

From Hetfelle to Hatfield - over 1000 years of history

HATFIELD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER NO 80 March 2011

Hatfield's Last Ploughman

Our article entitled *Farming at de Havillands*, in December's newsletter (No. 79), drew largely from a story about agriculture at DH's that was published in the Ford Motor Magazine of September 1952. Their story poetically concludes; 'Complete harmony between the world's oldest industry and one of the newest becomes a reality when one watches the Comets and Venoms speed down the runway between the waving crops of wheat and barley'.

The reason behind this article was purely commercial and about brand promotion as, at the time, De Havilland's only used Fords' tractors. However, the inexorable rise in mechanical farming in 'the worlds oldest industry' hadn't yet quite dispensed with the old ways at DH's in Hatfield which, no doubt, also played their role during the war years.



John Plumb with Blossom and Daisy, 1953

In fact, a year or so after the Ford article, 'as one watched the jet planes speed down the runway' one could also see 30 year old John Plumb still ploughing with shire horses close by - with Blossom and Daisy to be precise. These were the last two, of the five, 'shires' in active use when John first joined DH's. Part of his work was to break-in horses to be used for ploughing, which he did with these two 5 year old fillies - although this would normally happen when horses were 2 year olds.

John recalls that it was expected for an acre per day to be ploughed by one man, steering a single plough share, pulled by two horses. Remarkably, this was the same expectation from Saxon times a thousand years earlier - although they used oxen.

John reckoned to walk 11 miles to plough an acre. A quick calculation appears to agree:

An acre* could be viewed as a chain times a furlong (22 yards x 220 yards).

John's single plough share would cut 4 furrows to the yard thus creating 4 lengths of 220 yards = 880 yards of walking (or half a mile) to the ploughed yard.

Therefore 22 ploughed yards x ½ mile each = 11 miles.

John, Blossom and Daisy last ploughed a 20 acre field between the golf hut and the end of the runway, shortly before they were retired in 1956.

*An acre is also slightly bigger than half a football pitch.

*Do you have any recollections, anecdotes, or photos to share? Please send them to the editors, address below. Anything from one paragraph to a major story would be gratefully received. **Your recollections could stimulate others to respond too!***

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Our article on the front page of the December newsletter prompted this response from HLHS member Terry Pankhurst:

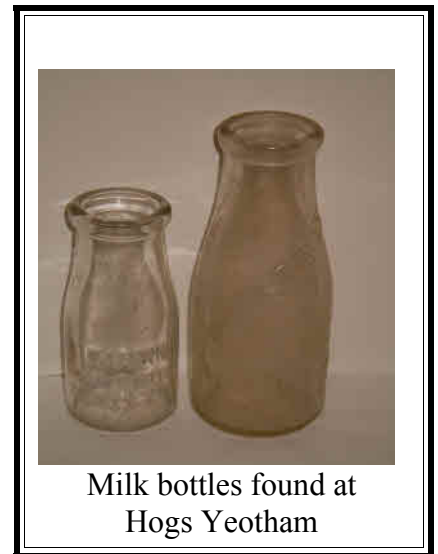
It was good to hear the name Hogs Yeotham again in your article. I can remember my father speaking of the place years ago although he pronounced it "Hogs Yoltham" as did others in Hatfield. As a youngster in the old town he remembered it as a place he used to go to buy apples, or should that be "scrump apples". I know little more about the place other than visiting the derelict house on occasions during my dinner hour when I worked at Astwick Manor. It still had a lot of interesting paperwork lying around but there was never time to search through it all.

Hogs Yeotham, Yoltham, however you spell it, is such an unusual name, unique in the county. As a History Society should we be trying to re-establish the name in some form or other? The whole area no longer exists other than being a large hole in the ground. Maybe we at least should try to get it used as a street name. Hogs Yoltham Lake might sound good for the hole in the ground. In another generation this lovely old name will be lost forever. Let us do our best as a Local History Society to re-establish this ancient name.

Terry Pankhurst

These two milk bottles, a half pint and pint, were found at the site of the derelict 'Poets' house at Hogs Yeotham. The pint bottle is embossed 'Holliers Dairy, Goldings, Ascots Farms, Hatfield', and the initials 'FJH' are on the neck and on the bottom of the bottle. Frederick John Hollier & Sons opened their dairy at Goldings Farm in French Horn Lane shortly after the first world war. Their milk carts and floats were a common sight in and around Hatfield for over fifty years.

The bottles were typical of a style that existed between 1910 and 1940 as evidenced, it appears, by the vertical seams on either side created during their manufacture. The glass was particularly thick and they had wider necks than modern bottles.



The Boar and Castle Pub

The WEA booklet 'Pubs and Publicans' informs us that the "Boar" pub was first mentioned in 1850 when it was owned by John and George Bligh, who also ran a butcher's business there. By 1904 the pub was acquired by Adey & White, then in 1936 by J. W. Green Ltd., then in the 1940's by the Flowers Brewery.

HLHS member George Hanlon, who now lives in Dorset, wrote the following recollections of living in the now demolished pub where he moved, as a child, with his family, in 1933.

The "Boar" was termed a "Beer House" which meant it was only licensed to sell beer and tobacco (not wine and spirits). It was one of four pubs within a hundred yard stretch of St. Albans Road, the others being the Robin Hood, White Lion and The Gun. The "Boar" was owned by the small, family run Adey & Whites Brewery of St. Albans - the only "Adeys" pub in Hatfield - and the other three mentioned later going to Benskins of Watford. In about 1940 the Boar & Castle was taken over by the Flower's brewery.

The licensed premises comprised of a public bar, a saloon bar, and what was known as a "jug & bottle" which was used mostly for take away sales such as bottled beer, draught in jugs or cigarettes.

The frontage next to the road measured approx. 20ft. The public bar would be about 20ft x 9ft wide. There were three tables 5 or 6ft long by 2ft wide with wooden forms either side, on which games such as cribbage, dominos, table Skittles, shove Ha-penny and card games would be played. Also of course there was a dart board. The floor was of red tiles, easy to keep clean with mop and bucket! The colour scheme was of "nicotine" brown walls and ceiling. The bar would be full if there were a couple of dozen bodies present. Heating was by a coke fire. In winter, on wet or humid evenings it was necessary for the throng to rotate to avoid being roasted. On such nights the drying out process would produce a steamy fug, coupled with the cigarette smoke it made for quite an unhealthy atmosphere.

Continued.....

The Boar continued

The saloon bar was approx 7ft x 20ft and access was gained via the "jug & bottle" lobby just inside the front door. The saloon did not get as crowded as the public bar. It was furnished with 3 or 4 small tables with chairs and a couple of snug seats, and used mainly by married or courting couples. And many was the illicit wine or sherry that was furtively passed through the glass partitions which hid the 'saloonists' from the public bar. There was a hearth, but when lit the fire smoked badly, so heating was by an electric fire which was only switched on once there was a customer!

The serving area was in the middle of all three counters with easy access to each, and housed all the bottled beer, glasses, cigarettes. Usually there were a couple of 4 and a half gallon 'firkin' kegs of "Beer from The Wood" either "Bitter" or "Old". The "Old" being a strong beer. The kegs had simple taps, while the bulk of the beer was drawn by the engine (pump action) from the cellar. Behind the licensed premises was a family living room and kitchen. A door off this room led to a stock room, under which was the cellar where barrels of 18 and 36 gallon capacity were mounted on stocks and connected to the pump. The floor of the cellar was cement, but below the cement was a natural spring which meant that when it rained the cellar became flooded, sometimes up to 6-8 inches deep. I seem to recall many Sunday afternoons spent helping my father to bail out the cellar. This was done by one of us being in the cellar and the other one up at the cellar flap in the back yard hauling the full buckets by means of a hook attached to a rope and emptying them into the adjacent "Gents" urinal. My father tried for years to get the brewers to install an electric pump but of course there was no way they would spend any money without profit.



Delivery day was once a week. In the early days (1933-34) I can recall the dray being hauled by horses and these were replaced by lorries. Usually these were two 'draymen' who, depending on what time of the day the drop had them made, would partake of a "buckshee" pint and eat their sandwich. Looking back to those days one realises that the "Boar" was the only Adeys pub I can recall outside of St. Albans. Not many other deliveries could be made after the Hatfield drop. The actual drop was made by sliding barrels on a coconut type of mattress down a stout wood and iron chute onto a trolley and eventually on to the 'stills' or stocks.

Toilet facilities were pretty primitive. There was one "Gents" urinal and a W.C across the yard which was used by both family and customer. Quite brutal in winter, one did not linger any longer than need be. Although our upstairs was quite spacious 5 bedrooms and large bathroom with wash basin etc., there was no toilet.

The gents urinal was situated in the yard, directly underneath one of the back bedrooms. Once in the mid 30's my Dads sister, who had married an American after WWI and lived in the states, came over on a holiday and stayed with us for a few days. She arrived one evening and she slept in this room overlooking the urinal. And apparently the next morning I did enquire how she had slept, to which she replied "fine, but what was that peculiar perfume I could smell in the room?"

Every pub in those days had its various clubs such as the slate club (a kind of sick club), and a loan club which were run by an Hon. Sec. elected by fellow customers (and on whom a close watch was always kept in case funds disappeared; a happening which was not uncommon in those days. We did not have any trouble in that respect! The Hon. Sec. handed the money to my dad, who in turn sent it to the brewers, who of course gained the interest on it until such a time as payment night, usually a week or so before Christmas. Those were big nights! There was also a weekly football sweep. The highest score was worth about a fiver. Pay-out time was Sunday lunch time and tradition was that the winner put 6 pints on the bar for less fortunate fellow members to partake of.

Continued.....

The Boar continued

Later on during the war, there was a troops gift fund, money was raised by means of a raffle, which enabled small parcels of goodies to be sent to lads serving in the forces.

When DH's moved from Stag Lane to Hatfield this opened a new era. Hoards of chaps would disgorge from the trains and walk from the station to the factory; it was not unusual to find 4 or 5 chaps coming in the back way at about 7.30am for a quick pint. There was no food in the pubs then, only Smiths crisps (2d), cheese biscuits, and arrowroot biscuits, so my mother and aunt started to do lunches to order. Each day 6-8 meat dinners were served at one shilling each. Slates were run up and settled on pay day. The pub also became the unofficial H.Q of the sheet metal workers union and many a walk-out or strike was voted for, most probably out of "legit" hours.

With the planning of the Hatfield New Town being discussed, my dad decided enough was enough and he quit in 1951. The pub then had a succession of landlords before closing for good in c1956. As for me, it was a great education and the friendships founded at "The Boar" have lasted ever since. At the same time it has made me appreciate how good the pubs used to be in comparison to those of today with their "live music", T.V, and slot machines.

THE RADIO BEACON

This building may have escaped the wrecking ball!

It appears to have been constructed during 1970's to replace an earlier radio mast closer to the runway.

This orange and white painted brick building is partly screened by bushes, and about 100 yards west of the fence surrounding the University Sports Village all-weather pitches. It is single storey and measures about 9ft x 9ft.

Radio beacons are transmitters sited at a known position which typically transmit limited information signals (on a specified radio frequency) to identify its location. They are most commonly used for air and sea navigation and small aerodromes. In this case, its main purpose most probably was to identify the De Havillands airfield, although some radio beacons could send meteorological information too.

This example appears to be a simple 'non directional beacon' which is located by on-board direction finders that aid aircraft making instrument guided approaches.



Can you help with a project?

HLHS member Reg Coleman is compiling snapshot albums of the Birchwood Estate. In 1949 Reg's family moved from a two-up two-down in Chapmans Terrace (which was gas only and had an outside toilet), to - as Reg puts it - a new council house 'palace' in Birchwood Avenue. He has lived on the estate ever since, at three different addresses.

The albums will not just contain photographs of scenes past and present, but will also be a record of local events and the experiences of local people. Although no great detail is included on any subject, the first two albums, A4 size, are almost full. More short stories and photos are waiting to be entered.

Reg would be pleased to hear from anyone who has material they think might be suitable for inclusion. He is particularly interested in recording any original, still existing house features, such as 1930's Art Deco style tiled fireplaces, or old photographs showing these. It is hoped these albums can be copied onto discs.

Would any members be interested in compiling similar albums on their locality? Or perhaps any non-member reading the newsletter would be interested in joining the society, to help record their area of Hatfield for posterity.

If you can help, please contact Reg directly, or any committee member, or the editors through the address on the front of the newsletter.