when he persuaded Ronald Bishop, the chief designer, whom he called "Bish" to get into a Vampire and taxi it around the airfield.

Geoffrey had complained of difficulty in steering it on the ground, whilst Bishop had not taken his complaint seriously. When Bishop careered all over the airfield in all sorts of trouble it made Geoffrey's day! For some reason he seemed to have a very cool relationship with the Air Ministry, particularly when they sent R.A.F. officers to have a flight in one of his beloved prototypes. On one occasion when an officer was ready to have his first flight in the Vampire, Geoffrey gave him verbal instructions on how to fly it, but when the chap said "how do I start the engine up again if it dies on me in the air?", Geoffrey just said "oh, Dick will tell you" and left him to it. In the event, he did lose the engine in flight and succeeded in starting it again. When he left Geoffrey came over to me and said "what did you tell him?" What I shall always remember him for is when he was about to take the newly-built Vampire jet on one of its first flights. As he was taxiing it out he suddenly stopped, called me over and said "how is your wife?" He had heard that she was seriously ill in Barnet Hospital. This shows that he had a kind-hearted side which perhaps was not apparent to many people that he worked with. He lived for flying. He had been taken up for his first flight in his mother's arms in his father's first aircraft that he had built. And sadly it was when flying he was eventually killed.

Dick Whittingham .

Monumental Inscription Day at St Luke's Church

This year Hertfordshire Family History Society will be holding a monumental inscription day at St Luke's Church, Hatfield on Saturday 20th June between 10.30am & 4.30pm. There will be over 600 memorials to transcribe. These are mostly 20th c., but there are a few difficult 19th c. head stones and kerbs. From these transcriptions a booklet is produced which will be part of a series eventually covering the whole of Hertfordshire.



Recording inscriptions before they become faint or are destroyed is of great importance to family and local historians. Gravestones can be a major source of information some providing considerable detail.

If anyone is interested in helping I am sure that if you turn up at St Luke's, on the day, you will not be turned away. Volunteers are always welcome.

Chris Martindale

World War II and the aftermath

A more generous timetable was introduced on 4 December, with the services much improved. They looked more like the peace-time services, with familiar names like the Night Scotsman and the Aberdonian returning to the scene. A similar pattern continued until the end of the war, with the railways enjoying bumper years, boosted by the imposition of petrol rationing and the later removal of the basic ration and the withdrawal of all express coach services where there was a railway. This was brought to an end by the era of closures around 1950 which saw the end of the branch line operations from Hatfield.

In the wartime timetable pages Hatfield continued to appear as an important station on the line.

Wartime operation and a little personal memory

With the advent of World War II advantage was again taken of the flat nature of the Great Northern route to Scotland, but this time not for speed but to load the locomotives very heavily. I was told that the war-time version of the "Flying Scotsman" sometimes had its coaches in two platforms at Kings Cross, and the engine had to reverse back after starting off with its first set in order to have the second set added.

In 1944 I happened to be at Darlington station on my way from Signals training in Catterick to work for Bletchley Park (although our destination was kept secret from us until we actually arrived at Bletchley.) when the Flying Scotsman passed through, and I tried to count the carriages, which seemed to be about 20, but I had some difficulty in concentrating because every wheel click was like a nail being driven into my head, which was still suffering the effects of our end-of-training party.

Maurice Richardson

A further instalment of Hatfield Parish Chairmen

Council Chairmen 04

JOSEPH SMEE GUNN (1854 -1935)

Born in 1854 at Wethersfield, Essex Joseph Gunn came to Hatfield as a young man with his father in about 1880, the pair setting up business as smiths and farriers in Batterdale. His only son Joseph Alfred Gunn, a ship's steward, lost his life in the Titanic' disaster of 1912.

Following his retirement Joseph Gunn resided in Stonecross Road, where he died at the age of eighty in April, 1935. He is buried in St. Luke's Cemetery

WE NEED YOUR FEEDBACK !

1. Please let us know what you think of the Branch Line booklet?
2. Would you like to see further little booklets when we have a lot of material on a particular subject or do you prefer just to have articles incorporated in the newsletter?
3. We have an interesting article on the early days of Lemsford Road. Have you any local knowledge to contribute, and, most of all HAS ANYONE GOT A PHOTOGRAPH of Lemsford Road in those days. We promise to treat it very carefully. It doesn't matter how bad its condition. We will copy it and give you the original and a copy. The article was held over to concentrate on railway matters
4. Have you any early memories to share? We will listen attentively and write them down for you to check.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

All meetings are at Friendship House

Thursday 16 April at 2.00 for 2.30 pm *Christine James*

“Do the Right Thing: Nature Conservation in Welwyn and Hatfield”

Mrs James is Planning & Environmental Health Officer for Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

Monday 11 May at 7.00 for 7.30 pm ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

followed by *Judy Faraday* “The John Lewis Partnership”

Ms Faraday is an archivist for John Lewis

Thursday 11 June at 2.00 for 2.30 pm

Open Meeting “Newsletter Jottings”

Come and share your memories and your views

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