

From Hetfelle to Hatfield - over 1000 years of history
HATFIELD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER No. 95 December 2014

OAK VIEW SCHOOL'S TRIBUTE TO HATFIELD'S WW1 FALLEN



Shortly before the new September term started, teacher Rachel Wan contacted us to request some information for a school project about Hatfield's involvement during WW1. She wanted her Oak View primary school pupils to learn something about the effect the war had on their town. Rachel - originally from Cornwall - was amazed to learn just how great the consequences of the 1914-18 conflict were, and its aftermath, on the much smaller population that existed here at the time. She was delighted to receive copies of our recent publications: *In Memoriam* and *Hatfield Answers The Call* - two books which provide so much factual evidence of the time. Of the 330 poppies the children made, 172 bore the name of a fallen soldier from the Parish.

Frank Groom Enquiry

This enquiry was received on the "Our Hatfield" website, from Caroline Palmer, asking for information regarding her Grandfather, Frank Groom:-

I have a photo of my grandfather in army uniform during WWI. I had no idea he had enlisted and thought he was a volunteer in the fire brigade during the war. I have been unable to locate any records relating to any army service. On his left sleeve he appears to have a pair of crossed axes which I guess may have something to do with his role in the fire service. Can anyone help?

Well, Caroline was in luck. While researching Hatfield in WW1 we collected quite a few

Cont.....

Contact the Editors:

c/o Mill Green Museum, Hatfield, AL9 5PD
Chairman: **Mrs Chris Martindale**





Frank Groom

images. In the photo below Frank Groom is standing in the back row far left. The Regiment is the No 4 (Hatfield) Coy 3rd Bn. Herts Volunteer Regiment, the picture shows Officers & Senior N.C.O.s.



No 4 (Hatfield) Company. 3rd Battalion . Herts. Volunteer Regiment

Also visit :

www.ourhatfield.org.uk (Other Topics/Hatfield Fire Brigade) for further information and pictures about the Hatfield Fire Brigade.

And since providing Caroline with the above photos, we have been in contact with a Mrs Sheila Groom, wife of Frank's nephew, John Groom. Sheila recalls that Frank's boyhood home was in Fore Street, but he spent his latter years living in Birchwood Avenue.

Frank - as with other family members - was a keen sportsman. He became a painter and decorator and, as a 'foreman', he undertook a lot of refurbishment jobs at London hotels. Sheila recalls that 'Uncle Frank' spoke with a pronounced stutter and would occasionally take somebody along to meetings to speak on his behalf in the event he couldn't overcome his impediment. During retirement he became something of a handyman to Barbara Cartland at Camfield Place, near Essendon specialising, she recalls, in furniture maintenance.



**Hatfield United FC 1910-11 season.
Frank Groom, with ball, is the team Captain**
Photo provided by Sheila Groom



**And here's another one from 100 years ago.
Frank, in plain clothes, stands, back row to
the far right with the Hatfield United team
of 1914**

'HLHS member Alastair Cameron was born in 1947 and provides some recollections from the 1950s:

Some Memories from the Hatfield Boyhood of Alastair Cameron

So, why is a person living in rural Bedfordshire now recalling growing up in the Hatfield area and writing about some aspects of it for the HLHS? Well, because I met Jon Brindle in the course of my involvement with the "Bringing the History of Smallford Station to Life" project - Need I say more? Yes; one shared anecdote can lead to a 'tide' of associated memory fragments', some of which bear recording...and some not; I definitely stop short of (non-literally) 'incriminating' myself...significantly! Like many, I don't possess a 'watertight' memory for all events dating back over 65+ years, and I like to think a lot of 'memory space' has been 'overwritten' during my later efforts to catch up on the diligent studying I didn't do at school....Occasional ERRORS in recall (for which I now apologise, and would be open to unbiased correction) and widespread OMISSIONS may occur – 'Such is Life'; this is clearly not any kind of 'proper' History... So, 'E. & O.E.'! (*Errors & Omissions Excepted*)

Born in Lemsford, I lived 5 years or so in Selwyn Avenue, off the St. Albans Road, close to Ellenbrook Lane, went to Green Lanes Primary School, staying on there after the family move to Welham Green. At the age of 5+, while still living in 'the Avenue', I had joined the choir of St. Etheldreda's, the 'lofty' Parish Church of Hatfield (many years after removal of its spire, but at least at the top of Fore Street's steep hill), and wanted to continue with it, mainly because of local friendships made, after we moved to Welham Green only a year or so later. This must have resulted in quite a lot of tedious 'taxi' driving for my parents, with a weekday evening choir practice and morning & evening Sunday services, plus Weddings on some Saturdays, until I was old enough to travel on my own by bus (between the 'Rookery' and 'One Bell' stops along the Great North Road), for two or three years.... Then I was equipped with a suitable bicycle - to ride on the little-used footpath alongside the Great North Road as far as Oxlease Bridge, where I would take to the 'informal' path alongside the railway boundary fence, to the edge of Old Hatfield, and pedal up Church Lane by St. Audrey's 'Blind Home' (as it was then known), to enter the churchyard by the Church Street gate, in front of the Curate's cottage.

On leaving the church after choir practices, several of us young choristers would cycle out of the churchyard (unless the Rector/Verger was in view!) and down Fore Street as fast as we dared...we latterly used to have our shoes fitted with steel heel tips and 'grind' these on the road surface, to 'skid' to a halt in small showers of sparks beside the car park of the 'One Bell' pub. Any braking problems/misjudgement could prove painful, if not catastrophic, as we were standing on one pedal and 'hovering' above our bikes' crossbars...and the Great North Road at the foot of Fore Street then was quite a busy major road through Old Hatfield. Along with the regular singing 'duties', the choir brought some less predictable 'treats' and 'extra-mural' activities. The former included Mr Collins ('Tom', to adults who knew him), Organist & Choirmaster, very occasionally 'giving in' to pleas from us during choir practice, to play the "Dambusters March" at 'full blast' on the church organ – a just Tremendous sound! Outside the church but very near by, we annually did Christmas carol-singing for very appreciative blind residents in St. Audrey's, where we were rewarded with mince pies and sweets. After a short 'procession' from church up to Hatfield House, we also sang carols around the splendidly-decorated huge Christmas Tree, standing on the impressive black & white marble floor of the house's 'Great Hall', for Lord & Lady Salisbury and family - who rewarded us similarly, with the addition of a suitable paperback novel for each of us, and so

generously wished us a “Merry Christmas!”, to follow a very busy period for the whole choir.

Further away from our church, we played ‘Hatfield Choirs League’ football matches against the choristers of St. Michael’s and St. John’s – on pitches at ‘The Breaks’ and beside Newtown School - with strict refereeing by a retired First Division professional football referee, who was ‘very firm, but fair’, and once pleased us all hugely by arranging for a coachload of us to go down to Highbury for a guided tour around Arsenal’s ‘top notch’ facilities, where we were even loaned a football to have a ‘kick-about’ on the stadium’s small training area (behind the ‘Clock End’ Stand, for ‘old’ Arsenal fans!).

Other away-from-St. Etheldreda’s trips included annual visits deputising for St. Albans Abbey/Cathedral choristers when they had a holiday break and - Once Only - joining them to deputise for the choristers of St. Paul’s Cathedral. Wow, what an event! – I can still recall the initial ‘jitters’, not helped by robing in the then very gloomy ‘spooky’ Crypt below the nave of St. Paul’s! It might have been that occasion that prompted my parents to take me to the photographer’s studio on the Great North Road, about halfway up ‘Brewery Hill’ (!), to have my (hitherto unpublished!) photo taken, here included – ‘Angelic’ appearance mildly deceptive?

Maybe not, as I was later selected for Royal School of Church Music residential Summer Schools in Croydon and Matlock. The first, I can barely remember at all, the second, though, was rather more memorable – there was some excitement about the fact that all of us BOYS were going to be staying at a boarding school for GIRLS.... but on arrival we found that it was so because ALL the girls were away for their summer holidays!....

The intensive work on singing better, plus the pervasive air of ‘moral rectitude’ in that ‘distraction-free zone’, must have done me some good, however, as I came back to be ‘elevated’ to Head Chorister status (alongside, or rather, in the choir pew opposite, senior school chum ‘P.V.H.’ – You know who you are, Pete, if you read this), and remained so until my voice ‘broke’.... apparently irretrievably.... and I had to quit singing, and the choir....

Aged 12, I had by then joined the Youth Club that originally met in a modest upstairs room, with just enough space for billiards and ‘ping-pong’ tables, in the nearby Old Palace, and then moved to the more capacious old Countess Anne’s School building at the top of Church St.

where slightly older former fellow choristers, Colin Blunstone and Hugh Grundy, plus two other budding ‘Rock Stars’ (Rod Argent and Chris White) rehearsed their very ‘un-churchy’ music, then emerging as ‘The Zombies’... Of course, there were girls there, but that’s another story (or several)....

Note:

In 1964 The Zombies had a massive hit with ‘She’s Not There’ in the UK, USA and Canada



Alastair as choirboy c1956

