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HATFIELD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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ROE HILL HOUSE YOUTH CLUB

Roe Hill House was built in Chantry Lane in 1905. Now demolished, it stood roughly opposite the ex Water Board site on what is now Bishops Rise. Its first occupant was Oliver Bury, a director of the Great Northern Railway. The WEA book about Roe Green recounts that, "...he would ride from the house in his carriage to Hatfield Station where the 9.09 am train was waiting to take him, first class, to work in London." That train time remained for over half a century and nowadays has only been slightly adjusted to 9.07 am.

During WW2 the house became a training camp for the women's ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Service) branch of the Home Guard where they were given instructions on operating searchlights.

But to many youngsters in the 1960s Roe Hill House was a youth club where the Warden, a Mr Dawson, lived with his wife and children.

Denise Sharman (nee Carter) recalls something of her time there as a member:

"I went to the club from about aged 8. I was told about it by a friend, Pauline Banham, who was in my class at Broad Oaks primary school. I used to call for her and she introduced me to other local girls near the club, who went to Roe Hill House. My dad, who drove a Vespa scooter, would drop me off in the winter but I would walk in the better weather.

I loved the big door we went through, and paying our entrance fee which I think was about 6d or a shilling. I would take more money with me, which I budgeted from my weekly pocket money from my parents, to buy a soft drink, tea, coffee, biscuits and cakes. Another temptation was to put money in the Juke Box to hear your favourite tunes. I remember dancing to the Monkees theme and having my first dance there to it. I'd probably also danced the twist to Cliff Richard tunes and the Dave Clark 5. I can only remember the girls dancing. Looking back it was a very exciting time, being out on your own and having fun with friends.

From when I started there, I continued going into the different age groups until reaching the group that teenagers went to. One of my favourite rooms was the dressing-up room where costumes were kept behind a big velvet curtain.

There were lots to choose from and we'd try on things like a long dress and a fox fur.

Occasionally some boys would burst in and us girls would shoo them out. There we'd



Roe Hill House c1960 by Ken Wright

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make up our own short shows and pretend to sing on stage. I remember the ceiling rose was very grand in that room but the electric lights were otherwise just bare bulbs and quite often it was a joke for someone to rush in and turn the lights out and run off again. Then there would be a chase to find the person doing this and, when found, to then inform one of the 'helpers' - which is what we called the people in charge of the different rooms and activities. There was no real harsh telling off but just a warning to be careful.

There was a 'quiet room' next door to the dressing-up room which was small and had a few chairs in and books on shelves. Rarely did I spend much time in there as I could read books at home but sometimes I would sit to get my breath back five minutes before going on to the next exciting room.

Another favourite - and this was a great place to let off steam - was the gym, as it was called. There were usually two or three helpers in the room and it was fitted out with a large slide, some ropes and climbing equipment which I think were made of wood, and were fitted together at different heights, possibly starting with some benches. I remember when we went into this room it was busy with children rushing around; climbing jumping, shouting and laughing.

There was always a popular man who helped out called Mr Ellis. He would help where needed in the room but when we requested he would catch us from the slide and swing us around. He never seemed to tire and was always a great sport and the boys would run rings around him. He was very firm but nice if he thought things were getting too rough. I think the boys sometimes did play-fighting on a blue mat.

There were many stairs in the house. The banisters seemed to go on forever. When you looked up you could see what we were told was the Loft. I think it had big nets over it and I once heard that you could go up to do the ghost walk if you were brave, but I never met anyone who had been up there except the two boys that lived in the house with their parents, Mr and Mrs Dawson. They were good folk and organised events like Christmas parties, film shows and bonfire nights. I remember a couple of summers when we could go swimming in a big rigid, round, pool in the garden. The first time I'd climbed up a ladder to get into a pool! I guess we only used it on hot summer evenings.

The last room I remember using was the Billiards Room. You had to wait your turn to get a game. You could watch quietly and were taught how to play, being careful of the very large table with its special baize cloth. I was always afraid I would rip it but never did. We were warned it was very expensive to replace and I think we were told we would have to foot the bill, should we damage it. I was always fascinated by the huge (it seemed) light above the table, suspended from the ceiling.

HLHS's Jon Brindle was a classmate of Denise and also attended Roe Hill House. He writes:

My recollections as a member are more associated with my interests as an 11 year old boy. I remember a small 5 a-side grass football pitch to the right of the main entrance. I would spend a lot of time on it. I believe it was floodlit to some extent.

Indoors, the Jukebox was a particular attraction, but it is mid 60s songs by the Rolling Stones which spring to mind from those days. Another favourite activity was wrestling on the gym 'horse'. Two boys would sit on it facing each other and try to dislodge his opponent. It was good rough and tumble fun but probably wouldn't be allowed these days.



RHH by Ken Wright

By Terry Pankhurst

Further to your article on agriculture at de Havilland's and the Lightning crash at the end of the runway. The professional photographer waiting ready with camera in hand was my late neighbours father Frank Meads from Essenden. I always thought it very suspicious that Frank, complete with camera should be at the end of the runway as his friend was flying in. I always wondered if it was not some sort of pre-planned stunt that was going to be performed that went badly wrong. Officially the aircraft suffered an "auto trim runaway" that suddenly made the aircraft uncontrollable. Certainly George Aired was lucky to survive such a crash with the aircraft in a vertical position, and I'm told he is still alive today.

I was still an apprentice with de Havilland and can remember hearing about the crash, then, not knowing the pilot had survived, while working on a trial drooped, fixed, leading edge on the Trident. This was a wooden construction to see how it improved the takeoff performance. As a result of these tests a retractable leading edge was later designed as a feature of the aircraft.

As a young teenager I was devastated at the news that an aircraft crash had occurred. I was working on things that killed people and I found that hard. I was largely working with men who had been through the war, and the news never bothered them. I soon came back to normality and accepted that these things happen, get on with it.

TIGER MOTH RESTORATION PROGRESS REPORT

In our edition no. 104 March 2017, we reported on a Hatfield built Tiger Moth: N-5490, which is being restored in Seattle, Washington by its owner - expat Ian Grace. He is carrying out a meticulous project to return N-5490 to full airworthiness. It will be restored as closely as possible to its 1938 specification and 20 E&RFTS (Elementary & Reserve Flying Training School) colours, including its original pre-war instrumentation, and full night flying equipment. The end result is expected to be the most authentically restored Tiger Moth to date. Last year, Ian decided to work on the cabling for the aircraft. Getting a new set of the correct original control cables, and associated parts (turnbuckles, shackles, special pins etc) proved to be more difficult than he first thought. Luckily he was put in touch with two restoration engineers at Old Warden. They helped him to source the parts he needed. When he had assembled all the cables and parts, he had them white cadmium plated, as per the originals.



The cable set completed at Old Warden
for N-5490

He then shipped the set to Old Warden, where their engineers (who make the cables for the aircraft of the Suttleworth Collection) set about hand splicing the cables for the Tiger Moth.

One last thing Ian will do before fitting the cables is to soak them in red-tinted Lanolin, per the original DH corrosion protection scheme. Particularly the fully-exposed rudder cables.

N5490 is well on its way to becoming the most authentic and original Tiger Moth restoration to date, and Ian is fairly confident that if anything lets it down, it won't be the control cables!

More info can be found at www.n4590.org

MIDWIFERY IN THE 1960's By Hazel Bell

In the Spring of 1964 I was due to have my second baby – at home, as my first had been born in hospital, and the official policy then was for second births, when the first had not been medically complicated, to be at home, attended by midwives.

A week before the birth was due I heard Dame Barbara Cartland on BBC Women's Hour complaining of the midwifery system, whereby midwives travelled from call to call by bicycle, and had no radio contact. Dame Barbara deplored the unreliability of this, claiming that all mothers-to-be in her area worried that they might not be able to reach a midwife when one was needed. I scoffed.

We had just moved from Welwyn Garden City to The Ryde, then a new estate lacking road name signs, road surfaces, pavements, and neighbours: a pioneering existence. A few days before another woman had moved in nearby, and I had called to ask her in for coffee. She was not free then, but mentioned, looking at my obvious signs of late pregnancy, that she had once been a nurse and would be happy to help with the baby if ever we needed it.

My mother came to stay when the birth was due, to look after my elder child, eighteen months old. I went into labour in the early evening, and called the midwife, who arrived and told me crossly that it was much too early for her to be needed: I should take two aspirins and go to bed, and she would come back in the morning.

When I staggered to the bathroom at ten o'clock next morning it was very apparent that the midwife was urgently needed – but she was by then out on her rounds, on her bicycle, and could not be reached. My husband carried me

back to bed and I told him, 'The woman with a yellow front door used to be a nurse – get her'. He duly went off to knock on the yellow door, introduced himself and explained; with superb calm our new neighbour said, 'I've just been washing up – my hands are quite clean', crossed the road and delivered my second son. My mother, looking after the first in the garden, unaware of the sudden crisis, saw the lady arrive and thought, 'How kind – a neighbourly enquiry. Perhaps I should offer her a cup of tea'. She came into the bedroom asking politely, 'Can I do anything for you?', and was urgently told 'Yes – hold this leg'. My husband rang our doctor – Dr Murray of Welwyn Garden City – who was engaged in his morning surgery. He came out, looked round the waiting room, and announced 'None of you are urgent – I'm going to a new baby'. He left the would-be patients and came straight to us. After examining the baby, he rang the county Midwives Department to complain, insisting that the Midwifery Supervisor come to join our little group.

When our designated midwife eventually arrived she found a crowded room: the doctor, her own Supervisor, the neighbour, my mother with toddler, my husband, the newborn and me all awaiting her arrival. 'Oh', she said, 'I thought I'd do my urgent calls first'.

When the crowd had dispersed, and she filled out the birth record (B.B.A. – Born Before Arrival), she had to ask me what was the baby's sex.

Hazel K. Bell



1960'S Midwives