

*From Hetfelle to Hatfield - over 1000 years of history*

# HATFIELD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER NO 73 JUNE 2009

## D - DAY REUNION ONCE MORE UNTO THE BEACH

Hatfield man and HLHS member Frank Sankey will soon be setting sail for the same Normandy beaches that he once visited as a soldier. But the only shots he intends to take this time will be with a camera.

He is going back to France to join up with other campaign veterans to commemorate the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the D Day landings of June 6<sup>th</sup> 1944 during WW2.

Frank was a 'mortar man' in the 57<sup>th</sup> Gordon Highlanders which formed part of 153 Brigade that also included the Black Watch and another regiment of the Gordons.

His company set sail from Tilbury Docks to meet up, in the Channel, with other vessels of the Brigade sailing down from Lowestoft.

Their convoy then feigned a course away from their intended destination before turning sharply to arrive at Juno beach in Normandy. "We acted as decoys" he says.

Frank recalls the weather was awful and the sea was particularly rough. They arrived during the afternoon of June 6<sup>th</sup>. Their boat anchored in about 8 feet of water.

Each soldier had to wear an inflated tyre around his waist and grab a rope that was thrown out to them by others on the beach, before being pulled ashore.

Fortunately his Brigade did not come under enemy fire as our Canadian allies, arriving earlier, had pushed the German army back about 3 miles inland.

The Black Watch, however, went into action the next morning. They attacked a German radio station but, having run out of ammunition, had to abort the mission. Sadly they lost many men in the attempt.

Frank saw action a few days later and was called upon to fire his 2" mortar. As this only had a range of 500 yards it appears that he was very close to the enemy.

Indeed he was blown up twice at Normandy. Fortunately he wasn't badly maimed but he was hospitalized, in Bayeux, with internal complaints which had the effect of draining him of energy. He also suffered appalling headaches.

Whilst in hospital he met up with an Orderly, also from Hatfield, who was a fellow darts player in Franks local pub - the Rising Sun. This chap had just arrived in Normandy after attending to wounded soldiers recovering at Hatfield House.

We hope Frank enjoys the commemorations.

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### Contacts:

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**Miss VIOLET GODFREY**  
**(b 13/12/1914 - d 31/03/2009)**

Violet was particularly well known as 'Miss Godfrey' to thousands of ex pupils as a secondary school teacher whose career, at St. Audrey's school, spanned five decades from the 1930s.

She taught at the various St. Audrey's school buildings in Church Street (now a function hall), Endymion Road (now Countess Anne school) and finally at the Travellers Lane school (now demolished).

Both my sister and I were her pupils.

Violet was born in the village of Long Crendon in Buckinghamshire and, in 1925 aged 11, moved with her family to Hatfield where her father, Herbert, opened a drapers shop at 23 Fore Street. She was the 2<sup>nd</sup> eldest of six daughters.

Violet maintained she had three 'families': her immediate family, her school family and her church family. She regularly worshipped at St. Etheldredas in the Old Town from almost the moment she arrived in Hatfield as a girl.

She attended Ware Grammar school in 1926 for 5 years and passed the Oxford School Certificate there in 1931.

History Society members will recall the piece she wrote for our recent 'Railway' booklet where she reminisces about catching the Hatfield to Hertford train and travelling, with her sisters, on the now disused branch line to go school.

She decided to become a teacher and had some early experience as a 'Monitor in Training' at the St. Audrey's infant school before studying at St. Katherine's College in Tottenham between 1933 and 1935. After college she taught at Parkway School in WGC until, in 1938, she was recruited by the Head of St. Audrey's school where she remained until retirement in 1974.

In 1939 her father died. As her one older sister had married and moved on, Violet became the family's main wage earner - a role that she embraced with typical selfless responsibility.

At her funeral service it became clear that she was 'always there' for her family.

Tingey's took over the drapers shop and stored furniture there during the War.

When Violet's mother died the landlords, Gascoigne Cecil Estates, were helpful in relocating the remaining girls into two cottages in Fore Street. Violet paid the rent.

To get a little perspective of her career: She taught me (now aged 55), my sister (66), HLHS contributor - Dennis Beach (75) and even her own two sisters (mid 80s).

She was guest of honour at our 'Class of 1969' reunion held at the Red Lion in 2003.

Despite it being 34 years since she had taught the 20 former pupils present, she remembered something about everybody - if she didn't recognize a face, a given name would bring a smile of recollection.

It was abundantly clear how much reverence she still commanded by those who were delighted to have the opportunity to meet her again - some had travelled great distances too.

She also forgave me for not handing in my slightly overdue homework of July 1969 !

Whilst she was my English (and Form) teacher, I know she also taught Maths to my sister.

I left school at 15 without qualifications. My greatest academic achievement though, was coming top in her English exam out of 60 'A' stream pupils when we were 14. I wanted to be a journalist back then (more specifically a football reporter!) and would write soccer stories for fun. Miss Godfrey took a kindly interest in these extra curricular works of mine and offered advice and encouragement. My winning exam score, by the way, was *only* 64%.

I believe this reflects something of her exacting standards as a teacher. With mainstream education nowadays it seems that the *lowest* mark achievable would be 64% !

You had to earn every percentage point with her.

Violet loved her long walks in Hatfield Park where she could be at one with nature. The sea she loved too and wrote of her joyful time sailing around the Scottish islands and Fingals Cave particularly. She also enjoyed writing poetry and produced two books.

A year ago she made arrangements so that after she passed away many friends and family would receive her 'Wandering Thoughts' collection of poems. Charming, within the book covers, she wrote little personal notes for the intended recipients.

She had also hand-written all the envelopes too, in thoughtful readiness.

We have produced one of her poems within this newsletter.

*Jon Brindle*

## **TRANSPORTED BEYOND THE SEAS**

From a book by Ken Griffin

Transportation for convicts was introduced by Parliament in 1597 with an act for the punishment of "Rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars." These felons were to be banished beyond the seas.

At first, convicts were sent to colonial America, effectively, as the first slaves.

However, as transportation was then the punishment second only to hanging, the accused may have seen it as the 'preferred option'.

By 1717 sentencing had become more formalised giving courts the power to transport robbers, forgers and burglars for, usually, seven years but sometimes for life.

The American War of Independence (1775) put an end to prisoners being sent to our former Colony. It is estimated that over 40,000 convicts were sent to America over the 185 years of British rule there.

From 1783 a new penal colony was sought as our jails became overcrowded.

Captain Cook had earlier reported encouragingly that the New South Wales coast "...was empty and hospitable".

So, in 1786, Australia came to replace America as the main destination for adjudged criminals bound for transportation from England.

This journey could take anything from three to seven months by sea. Sometimes a year.

The first fleet of eleven ships carried a total of 778 convicts - including 192 women.

There were five convicts from Hertfordshire amongst them. More were to follow.

In all, it is estimated that 165,000 people from the UK were transported over the 90 years of the 'System'. It appears that some named their new settlements after their home towns and villages too as testified by Hatfield, Essendon, Bayford, Hertford and St.Albans all being place names in Australia.

Although many local people would have been amongst the '£10 Poms' who migrated 'down under' in the 1960s when Australia needed to increase its population, these were not the true pioneers who began to develop the country. There are Hertfordshire court records, from those far off days in the 1800s, which include some familiar local surnames of prisoners who were sent to Australia.

The most common sentence was transportation for 7 years. Terms of 10 years, 14 and life were also meted out.

The crimes committed tell us something of those days too: highway robbery, poaching, the theft of livestock, beehives and even trousers. There are several instances of arson where the setting alight of haystacks seems to have been a popular pastime, perhaps due to the then recent invention of matches? Sometimes, however, the punishments did not seem to fit the crime. As a guide: 7 years was the norm for stealing to a value of one shilling (£30 nowadays).

Pity then, 22 year old James Ansell of Hatfield, an "idiotic wretch" and repeat offender who, in 1847, was in court for stealing 6d from an Ellen Kite. After pleading guilty he said "I done the crime to be sent away." He got 7 years but died en-route aboard the prison hulk Stirling Castle.

Then pity further modern day members of the Toby family researching their ancestry.

Imagine their reaction, if you will, at the moment when they discover they are related to a certain John Toby who, in 1845, was sentenced to lifetime transportation for an act of questionable intimacy with a donkey.

\*Please note that Mr. Toby was a resident of St.Albans.

In 1849, William Angel (30) stole 2lbs of beef and 8d from a William Walby (the Butcher?) and got 7 years. Previously he'd had sentences of six weeks hard labour, 6 months prison and been whipped - all for housebreaking. He sailed for Van Diemens Land aboard the Pestonjee Bomanjee ship on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1852, arriving on the 31<sup>st</sup> of July.

In 1830, William Allen and William Archer both received 7 years transportation for stealing a duck, worth 2 shillings, from a John Blake. Archer set sail aboard the SS Lady Harewood on 17<sup>th</sup> October 1830, bound for New South Wales, arriving on March 4<sup>th</sup> 1831.

In 1844, Joseph Bailey (18) received 7 years for stealing a watch, worth £1/10s, from an Isaac Bracey. He also stole a watch and chain, worth 5s 2d, from a James Wilmot.

In 1842, David Brinkley (16) and his mother Susannah Brinkley (50) were each transported for 7 years for stealing a watch and chain, worth 10s 3d, from a Thomas Attwood.

In 1844, Robert Durkin (14) stole a pair of trousers worth 8 shillings from a Retta Maria Moorcroft. He got 7 years.

### ***Transportation .....contd***

In 1846, Edward Catlin (38) and William Chapman (24) each received 7 years for stealing a tame doe rabbit, worth 2 shillings and 4 tame rabbits worth 3 shillings from a James Currell. They also stole a cock fowl worth 1 shilling from a James Archer.

In 1845, David Bilton (20) of North Mymms was sentenced to 10 years for breaking and entering, and stealing from the Bell Inn at Bell Bar: A crown, 32 half-crowns, 60 shilling pieces, 40 sixpences, 30 groats ( a groat = 4d) and a box worth one penny, all belonging to landlord Henry Williams. In 1899 Bilton died aged 74 in Maryborough, Victoria. He named his house there 'Hatfield'.

In 1826, Joseph Munns (21) and Benjamin Turvey (26) of Essendon, were both sentenced to 7 years for night poaching within Ox Wood, Essendon which was occupied by a Benjamin Hooper, tenant of the Marquis of Salisbury.

In 1836, John Venables (22) was convicted of breaking and entering a dwelling house and stealing a sovereign, half sovereign, 9 shillings and 4lbs of bread worth 4d, from John Gray of Hatfield Hyde. The sentence was 7 years.

Other recognisably local names include:

J. Waller, Wm Cockington, J.Field, J. Ewington, J.Fletcher, H.Glazebrook, Ann Hale, T.Potterill, J.Shambrook, G.Wackett, T.Rumbold, W. Scott

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### **HATFIELD PARK by Violet E. Godfrey**

No tailored lawns or formal beds  
Of regimented blues and reds  
No tennis court or putting green,  
No man made pleasure to be seen.  
Alone the Great Creators face  
Smiles gently on this lovely place.

In March wild daffodils shout their praise,  
Massed violets sing their softer lays.  
Green mist floats through the hawthorn brake  
As buds obey spring's call to wake.  
Bluebells, may and elder flower  
Come each at the appointed hour.  
Then sweet white roses clamber high,  
Pink stars against the summer sky.  
Butterflies dance where seeding grasses  
Tremble as the light wind passes.  
Grasshoppers click and crouch and leap  
Through harebells on a sunny steep.

In woodlands shaded from the heat,  
Where brambles snatch unwary feet,  
Gnarled oaks their twisted branches raise,

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Tough veterans of bygone days.  
Dark scars remain where limbs were torn  
So long before this age was born.  
Deep rooted in their Mother earth  
In which dropped acorns gave them birth,  
Steadfast, unmoved through storm and strife  
They witness to enduring life.

Beneath their stillness rest at ease  
To share the flow of strength and peace.



**Violet Godfrey Dec 1914 - March 2009**

### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

**Thursday 11th June 2.30pm** Open Meeting "Newsletter Jottings"

**Monday 14th September 7.30pm** "Any Old News" Chris Reynolds. (Resident genealogist on web site [hertfordshire-genealogy.co.uk](http://hertfordshire-genealogy.co.uk)). Talk will be looking at the history of Hertfordshire newspapers particularly the 19th century. Examples include body snatching and murder in Marshallswick which made national headlines.

**Thursday October 8th 2.30pm** To be arranged

**Monday November 9th 7.30pm** "History of the Barn Theatre, WGC." Denys Wells, archivist for the theatre.

**Thursday December 10th 2.30pm** Open Meeting, theme to be arranged.

All meetings at Friendship House, doors will open half an hour before each talk.