



Diamond Jubilee Celebrations 1897

By Chris Martindale

Looking at two articles from the Herts. Mercury in June and July of 1897, Hatfield made great efforts to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in style.

From the first article dated, 26/06/1897, we learn that the celebrations were organised by a large and influential committee and subcommittee. At noon many people assembled near the Brewery. The National Anthem was sung and then a procession headed by the Hatfield Town Band, and followed by the ambulance corps, novelty cricketers and the Boys Brigade Band, preceded through Batterdale, up Fore Street to Hatfield Park. Here there was a novelty cricket match, then a "Capital programme of athletic sports". At 6 o'clock "Two-thousand people assembled before an open-air stage to listen to an amusing programme given in capital style by Grooms Merrie Minstrels." Sports prizes were given out and then there was a short concert by the "Excelsior Quartetta". After this a torch light procession marched to Glebe Field, where a "monster bonfire" had been erected. This was lit by Lady Florence Cecil. Also that day, during the afternoon, "800 persons of the labouring classes were entertained to tea with meat pies in the Riding School." The various committees were congratulated on having organised such a successful day which "Would be remembered and talked of for many years to come."

The second article dated 03/07/1897 tells us that "Parishioners of Hatfield were entertained by the Marchioness of Salisbury in Hatfield Park in honour of the record reign of her Majesty". At one o'clock old folk, aged seventy and over, sat down to a dinner in the Riding School. There was a "Plentiful supply of ale and after the meal tobacco and cigars were handed round". In the afternoon there was a "Capital tea" for 800 school children. Then there was a sports programme for the children on the south front of Hatfield House. In the evening there was dancing to the band of the Herts. Militia. A plentiful supply of ale, tea, sandwiches and other light refreshments were provided. The day ended with "A grand firework display", and each child was presented with a handsome china Jubilee mug as a souvenir of the occasion.



Queen Victoria was no stranger to Hatfield, notwithstanding her thrice Prime Minister, the 3rd Marquess of Salisbury, lived here at stately Hatfield House



Elizabeth The Queen Mother and Prince Charles on their visit to Hatfield in 1970



Still the Queen in 1952. The Queen Mother, in mourning dress, visits de Havillands with Princess Elizabeth.



Prince Charles and Princess Diana on their visit to Hatfield House in 1982.



King George VI visits De Havillands in 1940. Next to him is Director Alan S Butler, with Geoffery De Havilland immediately behind.

ROYAL HATFIELD!

Hatfield's links to royalty are well documented. From Elizabeth 1st living here as a Princess, to visits by Queen Victoria attending a military review in Hatfield Park to George VI making a morale boosting war time call to De Havillands. And our current Queen is scheduled to visit in June as part of her Diamond Jubilee tour and, on another occasion, in 1985, she planted a sapling oak in the place of another famous oak under which Elizabeth 1st learnt of her accession to the throne in 1558.

But a book by former TV personality, Richard Whitmore, reveals that the late Queen mother had visited Hatfield House 'probably more times than she could remember, through her enduring friendship with three generations of the Cecil family, especially "Bobbity and Betty" - Robert the 5th Marquess of Salisbury, and his wife Elizabeth.'

And during 'the dark days of war' she made several visits to the hospital set up in Hatfield House visits, that she said, had done her good. However, as Whitmore points out, Hatfield was no safer than Buckingham Palace, as it was a constant target for enemy bombs.

In May 1969, the Queen Mother was in Hatfield again, reviewing the Hertfordshire St.Johns Ambulance Brigade at the Hatfield Polytechnic. Also in attendance was Barbara Cartland.

GREYHOUND RACING AND SPEEDWAY AT De HAVILLAND AERODROME

Most people, of course, associate the vast 500 acre De Havilland airfield site with the manufacture of aircraft. It was here that they had their factories, workshops and office blocks. At the north-eastern Manor Road end of the site they also provided a social club with adjacent football and cricket pitches and a bowling green. But before any of the above existed, the London Aeroplane Club had arrived, in 1930, and built a hangar, a social club, squash court block (with the beacon on its roof) and swimming pool. These white painted constructions, now all gone, were roughly opposite the northern end of the Galleria. But other sport also took place at the far south-west end of the airfield that was not associated with the flying club.

HLHS member Ben French recalls:

In October 1931, as a twelfth birthday treat, I had a ten minute flight from the new Hatfield aerodrome in a De Havilland Puss Moth G-ABLD. This cost my parents ten shillings (50p). My illusions were shattered when when the pilot was seen to be wearing a lounge suit and *not* a leather coat, helmet and goggles - especially as while waiting I had seen a DH 9 G-EBEZ bi-plane belonging to the *De Havilland School of Flying*, with open cockpits and a pilot dressed just like Biggles!

We took off from the grass airfield towards St. Albans and, just before the boundary of the field between Popefield Farm and Carters Nursery (now Notcutts Garden Centre), we saw Greyhound racing on a track below.

How long Greyhound Racing went on there at Smallford is not known - but any information would be welcome! *(A lot of hare coursing took place at nearby Colney Heath - Coursers Lane is named after the sport. In the early 1960s the landlord of The Cock pub in the village, was digging in the garden there and unearthed the skeletons of several greyhounds; dogs used both for coursing and racing -Ed)*

In 1936 Motorcycle Speedway started at Smallford [*on the same site as the greyhound track*] under the auspices of the Hertford and District Motorcycle & Car Club, and organised by the Brine and Geary families with support from the Wells family. Among the riders who joined the 'Stags' - as it had been nicknamed - were Dick Geary, Doug Wells and Percy & Cyril Brine. The dog track was modified and enlarged to A.C.U. (Auto Cycle Union) regulations and the track was ready for racing.

Although Smallford was a training track like Rye House, Dagenham and others, racing was fast and provided many thrills. The first season produced many promising riders who eventually went on to ride for some of the higher league clubs.

In the early days of this sport the circuits started off as Grass Tracks but, after the surface had worn away or become too muddy, ashes were applied to the surface and they became known as Dirt Tracks. After each race a team with rakes would level off the track.

Early in 1938 Smallford entered the Sunday Dirt track League along with such clubs as Eastbourne, Rye House, Dagenham and Romford. The first match was away to Romford where the Smallford Stags won by 42 points to 40; with each point worth two shillings (10p) in prize money. At the end of the 1938 season the league was disbanded and the teams went their own ways.

However, Smallford re-opened on 30th April 1939. The track had been improved with the bends now slightly more banked, and parts of the track levelled off. A covered stand for

spectators had been erected near the pits - including changing rooms for the riders.

Since opening in 1936, Smallford had continued to produce some excellent riders; the track being very popular with riders and the public alike.

But before the 1939 season ended, along with many other clubs, Smallford ceased to operate with the onset of war, and Speedway never returned there.

Now, after 76 years, there is no indication of where the track was. But for many years, just a few yards the Hatfield side of Notcutts on the Hatfield Road, there was a five barred gate leading into the field to the track site. De Havilland removed the gate when they erected a high security fence but a Milestone (indicating the distances to Reading and St.Albans) was not disturbed and remains very close to the old Speedway track entrance.

But in 1939 the land, like much other recreational land, was turned over to the plough to grow crops for the war effort. As a consequence the track became completely eradicated.

THE FIRST PROGRAMME



[However, during the late 1930s, the Luftwaffe photographed much of Britain in the run-up to war. When these photo's were discovered they were nicknamed 'Hitler's Holiday Snaps'. One of them is a picture of the de Havilland site and clearly shows the oval Speedway / greyhound track at exactly the place which Ben French describes -Ed]

Ben French would like to thank Norman Jacobs, author of 'Speedway In The South East' for his help in researching this article.

Finally; Jim Bacon was a boy living in Smallford during the late 1930s. He recalls watching the Speedway meetings at the 'cinder track' as he called it. He and his friends used to scramble under a hedge to avoid paying the 3d entrance fee!



Smallford Speedway star Percy Brine
c1937



The DH PUSS MOTH company demonstrator plane at Hatfield Aerodrome on the day that 12 year old Ben French flew in it as a birthday treat in 1931.

A 250th ANNIVERSARY AT THE MILL

Although a water mill was known to have been working at Mill Green in AD 970 - and mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 - this year sees the 250th anniversary of an inscription carved into the external brickwork near the entrance and assumed to have been made by Josiah Briggs who became the lessee in 1726 and later rebuilt the mill which was completed in 1762 - hence the carving. But old Josiah is not alone in immortalising himself on the mill; because inside the building at the business end, among the internal mechanisms, a certain Charles Bonus carved his name on an oak beam on August 4th 1821.

And, not to be outdone, 160 years later an employee of restoration company Millwrights International inscribed their logo into a brick in 1981 close to the main museum entrance.



The mark of Josiah Briggs
Note the 'J' is presented as 'I'



C (Charles) Bonus
Carved on a wooden beam



Millwrights International
Etched by the main entrance

So, despite there being a water mill on the site for over 1000 years, the present construction is 250 years old. And, to celebrate, several celebrations are planned. On 1st July there will be a barbecue; Georgian cooking re-enactors; cream teas; militia men firing muskets; children's games and, of course, an ice cream van.

With thanks to the U3A.

THE PEARL IN THE OYSTER

After reading about the “forgotten sculpture rediscovered” in the March 2012 newsletter, I took a trip down to the Central Resources Library where one of the librarians was kind enough to take me round to where the sculpture now lies. Although not shown in your article, the sculpture was originally supported on either side by two smaller stone pieces which helped make up the overall fountain and which today are lying alongside the main piece at the CRL. All three pieces appeared (to the layman’s eye) to be in quite good condition.

Interestingly, the brickwork that housed the sculpture is still in its original position near Simmons Bakers in White Lion Square. It today provides a home for one of the raised flower beds there. I have seen no sign of the original plumbing for the fountain itself. However, as the brickwork has, I believe, been scheduled for demolition as part of the town centre development, it did make me wonder whether the whole thing could be reconstructed (brickwork, fountain and all) in whatever new location is determined.

Last year, while researching the history of the Ryde area of Hatfield, I came across some photos of the sculpture in some old albums at HALS (Ref: CNT/WH). They were taken in 1970 by Ken Wright who still has the original negatives and has kindly provided me with decent prints. The copyright to these photos is held by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) who have kindly agreed that I may submit them to appear in your newsletter. The sculpture arrived by low-loader in February 1970 and was formally unveiled on 18 April 1970.

Yours sincerely, Phil Marris



Above: The sculpture arrives in White Lion Square



Above right: In situ with water jets aflow

Bottom right: View of the oval water feature



Hatfield Library 50th Anniversary

This September Hatfield Library will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of its opening in the Town Centre. Do you remember the opening, or your family using the library? Can you remember the earlier library and where was it? Share your memories, contact Hatfield Library in person or phone 0300 123 4049 and ask to be put through to Hatfield Library.

Dates for Your Diary

All meetings are held a friendship House, Wellfield Close, Hatfield

Thursday 14th June, 2.15 for a 2.30 start. We will be having a **Jubilee tea Party** to celebrate the Queen's Diamond jubilee.

Monday 10th September, 7.15 for a 7.30 start. An open meeting. A chance to chat and socialize.

Thursday 11th October, 2.15 for a 2.30 start. John Cox, "Born in Ayot St Lawrence"

Monday 12th November, 7.15 for a 7.30 start. Kate Thompson, "The Elephant Man"

Rock Around the Block

Half a century of local pop music, dance and venues in Hatfield.

£3.00 for members or £5.00 for non members.

On sale at our meetings



Community Fun Day

Here is our stand at the Community Fun Day at the Campus West in Welwyn Garden City on 10th March. Although it was a fairly quiet day we did manage to sell a few books and had people stopping to talk about their memories of Hatfield. The picture shows Jane Teather, a committee member.



Jane Teather attends our stand

What's new on the Our Hatfield website?

www.ourhatfield.org.uk

- 1 Rifleman Harry Ernest Ewington
- 2 Memories of De Havilland by Stuart McKay
- 3 Listen to St Michael's Bell
- 4 Guiding Memories
- 5 The Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment.

Put your memories on the website

www.ourhatfield.org.uk

Volunteer Needed

A volunteer is needed at Mill Green museum to help with their local history files. No computer experience required. If anyone is interested get in touch with Rosemary either on a Tuesday or Wednesday, at the museum,