

*From Hetfelle to Hatfield - over 1000 years of history*

## HATFIELD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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### On The Trail Of The East Indian Chief

What's in a name? Well, a pub name to be precise; *The East Indian Chief*. This was the question asked of us by Mrs Anne Todd whose home in the Old Town was once that pub. The building started off as a home, called 'New House', for butcher Nathaniel Phipp who had it constructed in 1715. His business premises lay behind it at what is now 6 Fore Street. By 1776 his New House had become a pub and was variously called *The Roebuck*, *Nags Head*, *Marquis of Granby* and *The Full Measure*. In 1838 the pub was an early acquisition of the Pryor family who had just bought the Hatfield Brewery in that same year. But in 1855 they renamed it the East Indian Chief, by which it was known until 1965 when the pub business closed and the building became a home once more. For 40 years Mrs Todd had wanted to find out who the mysterious East Indian Chief was. One suggestion was that a returning soldier, once stationed in India, spent his pension buying the pub and gratefully named it after one of the British military top brass out there. But the 'pension' idea seemed unlikely as the Pryor's Hatfield Brewery owned the pub and it would have been they that renamed it in 1855; not an independent landlord. However, there is an obvious connection with the East India Company who were formed in 1600 to pursue trade with the East Indies. They eventually came to rule large areas of the Indian sub-continent and were supported by their own private army until 1858 when the British Raj took over-all control. In 1806 the Honourable East India Company built a large college in Hailey, near to Hertford Heath. It was created as a 'distinguished centre for scholarship' for those destined to govern British India until 1854 when the college closed. It then became a public school now known as Haileybury College. But what has this to do with Hatfield, you may ask? Well, there were two pubs in the same village with reference to the EIC; one of them was the *East India College Arms* and the other was the Hatfield Brewery owned *Havelock Arms* which, one must assume, was named after the celebrated



General Sir Henry Havelock 'the hero of Lucknow' who died in 1857 after spending most of his military career in India. But it seems doubtful that the brewery would name two fairly local pubs after the same man - therefore we can probably discount him. So, who was the 'Chief'?

The sleuthing continued.....



#### Contact the Editors:

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Chairman: **Mrs Chris Martindale**



Only a couple of photos of the Fore Street pub are known to exist which show *pictorial* images on its inn sign hanging above the pavement. Whilst the images are not too clear, it is plain to see that there is the head and shoulders of a different person on each side. One sports a beard and the other appears clean shaven. The photos were not taken at the same time, but the 'clean shaven' photo is dated 1960. But before trying to identify these images, it is worth noting that pictorial inn signs were quite uncommon a century ago - in the Hatfield area at least! We have sourced over 40 photos of Pryor Reid pubs (amongst others) taken in the late 1800s to early 1900s, and none of them have a pictorial inn sign. Most of them simply have the words painted on eg Horse and Groom, The Eight Bells etc. Some just had their name – and brewery – painted on an outside wall. And this seems to conflict with the notion that inn signs had pictures to identify pubs because many people couldn't read back then! The 1915 photo of the East Indian Chief sign (below) has no picture; just the written words. And this sign was still there in c1940, as dated by another photo which shows a parked motor car of an early 1940s style - possibly a Wolseley 25.



The 1915 sign

However, in 1936 there was an Inn Signs Exhibition held in London where "260 iron and timber signs were seen by 18,000 visitors". This may indicate the renaissance of an earlier art form with the intention to generate new business within the pub trade. The exhibition was, reportedly, just a one-off event but it may have been the start of a movement which gained impetus after the end of WW2 in 1945 when war years austerity gradually heralded in new, imaginative and colourful initiatives.

And John French of the Inn Signs Society wrote to us to say: *"As regards images on signs, it was, and is, usually up to the brewery and not the landlord of a tied house as to the design of a sign. The heyday of pictorial signs tended to be the 1960s & 70s..."*

We know that the East Indian Chief did not have a pictorial inn sign in c1915 and c1940. And we also know that the Pryor Reid owners sold the pub at auction in 1920 to Watford's Benskin Brewery. Therefore it is safe to assume that the inn sign of the East Indian Chief did not have painted images until after the c1940 photo was taken.

Accordingly, it is highly likely that Benskins had the sign painted, perhaps around 1950; this being about 30 years after they bought it or, to put it another way, almost a century after the pub was renamed the East Indian Chief (in the singular) by a previous owner.

Therefore, how would Benskin's have known who the Chief actually was?

Maybe they didn't know and perhaps this was why they chose two candidates?

In any event, surely their images were based upon real, historic people. Perhaps paintings inside the pub gave a clue to the Identities they chose or, maybe, Benskins simply decided who they should be!

As some local users of the old pub could not recall anything specific, we were left to speculate. Extensive internet searches of Commanders-in-Chief associated with mid 1800s India - and images of them - did not yield any plausible likeness to those on the sign.

It was time to call upon some experts in the field....And the cavalry duly arrived!

We sent what information we had plus the photos shown on the front page to the National Army Museum. We received a prompt reply from their Jasdeep Singh whose immediate suggestion for the bearded image was Bahadur Shah Zafar, a Mughal Emperor also known as the 'Last King of Delhi'. He was well respected by the East India Company but, during the 1857 Indian Rebellion, he became a freedom fighter and was made Commander-in-Chief of

the mutiny soldiers. He died in 1862 aged 87. Mr Singh also sent us some images of Zafar which show a great likeness to the bearded person on the pub sign. Bahadur Shah Zafar is also a good candidate because he was clearly a Chief and Indian royalty. The painting of him (right) shows him as an older man than the one on the sign, but their facial features are very similar and both have a well groomed pointed beard. We, at least, are convinced that he is the man on Side 1.



**Bahadur Shah Zafar**

Our attempts to identify the 'clean shaven' character on the reverse of the inn sign led us to research more closely British Commanders-in-Chief in India during the mid 1800s. The best candidate seemed to be Sir Charles Napier who had many pubs named after him, plus statues in Trafalgar Square and one near to Hyde Park. But, like the others, no painting or photo of him could be said to resemble the chap on Side 2 of the East Indian Chief sign. But another suggestion by Mr Singh of the National Army Museum led us to Sir William Gomm who was C-in-C in India from 1851 to 1856. And, like some other candidates, he had fought in the Napoleonic Wars, including the battle of Waterloo, around 40 years earlier.



Of course the grainy image of the inn sign photo on the right is far from clear, but there are certainly facial similarities with a cartoon of Sir William which featured in a Vanity Fair magazine in 1853 - and a portrait. No other C-in-C we found came close!



In conclusion, both Zafar and Gomm would have been friendly disposed towards one another in 1855 when the pub was named the East Indian Chief by the Pryor Reid brewers - and this being a time two years before Zafar joined the mutiny against the British. But the Pryor Reid 'Chief' may not have been either of these men. Perhaps it was the Benskins brewery, a century later, who decided to depict those two leaders because they co-existed during a period of amity.

One is reminded that in 1947 India gained independence from Britain, so the inn sign may have been created thus for sensitive political reasons at around this time?

Has anybody else got a suggestion?



**Sir William Gomm**

## **CENTENARY YEAR FOR THE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE**

The Women's Institute movement began in Canada in 1897 further to meetings held by the wives of farmers who wanted to improve conditions in rural life for themselves, and their children through discussion and the exchange of ideas. The movement spread to Britain and the first WI meeting took place at Anglesey in 1915. Again, its objective here was to revitalise rural communities. And in this, the centenary year, the UK's movement is still going strong. Hatfield's Roe Green branch was formed in 1921 and held their meetings in the old Mission Room; the green 'Iron church' in Roe Green Lane (now College Lane) which was demolished in the 1980s.





A Hatfield Herald newspaper report from 50 years ago reveals that, *'Roe Green WI lapsed for a few years, but reformed in 1934 under the guidance of a Miss M.Sherriff'*.

Two well known past Presidents of Roe Green WI were Lady Katherine Seymour (1937-38) and Viscount Plumme (1939-40). And Barbara Cartland was a member of the Wild Hill WI which was part of the Roe Hill group for many years.

But aside from scant information like this, the branch are not aware who started it or who the first president was as, unfortunately, much of their archives were accidentally discarded many years ago.

After vacating their Mission Hall venue they moved on to Roe Hill Pavilion for a few years before moving to their current meeting place at Oxlease Methodist Church.

In 1965 a bazaar was held to raise funds to buy a Public Clock for Hatfield, and a ceremony was organised. And on 7th October 1967, Mrs C.L.Cater, President of the Roe Hill WI, donated the clock which was fixed above the entrance to the Arcade nearest the Market Place. A plaque beneath the clock stated that it was given to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of the National Federation of Women's Institutes. Also in attendance at the unveiling were Dr.W.A.Chapman of the New Towns Commission and former Roe Green WI leader Miss M. Sherriff. Cllr Windebank called it, "A splendid gift and a great day for Hatfield"

Roe Hill's Val Halliday says,"*At present our members are aged 50 to over 90. We are not bound by the jam and Jerusalem image or the famous risqué calendar image from the film starring Julie Walters and Helen Mirren. But we are, actually, interested and inspired women who are looking to make new friends, learn what is going on in the community and help where we can. We have up-to-date speakers on various subjects and we hear news from our international link with New Zealand. As a national organisation we vote on a resolution each year to be taken forward and campaign on topical issues.*

*We are part of a group –with two other institutes (there used to be six to eight) around Hatfield. While some institutes have closed through lack of membership, some new ones are opening up! We have group meetings each year and also attend special events.*

*As it is the centenary there are lots of countrywide events happening. By the time you read this the Centenary Baton will have passed through our area and some of us will have attended the celebration lunch at Northaw in May.*

*Our own WI at Roe Green will be having a special meeting in September – the month the National Federation was formed.*

*We also have at least four members that belong to the Hatfield History Society!"*

If you have any historic information about the Roe Green WI please contact them:

They meet at Oxlease Methodist Church, Woods Avenue, Hatfield on 2nd Tuesday each month @ 7.30pm"



The clock on the town centre Arcade which the Roe Green branch donated in 1967

Photo by Ken Wright



Roe Hill WI give serious consideration to a risqué 'Calendar Girls' fundraiser