

From Hetfelle to Hatfield - over 1000 years of history

HATFIELD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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The Beacon Lit Up Once More

As part of the University of Herts' 10th anniversary of the opening of their de Havilland campus, Hatfield's former London Flying Club beacon – believed to be the only pre war one in existence - was once again illuminated. The ceremony was attended by ex BAe / De Havillands veterans and local VIPs. University boss Quinten McKellar introduced MP Grant Shapps as the man with his finger on the illumination button. Grant, a pilot himself, described his wonderment at how pilots of the 1930s could rely upon such a basic navigational aid as the beacon when comparing it to modern aircraft systems such as automatic direction finders, radar and aviation sat-navs. Grant's ceremonial speech was punctuated with good humoured self deprecation but the real fun came when he pressed the 'On' button after a countdown; nothing immediately happened! Then, after a pause, the lights came on and everybody clapped – with some relief! Then it went off again and there was silence. Then the light came back on again to more applause. As this on-off cycle continued to repeat itself, it became apparent that nobody had been advised that this was meant to happen as it once did; flashing like a lighthouse!

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PRYOR REID & Co's ENTIRE STORY
(With apologies to Brian Lawrence and the WEA)



The New Fiddle (later Cat & Fiddle) c1915

This year in Hatfield we have seen the demolition of our 1930s art deco former Regent Cinema and the Cat and Fiddle pub built c1822 - in both cases to provide student accommodation. For many locals the loss of such iconic buildings is akin to cultural vandalism, but these losses have also created a flurry of interest in Hatfield's rich history on various social media internet sites as people ponder nostalgically at the ever changing townscape.

The Cat & Fiddle was originally called the New Fiddle (pictured above) and sited by the junction of Roe Green Lane and St. Albans Road West. As can be seen, it was once owned by brewers Pryor Reid & Co whose Hatfield Brewery in the Old Town produced over 7,500 36 gallon barrels per year to service their c100 pubs. The Pryors were a Quaker family of brewers from Baldock who purchased the Hatfield Brewery in c1837.

With further acquisitions of two other Hatfield breweries - Bradshaws and Sherriff's - and further bolstered by the arrival of London brewer Percy Reid - they went on to become one of the most important brewers in Hertfordshire.

But their brewing dynasty eventually came to a sad end, mainly due to a lack of family heirs. In 1876 Edward Vickris Pryor inherited the brewery having earlier married 16 year old Ethel Reid (Percy's sister) in 1871; but they had no children. His second marriage was to a Winifred in 1893, but it too remained childless. When Edward died aged 57 in 1904, control of the brewery passed to his then business partner and brother-in-law, Percy Reid. At the time of the 1891 census, Percy and wife Rose, had a 10 year old daughter, Evelyn, and sons Hugh (9) and Geoffrey (3) all registered as being born at Bury Farm in Feering, Essex.

Percy, incidentally, was born at Codicote, in Herts.

Percy's eldest son, Hugh, then disappears from any further records - indicating he'd probably died. And in 1915 his other son, Geoffrey, then a Lieutenant in the army, was killed in action during WW1. This left Percy Reid with just a 34 year old married daughter who had no children of her own registered when aged 30 in the 1911 census.

Without a suitable heir to the substantial Pryor Reid brewery business, Percy sold the company to the Benskins brewers of Watford in 1920.

The Hertfordshire Mercury reported on a farewell dinner of that year held for employees on 30th March at the One Bell pub in Old Hatfield, *‘where a capital repast was served by host W. Clarke....over which Mr Percy Reid presided.’*

The ‘paper also quoted from his farewell speech that it was *‘very painful for him to sever his connection with a business that he had taken so much interest in for the past 40 years. And had it not been for the disastrous effect of the war, and the death of his son, Geoffrey, who would undoubtedly have followed in his father’s footsteps and carried on the business, things might have been different’*

Pryor Reid were possibly Hatfield’s biggest employer at the time and the company made provision for its redundant workers *‘until such time as they found other employment..’*

Older hands were to receive a *‘little nest egg’* and Mr T. Christian, the firm’s oldest member, toasted the company and said, *“No firm had shown greater sympathy and consideration for their staff than Messrs Pryor Reid”*

He then presented a gold watch and chain to Mr Frank Eaton (presumably senior staff) on behalf of the employees.

The Hatfield Brewery then closed for good and, for the first time in centuries, no beer was brewed commercially in Hatfield.

GONE, BUT NOT ENTIRELY FORGOTTEN

But what’s the point of conducting historical research if you can’t resurrect the odd thing? In this case, it’s the beer that Pryor Reid brewed shortly before closure almost a century ago. Previous publications by HLHS’s Brian Lawrence and the WEA book *Pubs & Publicans* tell us much about brewing in Hatfield, but nobody can now tell us how the beer tasted; or can they?

The signboard in the photo of the New Fiddle states: *Pryor Reid & Co’s Entire*.

The word ‘Entire’ was actually the name of their premium beer. Not all of their pubs carried this slogan, but certainly the New Fiddle did, and the Bakers Arms in Church Street, and so too The Cock in nearby Colney Heath.

In 1802, a John Feltham wrote about a popular beverage called ‘three threads’ which, he said, was a concoction consisting of a third of ale, a third of beer and a third of “twopenny” (strong pale ale). It was also described as: “Compositions of sundry liquors”. Thus a publican would have to go to three different casks and pour some of each into a tankard.

It was a drink probably more familiar in modern times to beer mixes like brown & mild, light & bitter and black & tan. However, Feltham believed a brewer named Harwood invented a liquor which ‘partook of the united three threads’, and he called the new brew Entire or Entire-butt, meaning that it was served entirely from one cask. But while Feltham erroneously claimed ‘Entire butt’ was the forerunner of London Porter, there is no dispute that there *was* a beer called ‘three threads’ and that a beverage *was* brewed called ‘Entire’ to replicate it. In fact, in 1718, there is mention of a ‘Tom Mann’s Entire’ beer; with no reference to it being a porter.

And the Brewery History Journal also suggests that Entire butt was a replacement for three-threads - meaning unmixed beer - if three threads was, by contrast, mixed full casks of “ready-blended pale ale, mild beer and stale beer” made from an entire set of three ‘mashings’, unlike stout butt beer (porter) which was made from only the first and strongest mash.

So, the ‘Pryor Reid & Co’s Entire’ sign has an historic meaning not now in currency; like their beer. But help is at hand in the guise of Alastair Wallace of the Dead Brewers Society.

They have a collection of hundreds of beer recipes from long gone breweries, including the one used by the Pryor Brewery in Baldock.

Alastair is a retired head brewer who believes it is quite possible to recreate a very close replica of Pryor Reid's Entire - their flagship beer, and writes:

"I can use the 1841 brewing book page to concoct an "entire" out of the three worts which came out of the mash. The result should be a beer of OG approximately 1.047 - 1.049 - if we can find a brewery with the same brewhouse efficiency as the Hatfield Brewery. I'll have to adjust the hop rate to take into account the lower alpha acid content of early c20th hops but all said and done, you should end up with a seriously drinkable 1914 Pryor Reid Entire".

Alastair also advises that the beer recipe from the Pryor's Baldock brewery would have been the one used at the Hatfield Brewery when they acquired it in 1837. Their recipe would also have contained about double the hops of most modern beers. These would probably have been something similar to a Goldings hop which were grown in Hitchin, being just a few miles from Baldock. Hatfield also had a 'hopground' in the Birchwood area; thus, perhaps, providing an apt name for the Hopfields pub. Accordingly, it's possible that Hatfield hops were used at the Hatfield Brewery too!

Happily a suitable Hertfordshire brewery has now been found, and if appropriate licensing arrangements can be met, and local outlets found, then a very close version of Pryor Reid's Entire may give Hatfield a taste of its staple beer that was last supped 93 years ago.

IT's CLOSING TIME FOR THE COCK

Carrying on with the pub theme, there will be a little less joyousness this festive season just over the A1 border in Colney Heath. The Cock pub bade "last orders" to their customers on Tuesday 19th November. Landlady Pam Whiting's parents took tenancy of the pub in 1962 and the running of it eventually fell to her and husband Jim. They bought the freehold from the brewery in 1991 and have run it themselves ever since. Landlord Jim worked at the de Havillands factory for over 30 years and was a semi pro footballer for St.Albans City and later played for Hatfield Town at their Stonecross Road ground.

Being a 'village boy' Jim festooned The Cock with photos depicting Colney Heath's history in one bar, and covered the other bar with local football memorabilia. The central entrance lobby was also it's 'jug and bottle' where off sales could be purchased through a hatch.

The Cock was first mentioned as a pub in 1756 and was largely rebuilt in 1822.

Up until the time of closure, this small pub offered 12 different beers; there was no gambling machines, juke box or food sales; it was just a wonderfully warm community pub pleasantly bedecked outside with many colourful hanging baskets.

But with Jim and Pam now in their 70's - and having to work seven days a week without staff - the popular couple have decided to retire.

They and their pub will be sorely missed.

*Note

The Queens Head pub directly across the road from The Cock, closed three years ago.



November 2013: No more the cheery glow of an already historic Double Diamond inn sign outside The Cock in Colney Heath