

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

## HATFIELD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER NO 84 March 2012

### FORGOTTEN SCULPTURE REDISCOVERED

50 years ago James Butler's sculpture of a reclining woman, set within a shell, was proudly displayed within the water feature at White Lion Square. But when the circular pool was filled in, the sculpture was removed. It's final, ignominious, resting place appears to be something of an afterthought; placed behind a wall and facing a portacabin at the Central Resources Library at the New Barnfield site in Travellers Lane. There are now calls for it to be re-sited more appropriately elsewhere. Perhaps back at the town centre or at the pool with fountains on Mosquito Way. Suggestions are welcome.



Left: The reclining nude that James called 'The Pearl In the Oyster'

Above: The back of the stone shell

However, with thanks to Mark Lampert, we have been in contact with the sculptor who has provided an account of his artwork from c1960.

James Butler writes:

Thank you very much for your message concerning the fate of my sculpture. I am really touched by your interest.

I cannot remember exactly when the sculpture was commissioned, it must have been in the early sixties. I was an artist in residence at Digswell House and was commissioned by the architect Maxwell Fry who designed much of the architecture in the new development at

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Chairman: **Mrs Chris Martindale**



Hatfield. It was unveiled by the mayor of Hatfield and the water for the fountain turned on. Myself and an assistant prepared everything the night before the unveiling and made sure that all was in working order. I arrived at the site the next morning early and to my horror the whole pool was filled with cardboard boxes. We had to roll up our trousers and climb in - it took us about two hours to get rid of masses of soggy cardboard.

My idea was to have powerful water jets springing from behind the reclining figure and carrying the length of the pool. On the unveiling day it just happened to be extremely windy and shoppers were getting wet so we had to reposition the jets in order to reduce the carry of the fountain, so my original concept had to be modified to a degree. In order for the sculpture to look and function properly the water level in the pool had to be just right - which unfortunately it very rarely was.

The shell form is of Portland stone. It was quarried especially for me in Portland . Myself and a friend, Robert Mitchell ,went down to Portland and carved most of the form in situ. The stone that was quarried was so big that we had to reduce it in size before it could be set up in studio. I had then moved to an old school house in Bedfordshire where most of the finishing was done, including drilling through the stone to allow the water pipes to be set in.



*James Butler, left, takes delivery of the block of stone at his studio*



*The roughly shaped shell form*



*The highly polished figure*

The interior of the shell form was carved smooth but the outside was deliberately left rough hewn in order for lichen and a weathered appearance to be encouraged. There were two minor stone forms at the back of the shell from which minor jets of water kept the back of the shell form wet.

I suppose, subconsciously, the idea sprang from the Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* painting; it is very beautiful and depicts Venus standing in a shell, born from the sea. My intention was to create the idea of a pearl in the oyster.

The figure was carved in Derbyshire limestone - which took me ages to carve for the material is not really suitable, as the surface tends to pluck out when carving. I chose it for its colour and interesting surface when polished.

I cannot quite remember precisely how long the sculpture took to make, but it must have been the best part of one year. The commission was the first major job that I had.

I am most gratified that Hatfield people are concerned about the fate of my sculpture, of course I shall help you in any way that I can to re-locate it .

I should be delighted to attend a new unveiling and cannot thank you enough for your interest.



## **The Walby Family of Hatfield Part 1– by Jack Honour**

The Walby family. Does it ring any bells? I am sure a large majority of the people reading this can remember the Walby butchers. I recently read that in 1891: 19% of the people in Hertfordshire had the surname Walby! Now that's a lot of people: but where did all these Walby's come from and what did they do for a living? Read on to find out... If you would like to contact me regarding anything mentioned in this article:

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### **The Walby gamekeepers**

As a family history researcher, I research side interests but primarily I research my own direct ancestors. These ancestors, or at least the Walby ones, were gamekeepers. Gamekeepers moved around a lot: Joseph Walby born 1850 in Essendon moved all around the country to about 8 or 9 estates across Britain. I have learnt this was because the accommodation would become tired and dirty over time and also, you could become higher up in the *gamekeeping ladder* and therefore earn more money. Sound glamorous? No, they were technically upper servants.

The estate would provide the housing, money and perhaps Sunday off, but nothing else. Just highly paid servants. There are a number of great sources to help us in 2012 understand a gamekeeper's quality of life. Life in a Victorian Gamekeepers Cottage by H J Brown has a few wonderful quotes. The online article is all about a gamekeeper in Brocket Park. Although I cannot repeat every single quote, my favourite is this:

*'One of the bedrooms was used by the children with girls in one bed and boys in the other. The beds were large and strong with thick feather mattresses. The other bedroom was used by my grandparents and the youngest baby, which would either have slept in with my grandparents, or in a simple chair bed pushed between the main bed and the wall so that the baby didn't fall out.'*

Back to my direct descendants and their story; William Walby was born in 1843 in Essendon and in 1867; he married Sarah Webb in Tottenham. Then in 1871, the family are at 1 Kentish Lane, Essendon as a gamekeeper. Then in 1881, William is in Hoppets Wood as a gamekeeper. I believe this estate was owned by Camfield Place which has a number of literary connections. Interestingly, William's grandfather (another William) had lived next to Camfield Place, as an ag lab. Then, in 1890 William had a fateful accident involving a gun. The article is truly fascinating and gives an insight into life in Essendon at the time. It is really interesting but unfortunately too long to publish in the newsletter. If you email me, I would very happily send a copy.

As the article says, in 1890 – William was being employed by Charles Butler of Warren Wood. I include a photograph of Charles Butler but you are welcome to email me on the address at the start of the article if you want to know more about him. I think he then moved to Warren Wood, judging by the article, but they shared a gamekeeper with Woodfield as they are both relatively small estates. Why do I think this? Please view the attached flyer and discover more about where Sarah was when William died...



## ROCK AROUND THE BLOCK

### Half a century of local pop music, dance and venues

The minutes of our Executive meeting on 26th January reveal that the sale of publications 'has virtually stopped' with only one booklet sold during the autumn. Well, a limited edition potential best seller has arrived to stimulate flagging sales. Modestly priced at 19/11d Rock Around The Block chronicles much about popular music in Hatfield from the start of WW2 to 1990.

There are many anecdotes and hitherto unpublished photo's for you to enjoy, and the book has been published at no cost to the HLHS; but all proceeds from sales to members will be donated to the Society.

The book should be available from March 1st 2012.

A compilation CD of mostly unpublished songs by Hatfield artists is planned to be released after the book.

## MYSTERIOUS TUNNEL

David Gildea now lives in Canada, but as a 6 year old boy in 1950 his family moved to Mill Green where he attended Bush Hall school. He wrote to us at length about his 'special childhood' spent at the family home next to the school and River Lea. On one occasion he was on a small bridge there, and was pushed into the river by some pupils and nearly drowned. He was made to change into some football kit and marched to the headmasters office where he was sympathetically given 3 strokes of a 'cane' - which was actually the rib of a whale! But another memory still intrigues him, and David writes:

"There was what I understood was a tunnel entrance at the rear of our home in the garden under some big trees. I was always told that it led to Hatfield House and was an old escape tunnel. I don't know how true it was, but it was a heck of a story for a young boy!

On the internet, via Google earth, I can see the large trees are still in the garden of the house I knew as Bush Hall Cottage; underneath those trees is the tunnel, it was still there when I last visited in 1989. There were about 6-7 steps down to it at least; it had a brick arched Entrance. I think there was an old wood door; inside was like arched brick roof with a brick wall at the end. As I recall it was about 6 feet wide x 10 feet long and hollow behind the far wall; almost like it had been bricked up at a later date. I can remember digging from on top behind the wall and hitting first an old tractor seat, and then open space. I was too scared to go into the space and just left it". So, on David's behalf, your intrepid HLHS newsletter co-editors paid a visit to his old house. The present owner was very helpful and allowed us to investigate the 'ice well' in the garden. It transpires that these places were used to store ice for use in the summer. Ice was often collected from frozen ponds etc and even imported from Norway. Usually the 'tunnel' would go deeper than this one so, as David said, it was probably bricked up.

