

From Hetfelle to Hatfield - over 1000 years of history

HATFIELD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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THE BREAKS YOUTH CLUB CELEBRATES ITS 60th ANNIVERSARY

On 15th September 1951 Lady Cranborne declared the Hatfield Youth Centre officially open at Breaks Manor, a large house, built in 1930, then recently purchased by the Hatfield Development Corporation. Lady Cranborne said, *"I am quite certain this centre is going to fulfil a great need in Hatfield, and is something which has been increasingly needed as the town has grown"*

The club opened with 168 members (plus a waiting list) and soon became known as 'The Breaks'. It has been a great success since.

Its first warden was the famed Bill Salmon whose pay, at the time, was generously provided by the local De Havilland aircraft company. Later his wife, Rose, helped him at the Breaks. Indeed Bill, nicknamed 'Skip', was also the warden of the earlier De Havilland Boys Club which operated on the upper floor of a large DH storehouse known as the Fiddle Bridge Hall or Club, sited near the Cat & Fiddle pub on the opposite side of the Hatfield - St. Albans branch line (now Alban Way).

In the few years following WW2 there were a variety of youth clubs set up but they became transient, prompting Alderman CG Maynard to think it 'wise' that a permanent youth centre be provided. And he said, *"We must give the problem of youth very serious attention."*

It is doubtful, in 1951, that the good Alderman was referring to the same 'problems of youth' that some would now associate with the current 'problems' in Hatfield 60 years later!

The Breaks was originally run as a twin club with boys and girls having their own separate activities, but members did mix for certain programmes such as music and drama.

Shortly after opening, the Breaks also became the home for the Hatfield 20-35 Club and HLHS member Reg Coleman, then aged 21, became Chairman of their Camera Club. Then the Hatfield Society of Model Engineers arrived in 1952.

However, as Hatfield rapidly expanded in the mid 1950s - so did the Breaks. And in 1956 De Havilland's kindly donated a large building that was once their old drawing office. This was to become the clubs' dance hall, among other uses. But the contractors employed to dismantle and re-assemble the building went bust. In a great show of determination, club members (40 boys & girls) decided to take on the task of construction under supervision. It took eighteen months to complete and in 1958 it was open for use. The Radio Times magazine was moved to write an article about the club's Herculean efforts and broadcast their story on BBC Radio South East. During the early 1960s many famous pop groups appeared in the Breaks self-built dance hall - such as Johnnie Kidd & The Pirates, The Tremelos and The Zombies. It also provided a stage for local bands The Cortinas, Mixed Bag, Herbal Remedy and Albert Monk.



The Breaks circa 1958. (Picture provided by the Hatfield & District Society of Model Engineers)

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Chairman: **Mrs Chris Martindale**



FROM AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY TO COTTAGE INDUSTRY

For almost 60 years the development and building of aircraft took place here in Hatfield. De Havillands, the original company, were replaced by Hawker Siddeley who then ceded to British Aerospace. However, the name changes probably mattered little to the workers there, and at its peak over 10,000 people earned their living at the site.

And there were many departments from the factory floors to the office blocks, all doing their bit for the company.

Inter-departmental sports matches were an annual highlight and pride in the workshop was evident in the 'spring clean' leading to the famous De Havilland open days, where the families and friends of workers could visit the site to marvel at the giant machines, hangars and the planes under construction.

The site was so vast that individual departments, often with hundreds of employees, became little communities which provided support to their colleagues in a different way to that of their trade unions.

Departments would hold dances and raffles to raise money for their own social funds which, typically, could be used to provide a little extra cash in times of strike action or to help a stricken colleague. Money could also be allocated for retirement presents, donations towards funeral expenses, wedding gifts, prizes for competitions and the odd seaside trip.

However, the earnings of most shop floor workers involved in production and assembly, largely included bonus or piecework pay - the rates of which were set by the time and motion people. As a consequence, workers would only achieve output targets that were reasonable. To complete too much work would be counter productive as those setting the rates would simply reduce piecework target times.

But many workers earned a bit on the side by using what 'free' time they had created once their bonuses were assured. Some would use their machines and workstations to do private work for small local engineering firms. Others would bring in car body parts that were anodised to become rust-proof. Dents were removed by the De Havilland panel beaters and car engines were degreased in the tetrachloroethylene tanks.

But others sold things more commonly seen in Hatfield's once thriving town centre market.

Some of the more enterprising workers would visit the cash & carry warehouses around London's Petticoat Lane / Houndsditch area to stock up with all kinds of merchandise.

One ex DH employee with 35 years service jokingly recalls, "That you could buy anything from a pin to an elephant" including; watches, clothes, household appliances, cleaning fluids, paint, Tupperware, pots, pans, tools and toys.

One particular chap, of Dutch extraction, actually had his own lock-up shed within the factory. It was used solely as a shop. The Management didn't so much turn a blind eye to this as actively encourage it - because they were regular customers themselves!

Many workers had wooden trolley's to transport their tools around the factories. Some would be part loaded with goods for sale. It is amusing to visualise them moving around like barrow boys at a market.

As one wag put it, "Apparently you could even buy an aircraft at DeHavillands too."

ENTERTAINMENT IN HATFIELD 1930s to 1960 WE NEED YOUR RECOLLECTIONS OF MUSIC, DANCES, BANDS, VENUES and PHOTO's PLEASE CAN YOU HELP ?

Who did you see perform or dance to at :

The Comet Hotel, Stonehouse, the Public Hall. In Old Hatfield.

De Havillands - Aviation and Dynamics, Jack Oldings, Cavendish Hall, the Hilltop.

Youth clubs, church halls, fetes.....

Please write to us , the Editors , HLHS, c/o Mill Green Museum, Hatfield, AL9 5PD
or send us an email to: hatfieldhistory@ntlworld.com

HATFIELD'S FIRST GOLF COURSE

Following on from our story of the little known De Havilland golf course (Issue 81), the recent visit to Hatfield House presented an opportunity to ask about the 'golf course' in the Park that was identified in a 1919 Ordnance Survey map.

This old map was clearly not exact in dating its topographical features as it showed the town of WGC on it, which was built shortly after.

However, the 1920s did see the emergence of three local golf courses; Potters Bar (1923), WGC (1923) and Brookmans Park (1926).

Clearly these were facilities to attract the middle-classes to come and settle in the new residential developments constructed around the time.

Indeed, the Brookmans Park Golf Club website states:

When the London & North Eastern Railway built a new station at Brookmans Park in 1926, with direct services to Kings Cross and Broad Street, an 18 hole parkland golf course was built to attract new house buyers to Brookmans Park.

But, evidently, a golf course existed in Hatfield Park well before those others mentioned.

With information kindly provided by House archivist Robin Harcourt Williams, we present a quote from a letter dated 11th March 1888 from Lord Hugh Cecil to his mother:

"...if I am all right I shall go straight thro' to Hatfield to mark out the Golf Links".

Whilst not much documentation exists, papers from the 4th Marquess (d1947 aged 86) include letters from people asking for permission to play. One such written request came from a Mr G. Clough of Barnet, on 14 February 1891. The letter begins *"Some little time ago a statement appeared in the newspapers that a Golf Course had been laid out in the Park at Hatfield"*.

Robin also provided a golf card, showing that it was a par 69, 18 hole course.

It appears to have been an entirely private one for use by the family and their guests.

House Labour Account records show that in 1905 a certain S. Brown was being paid 1/6d a day as a 'Golf-boy'.

And a book about the early tank trials in the Park 1916 also draws reference to the golf course.

It is further understood that J.C. McCowan, who was the Agent in Hatfield from 1897 to 1937, was a keen golfer who sometimes played with Lady Cowper's Panshanger Agent, George Turner.

It appears that Fore Street resident W.E. (Bill) Peters, was the last golf professional at the Park. His employment may have come to an end when the course fell into disuse, most probably at the start of WW2 (c1939) when manpower and a demand for more arable land put an end to many other courses in Britain during the Dig for Victory campaign.

Bill's father, William, was also a golf pro, as was his brother, Bob, who became the pro at the Harpenden Common club.

HLHS member Brian Lawrence recalls that Bill Peters then went on to become the golf professional at Mid-Herts golf club at Gustards Wood. This recollection is borne out by the Clubs' Centenary book which records that their course professional, V.G. Thompson, died in 1940. The next known professional is Bill who reportedly took over as club pro after the War ended in 1945. But prior to this he had a motor cycle accident which ended his golf career as a tournament player and he went to work at De Havilland's for a time after the closure of the Hatfield Park course. But, in 1960, the club historian writes; *"....the long-serving Bill Peters decided he could no longer combine the green keepers responsibility with his duties as Professional (and part-time barkeeper!)..."*

John Gray also mentions the Hatfield Park course in his book *The History of Hatfield Cricket* which stated; *"...the Hatfield Park golf course had a Professional's Hut, but not a clubhouse.....near to the water reservoir known as Carters Pond...."*

Bill Peters' daughter, Sandra, was very young at the time but recalls her father had a 'wooden slatted hut' which she played in with her 'bakelite dolls'. It was opposite the reservoir, which she termed a 'swimming pool'.

Typically such golf huts would have been placed near the 1st tee, which is believed to have been on the South Front of Hatfield House. Golfers would then play down South Avenue to the 1st green. The course would have turned anti-clockwise, parallel to Woodside Avenue, and then turn right again towards Essendon Lodge.

THE GOLF CARD FOR THE HATFIELD PARK COURSE

c1888 to 1938

Kindly provided by House
Archivist Robin Harcourt Williams



Example of golf fashion in 1900

SIX INCHES.

HATFIELD PARK PRIVATE GOLF COURSE.
Full length of Course 5,146 yards. Bogey 69.

Player _____ Date _____

No. of Hole.	Length in Yards.	Bogey.	Strokes allowed.	Score.	Won X Lost — Halved O	No. of Hole.	Length in Yards.	Bogey.	Strokes allowed.	Score.	Won X Lost — Halved O
1	360	4				10	340	4			
2	320	4				11	288	4			
3	165	3				12	265	4			
4	420	4				13	390	4			
5	450	5				14	138	3			
6	165	3				15	240	4			
7	360	4				16	140	3			
8	400	5				17	340	4			
9	255	4				18	110	3			

Won..... } Result.....
 Lost..... }
 Halved..... }

Signature of Marker.....

Out
 In.....
 Total
 Less Handicap
 Net Score...

HATFIELD CINEMA - WAR TIME

By Janet Robinson (née Tingey)

Sorting through my mother's papers I came across the programme for the concert at the Regent Cinema in 1943. She must have been thrilled by it to have kept the programme for sixty years.

Looking on the internet I see there are still plenty of entries about Richard Tauber. In fact he was acclaimed as "one of the best Austrian tenors of the early to mid-twentieth century" He was awarded British Citizenship in 1940 and remained in the UK for the entire war where he made a living by singing, conducting and making gramophone records and radio broadcasts, though the concert in Hatfield was clearly for charity. He died of lung cancer in 1948.

Marian Nowakowski – despite the Christian name was apparently a great Polish bass. I can't nail Sulikowski, but Percy Kahn was a noted pianist and accompanist, so it was an impressive line-up for little old Hatfield..

However, I was equally interested to read the supporting advertisements. Who remembers all those shops and would any advertisement for Ales dare to suggest you might "Keep fit" on them?

