

From Hetfelle to Hatfield - over 1000 years of history

HATFIELD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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HATFIELD BREWERY TO RE-CREATE PRYOR REID ALES

Further to our story in December's newsletter, a brewer has been found to re-create the ales produced by Hatfield's Pryor Reid brewery and, incredibly, they're based in Hatfield too! The '3 Brewers' only opened for business last summer at Symonds Hyde Farm and are keen to embrace our project and expand their range with some long gone 'heritage' beer.

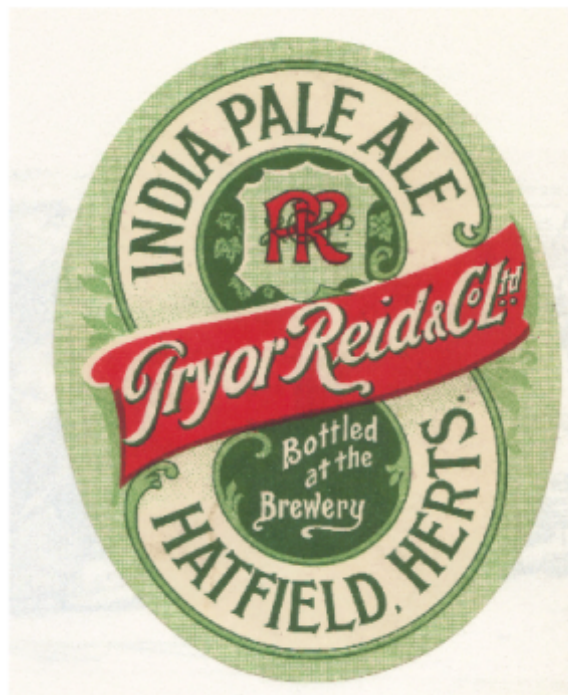
Alastair Wallace's Dead Brewers Society has six Pryor Reid beer recipes dating from 1914 and one - a porter of around 5.5% ABV - is scheduled for a test brew in early June. They also hope to produce a dark mild of around 3.7% later in the month. The '3 Brewers' will invite HLHS members to a tasting in July.

Aside from our amazing good fortune in discovering retired head brewer Alastair and his old recipes, he has offered to mentor the process of creating the Pryor Reid ales by using some of the brewing methods once used at the Hatfield Brewery a century ago. He was able to gain technical information from the apparatus that was included within the sale of Pryor Reid assets at auction in 1920 and experiments have already started - with good results. Beers from a century ago would use far more hops than modern versions, and would be more flavoursome. And the particular yeast used back then cannot now be sourced locally.

But it's not just the ingredients that will do the job; the water has to be 'right' too. Whilst Pryor Reid had their own bore hole at the old Hatfield Brewery from which to draw water, the Affinity Water company were approached for help and recently wrote about our project in one of their magazines:

"Customers often request water quality information but, in February, the reason behind one was more unusual....Since beer is 90% water, the mineral composition of the water is very important to the final result. Whilst some adjustments are necessary, retaining characteristics of the local water contributes to the individuality of regional beers..."

Affinity will now be providing the 3 Brewers with water quality data as an indication of that used down in Fore Street 100 years ago. And hopefully we'll soon be able to sample a bit of Hatfield's great brewing heritage. The three remaining pubs in the old town, plus The Wrestlers, were all once Pryor Reid pubs.



Pryor Reid bottle label of c1914.
Supplied by Peter Sanden

Contact the Editors:

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Chairman: **Mrs Chris Martindale**



Geoffrey de Havilland Jnr - Test Pilot by Dick Whittingham

I got to know Geoffrey de H quite well during the war years, as from the middle of 1942 until the end of 1945 I carried out daily inspections on the experimental aircraft that flew and signed them out as being safe for flight. This was a great responsibility and privilege as I was only 22 years old when I was first assigned to this position. The first time that I had the opportunity to speak to him was on the first day that I had cleared his aircraft for flight. After he landed the Mosquito I asked him if he would be flying it the next day, he replied "yes, the crack of dawn".

When I told this to the flight test foreman I said "what ever time will that be?" and he said "twenty to ten!" Geoffrey was a brilliant pilot, the ultimate professional. A man of few words, modest, private and unassuming like his father and also his brother John who was also a test pilot. He was utterly focused on his job and because of that had no time for jokes or small talk with those who worked with him, although I am sure that other pilots and friends who socialised with him in the evenings when he relaxed would have seen another side of his character.

He would never blame anyone if mistakes were made, and once when due to the failure of a ball-race on a Vampire that nearly caused him to crash I tried to explain to him what caused the problem he merely said "but when will it be ready to fly again?"

Very occasionally one would catch a glimpse of his more "human" side. He had a passion for model steam engines, and once said to me "if you had a model steam engine, would your wife let you start it up in the kitchen?". I said "of course she would". To which he replied "they won't let me do it at home". I only saw him get really annoyed on one occasion. He was flying a Mosquito locally when part of the perspex canopy broke off and his precious hacking jacket that he always wore and stowed behind his seat was sucked out and blew away. He got as many of his pilots as possible into the air and we watched them circling round and round somewhere near the "Crooked Chimney" looking for it. It was never found! In 1942 Geoffrey visited Canada and the U.S.A. This was in order to hand over a Mosquito to the U.S Army Air Corps and also to test the first Canadian built Mosquito. Whilst in Toronto he gave demos to the workers there, and it gave one a good insight into his character when reading his report on his time at the Canadian factory when he writes..."this was my most unpleasant day out there as three speeches were required from me: they were short speeches." Before leaving Canada he flew the Mosquito in a demonstration flight over Toronto in aid of War Bonds sale drive. He wrote..."This was a truly amusing show to do and one gained a fine impression of speed going well below the tall skyscrapers with 400 m.p.h indicated".

He then toured the U.S.A demonstrating the Mosquito to Army and Naval Air Staff who gave him an opportunity to fly many of their aircraft. It is worth recording a meeting he had with Howard Hughes. Geoffrey wrote... "He is at present engaged on the design and construction of a 30,000lb wooden - plastic transport for the Army Air Corps (the Spruce Goose?). This plane was to have been the very acme of simplicity in construction, but Hughes was dumfounded when he looked at the Mosquito. Turning to me he said "I guess I'm going to give those goddamn designers of mine holy-jeeze." Sure enough the following day there arrived at the field half a dozen long faced gloomy looking individuals, members of the Hughes design staff. They enjoyed several hours inspecting the Mosquito and asking questions. In sympathy, Burrell (his observer) and I stood them lunch in the fine Glywayo restaurant.

On occasions, I had the opportunity to fly with Geoffrey in the Mosquito. It was always an exhilarating experience. In the air he was always focused on the job in hand and was completely unflappable. Once we were driving almost vertically through thick cloud and suddenly broke out into sunlight, just missing a Catalina that was flying past just below the cloud-base. It was so close that I could see the horrified expression on the gunners face, looking at us from his perspex blister. Geoffrey was completely unmoved by the incident as if it was nothing unusual. When on the ground however, ready for take-off he would not move until you assured him that there was no plane about to land on top of us. (The Mosquito had no rear view mirrors!) The only time I saw him enjoy a joke was when he persuaded Ronald Bishop, the Chief Designer, who he called "Bish" to get into the Vampire and taxi it around the airfield. Geoffrey had complained of difficulty in steering it on the ground, whilst Bishop had not taken his complaint seriously. When bishop careered all over the airfield in all sort of trouble it made Geoffrey's day!

For some reason he had a very cool relationship with the Air Ministry, particularly when they sent R.A.F officers to have a flight in one of his beloved prototypes. On one occasion when an officer was ready to have his first flight in the Vampire Geoffrey gave him verbal instructions on how to fly it but when the chap said "how do I start the engine up again if it dies on me in the air?" Geoffrey just said "Oh Dick will tell you" and left him to it. In the event he did lose the engine in flight and succeeded in starting it again. When he left Geoffrey came over to me and said "what did you tell him?" What I shall always remember him for was when he was about to take a newly-built Vampire jet on one of it's first flights. As he was taxiing it out he suddenly stopped, called me over and said "how is your wife?" He had heard that she was seriously ill in Barnet Hospital. This shows that he had a kind-hearted side which perhaps was not apparent to many people that he worked with.

He lived for flying. He had been taken up for his first flight in his mother's arms in his fathers's first aircraft that he had built. And sadly it was when flying he was eventually killed.



BROTHERS IN ARMS

Piloted by Geoffrey de Havilland Jnr with Dick Whittingham as observer,
Mosquito Prototype W4050 returns to Hatfield following a test flight on Sunday August
8th 1943. Painting by Ronald Wong

MESSAGE FROM THE FRONT



This postcard was donated by Claire Wright, and is now at the Mill Green museum. It was sent to Mr. W Angell, Pond Hill, Hatfield, Herts with the message:

Best wishes and all that's best.

George

Written in pencil: perhaps so that the censor could erase text? Or because no ink was available?

Novelty postcards crafted from card and silk first appeared around 1898. Before WWI, convents in Belgium and Northern France had been accustomed to embroidering church vestments, alongside commercial articles for sale to visitors, to financially support their ministry for God. The advent of war opened a new source of revenue for the nuns, to support their work; a passion developed from men away from home, to acquire a "souvenir" of their war involvement. The convent nuns satisfied this by organising refugee workers to embroider complex, yet affordable, war-themed souvenir "memory" items.



HLHS members at the famous oak tree

VISIT TO PANSHANGER HOUSE RUINS

On Saturday May 10th some of our Society members were fortunate to have a guided tour of the remains of Panshanger House and its grounds. The ruined House replaced an earlier nearby country residence that was built by the 1st Earl Cowper in the early 1700s on what was once known as Cole Green Park.

For many years the area has been extensively used for gravel extraction and is now under the ownership of La Farge Aggregates, who laid on the tour for us. Whilst the former Panshanger Park has recently been made more accessible to the public, La Farge are scheduled to cease operations there in three years, which will result in more accessibility. In the glacial valley running through the Park, some former gravel pits have been made into lakes alongside the River Mimram, adding to the general amenity and providing a wider habitat for wildlife, including

regular visits by rare osprey's to prey on the fish stocked here. A nesting platform has also been built to encourage them to breed. However, as stately piles go, Panshanger House did not stand the test of time. Completed in 1810, it was demolished in 1953 under the orders of its last owner, Lady Desborough, who had no family member wishing to inherit the estate. Shortly after WW1 she sold 1500 acres at auction. It was purchased by Ebenezer Howard who used it for housing in the creation of WGC.

At Panshanger is an ancient oak tree, the girth of which is reportedly the largest in Britain. Our guide informed that it could be 500 or even 600 years old; nobody knew. HLHS member Jon Brindle suggested the giant tree be sawn in half so the rings on its trunk could be counted to reveal a precise age. But this was discounted. We were then informed that Elizabeth 1st once sat under it; but this claim may be questionable as she had been dead over a hundred years before the first 'Panshanger House' was built at Cole Green Park.