

From Hetfelle to Hatfield - over 1000 years of history

HATFIELD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

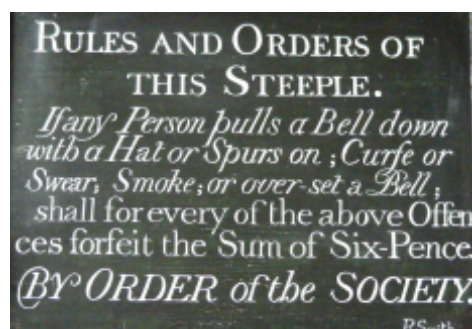
NEWSLETTER No. 96 March 2015

St. ETHELDREDA's CHURCH TOWER VISIT

In early February a small group of us were permitted to go up into the church tower. The initial purpose was simply to take some panoramic photos of Hatfield from the very top whilst leafless trees provided the clearest views. We thought we would be completed in about half an hour. As it happened, we were there much, much longer. It wasn't the location of a large door key that delayed us or even ascending the sometimes precarious steep, narrow winding stone stairs which seemed to spiral ever upwards. Our delay was caused by our fascinating visits to each floor level up the tower. The first stop was where the bell ringers assemble. There was so much information about bell ringing from the past - including a warning about bad behaviour - that it was difficult to pull ourselves away. Fortunately our guide, Malcolm Caie, was both helpful and patient. The Church guide book explains about the bells: 'A list of church goods of 1552-3 lists "5 bells in the steeple and a sance (Sanctus) bell" and confirmed in a list of 1610 (5 great bells and a little bell), also by Chauncy in his History of Hertfordshire of 1700. A wooden tablet in the tower reads: "These bells, which were cast and hung by Mr John Briant of Hartford were opened by the (College Youth) Society on June 5th 1786 with a complete peal of 5120 changes....." This was on a new set of 8 bells but may have included the old ones recast. There may have been 8 bells from an earlier date; a letter of 19th March 1738/9 to the Rector mentions the desire for 8 bells instead of 5, and the name of the inn at the bottom of Fore Street was changed from 'The Five Bells' to 'The Eight Bells' before 1756. Two new bells were given in 1929 by Lord William Cecil, Bishop of Exeter and former Rector of Hatfield, in memory of his son Rupert, killed in the 1914-18 war and the whole ring was retuned and rehung in 1938.

At that time there was a call for the Eight Bells pub to be renamed again, to become the Ten Bells, but clearly this didn't happen. Our journey further up the tower brought us to the clock mechanisms and carillon (pictured right), which are housed on the level below the main bells. Both sets of equipment looked in good condition but neither had worked for some years.

The church carillon was of particular interest. In effect, it is like a huge musical box. It has a large cylinder with pegs set in positions to play the



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notes of its repertoire of tunes. Rob Goss, the church Steeple-keeper, explains:

'The carillon is linked to the church clock and (when it works) plays a tune four times a day at 9 am, 12 noon, 3 pm and 6 pm. There were several different tunes -rather obscure ones from what I recall! Essentially the large drum rotates and there are a series of little pegs on the drum that pull the wires which are in turn connected to the hammers. Although there are 10 bells in the tower there are only hammers on the 'back eight bells' and not on the two trebles. There are two clock hammers per bell and when we want to ring the bells, there is a large lever inside the Ringing Chamber which is pulled down to pull the hammers away from the lip of the bells so we can ring them full circle. My colleague Russell Smith (another ring-er) – who is a skilled technician/engineer did get the clock going again about 3-4 years ago and we are not quite sure what happened but we believe the clock was tampered with and it has not worked since...'

And the Church guide book states:

'The carillon machine which plays the bells... was given in 1786 by Emily Mary, the Marchioness of Salisbury. When wound up (which is a heavy task) it plays at 09.00, noon, 3.00 pm and 6.00 pm with a different tune for each day of the week'.

Back then it appears the carillon was operated manually. But the current equipment is set to operate electro-mechanically as evidenced by the electrical switchgear present.

The manufacturer of the existing clock, at least, is Dent & Co. But as they were 'only' formed in 1814 it is apparent that their equipment - or much of it - must have replaced

the Marchioness's gift of 1786. But when? The carillon may not be Dent's, though.

Our thoughts then turned to how we could get the clock and carillon functioning again.

The Chairman of Dent & Co, London, could not provide any service history of the St. Etheldreda's equipment as, he says, the company lost much of their archives during WW2. It was even possible that they did not install it either if - as one HLHS member thought, the mechanisms may have been procured from another church!

But photos we'd taken on our visit revealed a service record, of sorts, fixed to the housing of the equipment. Tin labels from GH Hall dated 1950 and John Smith & Sons of Derby (1958) and one from a Peter Fletcher, Biggleswade, (1995) gave us some leads.

We could not trace GH Hall, and Peter Fletcher is now retired and living abroad. But we made contact with John Smith's who informed that although they had not worked on the clock & carillon, they had also quoted for the repair works that clock engineer Peter Fletcher undertook in 1995 - and would be happy to do so again. Hopefully, the carillon will get repaired and once more chime out its range of daily tunes. These being:
Sundays: *Hanover*; Mondays: *Clasper Clown*;
Tuesdays: *Auld Reekie*; Wednesdays: *Old Belle Isle March*
Thursdays: *Adam & Eve*;
Fridays: *Malbrooks 'en va-t-en guerre*;
Saturdays: *Step In*



The Dent & Co clock mechanism with electrical switchgear to the left.

Three of the ten bells in the church tower



More Miscellaneous Memories from the 1950's & 1960's Hatfield Boyhood and Early Youth of Alastair Cameron

The 'Carry-Cot' Years

Birthplace 'Lemsford, England', according to official records. First family home in Selwyn Avenue, Dad a Research Engineer with DeHavillands, Mum the sole 'full-time' Physiotherapist in Hatfield (clinic originally in the old 'Northcotts' house, almost opposite the Railway Station - later of special relevance to me). Once old enough to be 'carted about', I was often taken in a 'Carry-Cot' to Mum's clinic and around Hatfield when she went to treat patients for whom clinic attendance was not appropriate - including the sweet old lady known to me as 'Granny Moore' in one of the old Glebeland cottages, Mr Lawson the Grocer in the old Batterdale, Publicans in Fore Street ("East Indian Chief" – I remember the pub's name from seeing its sign in later years! - and a 'front room only' pub about half way up the hill ("Green Man"? - I'm unsure, as it had closed by those 'later years'...), and also the Lord & Lady Salisbury of the time, with whose children I was later allowed to play a little when I was old enough. Naturally, I have only the vaguest memories of these times, memorable 'events' such as being given 'sweeties' by 'Granny Moore', permission to help myself to broken biscuits from the big tin in Mr Lawson's little shop, and bags of crisps in the Fore Street pubs (visited when closed between lunchtime and evening 'opening hours', as there were in those days, of course!).

Pre-school and Primary School Years

Selwyn Avenue life was 'fine' with Mum/Dad always around and the 'homestead' well populated with pets - 2 dogs, a cat, some rabbits in mobile hutches on the lawn, budgies in an aviary, ducks and geese in pens on a plot to the rear of the garden. I remember Hollier's Dairy delivering milk on a horse-drawn float, Hill & Simmons little van delivering bread and cakes, 'Jock' Auld the Scottish baker from Welwyn Garden City bringing a selection of his wares to choose from - including Forfar Bridies, 'Scotch' (mutton) Pies and Scottish-style 'Morning Rolls'/'Baps' - in a 'split-screen' VW Microbus/CombiVan, if I recall correctly - all suppliers stopping more or less outside the front door.

Not stopping outside the door, unless 'hailed', was the occasionally-seen 'Rag and Bone Man' with his horse and cart, ringing a hand bell and crying out something sounding like "Rag-er-Boho!".

When aged about 3 and a half, I once wandered off along 'the Avenue' and turned left up Ellenbrook Lane towards the Level Crossing close to Nast Hyde Halt, where Bill, a local family friend, used to return by train from his work in Welwyn. I was later told that my distraught mother, having feared that I might have drowned in the Ellen Brook, was hugely relieved to find me standing on the bottom rail of a Level Crossing gate, clinging onto a higher crossbar, saying I was "waiting for Uncle Bill's train to come". This must have been not very long after Dad had first taken me to meet Bill off his usual (then steam-hauled) train, which I had evidently found hugely impressive and 'vital' to see again....and which may have been the root of my later enthusiasm for steam locomotives and railway history/heritage.



The 'Ellenbrook' level crossing with the railway cottage sited close to the platform of Nast Hyde Halt.

Photo courtesy Smallford.org website

No 'Nursery School' for me, with a mid-September birthday, so I went straight into Green Lanes Primary School aged 4+. Once I got settled in there, I had to "mind my P's and Q's" a bit more than most because the Headmaster, Mr Brown, known (very well) by my parents as 'Vin', lived exactly opposite our house! A very memorable 'early years' teacher at the school was Miss Wells (granddaughter of famous writer 'H.G.', we later learned) upon whom we 'little ones' doted – not only because she was a 'sweetie', but also because she had a bright yellow Morris 8 Tourer with black mudguards that was very eye-catching, and looked not unlike Enid Blyton's "Noddy's Car"!

When 'old enough' not to need to be collected at the school gate (aged about 5 or 6 back in those days), I used to walk with schoolmates across the 'farm track' opposite Astwick Avenue to cross the 'Barnet By-Pass' (A1) and walk on down Homestead Rd to the house of a 'courtesy Aunt' who gave me a teatime snack and looked after me until Mum had finished treating patients at her clinic and could come to collect me, to go home for the family evening meal and a relatively 'early night' - no childrens TV after about 5.30pm then, I think. On 'non-school days', I would go with Mum to 'Northcotts' clinic but then plead 'boredom' and 'lack of space' as an excuse to go over the road to the station to "watch the trains" with other lads - armed with a bit of Pocket Money to spend in the station Buffet on tea/squash and lunchtime sandwiches/Lyons Fruit Pies/Cakes....and maybe then start to note down engine numbers – to later duly underline in the 'Ian Allan ABC Locospotter's Book', as the other lads did. That, like wanting to be an Engine Driver when I grew up, was the 'usual thing' for large numbers of boys back then, of course.

When a bit older, maybe 7 or so, I would walk from Green Lanes right through to the St Albans Road at the end of Ground Lane and then along past the Petty Sessional Court house to the (wartime?) wooden buildings where Mum's clinic had been moved to when 'Northcotts' was closed and sold off by the Health Authorities – later becoming the site of the Social/Trades Union & Labour Club. The 'new' clinic was much bigger and better equipped, and I could wait there for Mum to finish treating patients before going home. A bit later still, when aged from around 8, I would instead sometimes walk from school along past the end of Manor Road and continue on to the 'Main Gate' of DeHavillands, where the aerodrome 'Police' (company security guards) knew me and would just tell me to "Go straight to your Dad's office, Nowhere Else, you know the way..." - I understood that this was a great privilege, and always behaved well 'inside the gates'. I had previously quite often accompanied Dad into his office and Experimental Dept area at weekends, when the buildings were much quieter, and he needed to go in just to check on experiments in progress. Also, I had attended the company's great Children's Christmas Parties and Family Open Days since I was about 4.

Sir Geoffrey DeHavilland knew all his permanent staff by name, very often touring departments to look at work in progress, talking to 'all and sundry' and asking after their family members who he knew about, again by name, my Mum and I no exception. A great 'Boss', who never failed to recognise what efforts his staff put in - in the aftermath of the Comet 'disasters', especially, when Dad went to the 'drome and, like others, often voluntarily stayed there working solidly for two or three days at a time, sometimes more... Speaks volumes, I'd say...

Continued.....

We had moved to Welham Green when I was around 6, living in a house just up the lane from Marshmoor Sidings, where I would go and watch John Mowlem & Co.'s tank engines, called 'London John' and 'Shirley', and British Railways tank engines shunting wagons in the sidings, with large construction equipment belonging to Mowlems and coal traffic for the village coal merchants' yard there. I also took my first photographs of steam-hauled trains passing Marshmoor Signal Box on the main running lines, with a Kodak 'Brownie' box camera....sadly, completely unsuccessfully - I knew nothing about 'moving-subjects' photography 'basics', and wound up with such disappointingly blurred and badly-'framed' photos that only one or two of them survive. Unfortunately, because of the unacceptable impact of film-buying on my modest pocket-money (needed more for 'Pop', Crisps and 'Wagon Wheels'!), this resulted in my attempting no further railway photos for many years, so I have no personal photographic record of 'what I saw' during a time when such things were a major interest for me - Hrmph! And I never took any photos inside Marshmoor Signal Box - unsurprisingly, I think, as my visits there were definitely 'unofficial' and dependent on a 'blind eye' to Regulations on the part of Bill, the kinder of the two regular signalmen - the other one just shouted 'Buzz Off!' (or equivalent)...; it would be nice to see that long-gone building's immaculately-kept interior again.... I did get an official visit to a Signal Box around that time, though, as in 1955 the new station at Potters Bar was opened and we got shown around the brand new 'Power' Box, where the signalman sat at a console, using electrical switches to change points and (colour light) signals, instead of the traditional levers. Impressively 'modern', not to say 'clinical', to me but I remain grateful to whoever was responsible for arranging the clearly 'special' visit.

Growing 'rail' interest ensued, plus more independent travel - locally by bicycle (including alongside the railway between Oxlease Bridge and Old Hatfield, as previously mentioned) and further afield by train, occasionally to stay with cousins in Edinburgh - travelling, aged 8-10, as an 'Unaccompanied Minor' but 'supervised', on and off, by the catering Stewards and Train Guard. This led to a period of 'serious' train-spotting, with visits to engine sheds in London & Edinburgh, usually with essential official 'Permits', as well as more locally - usually without Permits, relying on the generosity of spirit of less strictly managed staff in 'country' areas, not always successfully! I was denied entry to Hatfield 'shed' on a number of occasions and 'thrown out' a couple of times after sneaking in through the gate off Beaconsfield Road, but did manage some circumspect - and successful - 'incursions'.



Perhaps this is one of the steam engines that Alastair saw at Mowlems' Marshmoor sidings. It's a Hudson Clark 0-6-0 saddle tank named 'London John'. It is of a style of engine built in the 1920s.

Photo from the Marshmoor website

Secondary School Years

After Diesels were introduced, gradually increasing in numbers and reliability (allowing the scrapping of steam locomotives which had initially been kept as 'back-ups'....and often needed in early Diesel days) Hatfield shed closed (in 1960), around which time I sort of lost interest in the railways, and began to get more interested in cars - specifically, American Hot Rods and Dragsters. The 'real thing' not being in evidence locally, this required diversion of pocket money into (relatively costly) American 'specialist' magazines, alongside the growing expenditure on products of the 'Pop' music industry ('Shadows', 'Beatles', etc.) and associated 'socialising'. I also spent money on a 'better' bicycle as I was wanting more 'independence' and 'adventure' than public transport could offer - by cycling, as not yet old enough to use powered vehicles. I bought a 'tired' secondhand Viking 'road-racer' with 5 gears (a lot in those days!), took it to bits and got the frame 'stove-enamelled' a beautiful glossy black, with 'Viking' hand-painted in gold Old English script on the frame's down tube - by Stan Miles in St.Albans (at I know not what cost; Dad must have paid!) - but once it was rebuilt, I thought it 'the Bee's Knees'!

I cycled to school (in St.Albans) on it – despite having a free bus pass for the journey on the old 343 route! – and pretty much everywhere else I wanted to go in Hertfordshire, plus...even a 'day out', to Woburn Abbey.

By then, railways were, for me, just an occasional, more-or-less convenient, form of transport for long journeys....all 'glamour' gone. After a few years of 'glorious' (well, mostly...) independent travel on motor scooters and motor bikes, and driving Dad's car on every possible pretext, then passing my car test and having my own car, I went to work in London...and spent many years commuting by rail...Of which, I can only say, the one Good Thing was...it gave me plenty of time to Read! Only much later, in the 1990's, and no longer doing much travel by rail at all, did I begin to develop an interest in railway heritage/history...and eventually, a couple of years ago, got involved with the "Bringing the History of Smallford Station to Life" Project...met Jon Brindle, and the rest is...er, History?



"SMALLFORD c.1960": Photo of the 'central' part of a model of the 'timeworn' Station & its Yard, representing it in its 'Goods Only' declining years, about 10 years after the passenger service ceased. Model made to illustrate the focus of the "Bringing the History of Smallford Station to Life" Project (supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and U.H. Heritage Hub), to help promote the Project – its next exhibition, with relevant history display, is due at St.Albans Arena on 10th & 11th January 2015. Model and photo by ' Smallford StationProject' member Alastair Cameron.

Re: Newsletter No. 95 December 2014

by Jim Page

I was interested to read about Frank Groom and to see the photograph of the football team in 1910-11. My late Father in Law, Ernest Hickson, is seated second from the left on the front row next to Frank.

There were six boys and one girl in the Hickson family and all the men were involved in WWI. Four were in the Army, Ireton, Tom, Ernest, and Edwin. George, a highly qualified plumber, was involved in secret work on the storage and carriage of poison gas, and did not go into the forces. Les, the youngest, served at the end of the war and was in forces in the Rhineland in 1919. Ireton was awarded the Military Medal, but I have no details of the citation.



Ernest Hickson & Frank Groom

Ernest was wounded at the Battle of Festubert in 1915.

The muscles in his right arm were shot away, and on return to England, faced the amputation of his right arm. Fortunately for him, the Lady Salisbury of the day heard of his plight, and arranged for him to have specialist care in London. Although he had to wear a glove and arm strap for the rest of his life, fortunately he did not lose his arm. He always said that the repairs to the tissues was by using the membrane that occurs containing the white of an egg. High skills shown indeed by the Surgeon!

Lady Salisbury, who was so caring of all the Hatfield boys who went to War, realised that Ernest, as a painter and decorator, as was Frank, could never work on ladders again. She arranged for him to be trained as a sign- writer, and he later did some specialist decoration in Hatfield House.

During his treatment in London, he lived at the Salisbury's London residence. While there he was seconded to spend non treatment days at Hoopers, the Chelsea Carriage builders, who were then building aeroplanes. It was here that he met Louisa Dorsett, a member of the Women's Royal Air Force. They married after the war and were one of the first families to move into Cecil Crescent, the post war "Homes for Heroes" in Hatfield (*built in 1924*). She died in 1952 but he lived on till the early 70's.

Before the First World War, he had won County Caps for both Cricket and Football and was a key member of the Hatfield United Football Club and Cricket Club. He was a noted athlete, and photos exist of him high jumping at the White City despite his injuries. (He jumped in the old astride style before the later "Fosby Flop" rollover action that is now the norm) After the war he could no longer play football or cricket to such a high standard, but he was active in Hatfield sports for the rest of his life.

The other brothers survived the war, Ireton becoming a postman in Harrow, George, a plumber in Barnet, and Eddie, a builder in Potters Bar. Tom became chauffeur to Colonel McCowan, Lord Salisbury's Agent and Les, after many years on the Hatfield Park staff as Bailiff, was for many more years Gate Keeper at the Park Lodge opposite the Station. Some of your readers born in Pre- WW2 days may remember some of them.

Ernest and Louisa had a son and a daughter.

I was lucky to marry Mary and we lived in the family home until work took me north in 1958. Our three daughters were all born there.

You may recall that Smallford Residents' Association received a substantial grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund's *All Our Stories* scheme. Much of this centred on the history of the former railway station there. The grant period is over, but the Project proceeds apace, as you can read, below:

CELEBRATING THE 150th ANNIVERSARY OF THE OPENING OF THE HATFIELD-ST. ALBANS BRANCH LINE

Of course, what is now The Alban Way was once the Hatfield-St Albans Railway. It opened on 16th October 1865 – so this coming October will be the 150th Anniversary – a date for your diary. A range of celebrations are being planned for that weekend. Ideas include:

- ❑ A picnic and guided walk
- ❑ An exhibition of our research findings
- ❑ Dressing up in Victorian/Edwardian clothing – eg station master, passengers
- ❑ The North London Society of Model Engineers (based in Colney Heath) setting up a short railway ride alongside Smallford Station

If you have any ideas, or if you'd like to organise an activity as part of our celebrations, please get in touch with the editors.

ALBAN WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Over the next few years, St Albans District Council plan to improve the Alban Way. This scheme has already started – the Council has received a £30,000 grant to clear a lot of the vegetation along the line, including on and around three platforms/halts – at Smallford, Hill End and Camp Road. Unfortunately nothing is planned by the Welwyn Hatfield Council to clear the platforms at Lemsford Road and Nast Hyde Halt on the Hatfield section of the line.

Smallford station platform after clearance



Stills from the 1933 film of Smallford station



ONE AMAZING FIND

Thanks to Frank Banfield from Ivinghoe, a small group of us Project Members were privileged to watch an old 16mm B&W movie – made in 1933 - by the Finchley Amateur Film Club. The last 10 minutes were filmed around Smallford Station (re-named as 'Southmoor' in the film). It gives a charming glimpse of its past with enamel advertising signs, ornate gas lamps and period station furniture.

So we now have some fantastic 'new' images of the station, from 80 years ago, which provide some wonderful, hitherto unknown evidence of what it actually looked like at the time!

HLHS members can also watch this film on the internet via: www.smallford.org

Alternatively you can watch it on Youtube. Search: *Smallford station in the 1930's*

An exhibition about Smallford Station is now on display at Hatfield Library until March 7th.

Many thanks to project leader Jeff Lewis and the Colney Heath Chronicle for the article.