

From Hetfelle to Hatfield - over 1000 years of history

HATFIELD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER NO 77 June 2010

KYBES GREEN (Near Essendon)

By Brian Lawrence

I was somewhat surprised to read in the latest edition of the HLHS newsletter your reference to Kybes Green as I have always encountered blank looks when mentioning the place to anyone in the past.

In fact while undertaking some family history research several years ago I found that my great grandparents, Frederick and Martha Valentine, were living in a cottage at Kybes Green with their 6 children at the time of the 1851 census. Coincidentally, the next entry in the census shows William Valentine, presumably Frederick's elder brother, and his family. By the time of the 1861 census Frederick and Martha were at the same address with their 8 children, ranging in age from 18 years to one year. Incidentally my grandfather, David Valentine, was not born until the following year, 1862. At the time of the 1871 census these two cottages were shown as "uninhabited" though I did manage to find my great grandfather and his family living in a cottage at Mill Green. By that time Frederick Valentine was shown as a woodman, having earlier being described as an agricultural labourer. To round off this part of my family history I would mention that, by chance, I was able to trace entries for both my great grandfather and his wife buried in the graveyard of the Park Street Chapel so their remains probably now lie under the foundations of one of the houses in Park Close.

I suspect that my ancestors lived in one of a pair of cottages, possibly belonging to the Estate, rather like an earlier version of the Estate cottage on the Great North Road in Hatfield in which I and my mother were born.

Kybes Green seems to be mid way between Campfield Place and West End Farm.

** Or, if you prefer, mid-way between the Woodman pub in Wildhill and the Candlestick -Ed's*

***Named after a John Kybe, it was also referred to as Kybescroft (1443) and Kibesgrene (1482).*



The Well at Kybes Green

Jon writes:

I am sure that this settlement was still noted in the census of 1881. The Venables family were also living there along with the Valentines and two other families. Most latterly it appears there were two blocks of semi's in a field next to woodland and accessed by a bridleway (aka Green Street?). The well, opposite, is found just inside the woods and about 25 yards from the site of the houses. The well is brick-lined with a diameter of 4ft. Even now the water within it is 5ft deep. Some rotting timbers indicate that the well may have had a roof at one time. A brief bit of excavation revealed a small white enamelled spur, perhaps lost by a rider whose horse drank at a trough by the well?

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Girl Guides Centenary by Beryl Blanks (nee Crane)

I was in the photo (Issue 76) of the 1st Hatfield Girl Guides who were based at The Guide Hut, Ground Lane, Hatfield. That picture appears to have been taken in 1941, when I was 9 years old.

Guiding for me was a good few years ago, but it was very much a part of my childhood. I joined the Guides, moving up from the Brownies, and there I began to feel very grown up.

Our Captain was Miss Millie Rumbelow from Cecil Crescent, and our Lieutenant was Miss Edna Diddams from Hatfield Park.

Our Captain was VERY strict with us. Our uniform had to be pressed each time we wore it, and oh those ties! They had to be folded in a certain way to reach a certain width and length, and of course they were tied with a reef-knot around the back of the collar - how well I remember the blood, sweat and tears to get that just right. We had a flat iron at home and I remember standing for what seemed like hours at a time, with a tape measure, trying to get it exactly right. Our badges, belts and belt buckles and shoes all had to be polished, polished and polished. We had a uniform inspection at every meeting, and our group lost points if any of it was unsatisfactory.

Our annual camp was something we all looked forward to each year, as for most of us it was our only holiday of the year. As I look back on it now, I cannot imagine why it was such a highlight as it was almost all jolly hard work! We camped at the Guide Hut in Hatfield Park quite a bit, but I also seem to remember that we camped at a place called Little Gaddesden. It was when we were on one of our away camps that we heard from workmen passing on their bikes that the war was over. They had been sent home from work to celebrate with their families. Our camp fire singing had a little added fervour that night!

The one thing I can vividly remember about the camping was that none of the groups wanted to be cooks on the last day, as if you were you had to clean all the cooking pots. It was a grim task, and Captain made us work on them until they shone like new. I seem to remember we had something like Vim to start with, then when that ran out we had to resort to ashes from the fire covered in grass. Sounds dreadful now, so perhaps here my memory is playing tricks. Maybe someone else can correct me.

One thing that Captain was not very happy about was when the more senior guides began to get boy-friends and they waited for the girls outside the Guide Hut. I can still hear her tut-tutting.

**The Gun-Butts wall
at de Havillands in 2006**



This wall stood about 12ft high, was about 2ft thick and 25ft wide. It may have been wider at one time?

It was sited on the SE corner of Round Wood on the Dynamics side of the runway and accessed by a narrow internal road that ran from the main Dynamics site, past the wall and onto the runway itself. We are told that, during WW2, aircraft machine guns were fired at targets set in front of the wall. Later, aircraft parts were tested for their resilience to bird strikes there.

Chickens (not frozen ones) were fired at sections of planes. Indeed, the nose cone / cockpit of a Trident was discovered there as recently as 2006. There were two sizeable corrugated huts close to the wall, presumably used by the test-engineers. Other more secure brick built buildings were secreted away 30 yards inside the woods, some with heavy steel doors.

All of these buildings have now been demolished.

Does anybody recall the workings within this corner of the former DH site?

Dates for the diary:

Monday 13th September 7:00 for a 7:30 start: Paul Chamberlain: Bone, straw and paper; how French prisoners of war occupied their time

Thursday 14th October 2:00 for a 2:30 start: Ken Cain : The Quaint & Quirky of Hertfordshire Part 1

Monday 8th November 7:00 for a 7:30 start: Tom Doig: Hatfield in the Domesday Book

All meetings are held at Friendship House, Wellfield Road Hatfield

All welcome. Members £1, non-members £2



The House in the Woods

This photo was taken c2008. Old maps indicate it was called Beech Cottage - probably making it associated with the nearby Beech Farm on Coopers Green Lane. It is sited just inside the NW corner of Round Wood, which bordered the old Dynamics side of the BAe runway. The house was also made world famous when it was used in the filming of Saving Private Ryan c1997. The film-makers coated one side of the house with polystyrene 'render' and used exploding detonators to mimic bullets hitting the wall. The electrical wires which set off the detonators were also still in place next to the fake 'bullet holes' at the time of the photo.

Bob Padget recalls a cottage:

I remember this house in the woods. A lady lived there called Rene. I never spoke to her but I did see her on occasions. She used to walk to Coopers Green Lane to catch the 382 Codicote to St. Albans bus. There were three per day. This would've been 1955-56. Years later, around 1968, after I knew Rene had died, I did go into the wood and see the house again. It was in ruins - probably wrecked by vandals. The wood in which the house was contained I remember was to the runway side of the lake adjacent to Coopers Green Lane. You might not be familiar with the lake? There might not be any water in it at present due to the drought. But if there is not a lake at present due to lack of water there is a very large hole! It was excavated for gravel and the contractors could not fill it with waste materials within the contract period due to lack of acceptable infilling materials. Herts County Council gave the contractors dispensation to create a landscaped lake. The wood in question was felled for gravel extraction and later infilled and new trees planted on the restored land. So this area is all very different.

The WEA book 'Pubs & Publicans' reveals that the One Bell, in the Old Town, was first mentioned in 1635 and was still operative in 1960. However, aside from basic facts, written recollections from the people that frequented these now long gone establishments are a little thin on the ground. We would like to encourage those with memories of our old pubs to share them with us. We may then be able to touch upon something of the atmosphere of these places., perhaps leading to a HLHS booklet on the subject?

The One Bell Public House

By John Garman

I was 18 years old in 1938 and I often visited the One Bell before joining the army in 1940. The landlord was a Justice of the Peace (Magistrate) named Walter Clarke. He had thick greyish/white hair and stood about 5'9" tall. He was a strict man and we always referred to him as Mr. Clarke. I never saw his wife; he always seemed to be serving there alone. The pub was then owned by the Watford brewery, Benskins, and sited next to the old Great North Road and about 20 yards from the still existing Eight Bells. Customers had to walk across a courtyard to the pub where a few concrete steps led up to the heavy main door. From there a passageway, about 15ft long, led to the one small serving counter - which was the width of the passageway - about 4ft. As you stood at the counter, a doorway, immediately to your left, led into the one bar room, which measured roughly 14ft x 20 ft. It was sparsely furnished with hard wooden chairs and bare tables, but it did have a carpet. The bar room window overlooked the bottom of Fore Street. There was a piano, which was often played by a chap named Harry Bell. He would sit on the stool and play for as long as there was beer in his glass, which he sat atop the piano. He'd stop playing when it became empty and only resume when a customer bought him another pint. He was a bit like a human jukebox! Harry came to Hatfield, from Darlington, to work on the WW1 tank trials in the Park - and stayed! I much preferred Benskin's beer to its local rival McMullen's. The bar had two pumps - one for best bitter and one for mild. A pint cost 4d (2p) then. They also supplied half pint bottles of light ale (slightly fizzy) and the sweeter brown ale at 3d per bottle. Pints of Light & Bitter and Brown & Mild were common 50-50 mixes of the day. Benskins also supplied smaller bottles of their strong 'Colne Spring' beer (possibly a barley wine) which we nicknamed 'Journey into space'. It was the drink we'd offer the girls after dances at the nearby Public Hall! However, the girls generally preferred an 'exotic' gin and orange.

Bunchley Pond

Mr Lindsay Sinclair, of Tollgate Farm writes:

My father (aged 82) was interested to read the recent piece about Bunchley Pond (Newsletter 76). He has lived in the area for most of his life and once farmed the land at Parsonage Farm on which the two Bunchley Ponds were situated.

My Grandfather farmed Parsonage Farm, first as an agent and later as a tenant, from about the start of the 2nd World War (1939) until it was sold to the New Towns commission by the owner, Mowlems (*the construction company-Eds*).

At that time the old farm buildings still remained at Parsonage and cattle were kept there.

The house had already gone but there were some small ponds around the farm site which my father thought were the remains of a moat or similar feature.

My father recalls two Bunchley Ponds, Big Bunchley at the top of the hill and Small Bunchley lower down. They are shown quite clearly on my Grandfathers War Ag Plan of the District (*copy provided-Eds*). Big Bunchley could be reached by a cart track from the farm.

The 'mystique' that Jon Brindle describes as attaching to Big Bunchley Pond is confirmed by my father. He does not know of the 'horse and cart' rumour but does recall two drowning that happened in the Pond, neither body ever being recovered due to the depth and underground water making it undrainable.

He remembers a WREN (*Woman's Royal Naval Service*) drowning in the Pond whilst swimming sometime during the War and, around the same era, perhaps a year or so one way or the other, a boy drowned too. My father was there when the Fire Brigade came to drain the Pond to recover the WREN's body. They pumped the water into the ditch to the south of the Pond but could not get the water level down, which would seem to confirm that it is connected to an underground water system.

The Home Guard had an Observation Post nearby at the corner of Field no's 517 & 515 on the War Ag Plan. This was a hut on a 20ft scaffolding platform, painted brown and green. It was dismantled at the end of the war and 'recycled' into a tree house for my father, here at Tollgate Farm.

Keen angler Steve Bailey spent many a day fishing at Big Bunchley. He recalls when there was a massive fire at the nearby Mowlem's site c1985. The Fire Brigade, becoming desperate to fight the blaze, ran hoses up to the Pond and spent hours pumping out thousands of gallons of water to douse the flames. However, the Pond still did not drain!

Steve also recalls being there when divers from the Hatfield Polytechnic were trying to establish where Bunchley's water came from. They put a blue dye in the Pond and found that it reappeared in the River Lea by Bush Hall approx 2 miles distant.

The Pond is sited on high ground and said to have an average depth of 12ft, with much silt at the bottom.

**An Environment Agency officer says that there appears to be no connection with surface waters in the area and that they have no library records relating to the pond.*

Dick Whittingham by Sheila

It is with great sadness that I must inform members of the death of my uncle Dick Whittingham on 23rd April at the age of 90. Dick lived in Hatfield from 1935 when he came here from Ardeley (near Walkern) at the age of 15 to start an apprenticeship at de Havillands. During his long and distinguished career he worked on the Mosquito, the Vampire, the Comet and the Trident, and knew Geoffrey de Havilland. His other passion was music. His jazz band the Nite Hawks was very successful, playing at local dances and becoming extremely popular. Dick became musical director of a big band, arranging the music and conducting, until finally retiring in 2003. Although a fairly recent member of the Society, Dick and his wife Vera have made many contributions to our bank of material. Dick provided a great deal of information and anecdotes for the recent de Havilland Reminiscence project, for which he was interviewed for 5 days. He was due appear on BBCTV talking about his work on the Comet. He will be greatly missed.