

From Hetfelle to Hatfield - over 1000 years of history

HATFIELD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER No. 113 June 2019

LOCAL HEALTHCARE BEFORE THE QE2

Last year saw the 70th anniversary of the formation of the National Health Service in 1948. It was launched with three core principles:

That it meet the needs of everyone; That it be free at the point of delivery; That it be based on clinical need, not the ability to pay.

And locally in 1963, the 500 bed QE2 was the first new NHS funded hospital to open in the country.

But what was healthcare provision like in Hatfield before the NHS?

In her book about the QE2, Angela Eserin writes that before it was built, the main hospital serving Hatfield (and later WGC) was the hospital at Hertford which opened in 1833 as the General Infirmary - beer was brewed there too!

It was supported by local funds with Earl Cowper prominently named as a contributor. The building was 'substantially reconstructed' in 1916, by which time it had been renamed as Hertford County Hospital.

In 1900, the average wage for a local labourer was £2/15s per while weekly rates of insurance to the Hatfield Medical Club was listed as 1/2d per child; 1d per adult and 3d per family. By 1948 costs for this type of scheme were 2d per child and 4d per adult. Average wages were then £5/10s.

In 1935, WGC wanted to upgrade its eight bed Cottage Hospital to a 30 bed general hospital. Hatfield's Rural District Council were approached to join the venture but declined as its doctors were happy with the existing arrangements with Hertford County Hospital.

Research papers written by Shirley Knapp give more insight into Hatfield's medical provision during the following decade. Shirley was a member of the WEA group which published a dozen or so brilliant historical booklets about our town's past. This research was compiled in the late 1950s and

may have been intended to be used in a 'Hatfield Healthcare' volume which wasn't completed; who knows? However, some interesting snippets are to be gleaned.

When the NHS was formed in 1948 Hatfield's population was 8,000 but big plans for an expansion into it becoming a New Town were soon to commence and with it the ensuing matters of infrastructure to address.



NORTHCOTTS: During WW1 the building was used as a hospital for recovering soldiers. In 1919 it became a Child Welfare Clinic and finally a Social Club before demolition c1970.

Contact the Editors:

c/o Mill Green Museum, Hatfield, AL9 5PD

Email: editor@hatfieldhistory.uk

Chairman: **Mrs Chris Martindale**



The medical facilities available at the time and practising under the then new National Health Service were:

6 Doctors*; 2 Dentists; 3 Ophthalmic surgeons; 1 Midwife and 1 Public Health Inspector.

*There was no lady doctor.

Health facilities in the Hatfield of 1948 were noted as:

1. Physiotherapy Clinic and T.B. Dispensary, Northcotts, Great North Road.
2. The Wellfield Public Assistance Institution, at the corner of Wellfield Road and the St. Albans Road (east), being the primary hospital for the aged and run by the HCC.
3. There were three Chemists.

Independent practitioner numbers were not available.

There were 940 OAPs drawing their pension in Hatfield – but not all were necessarily residents.

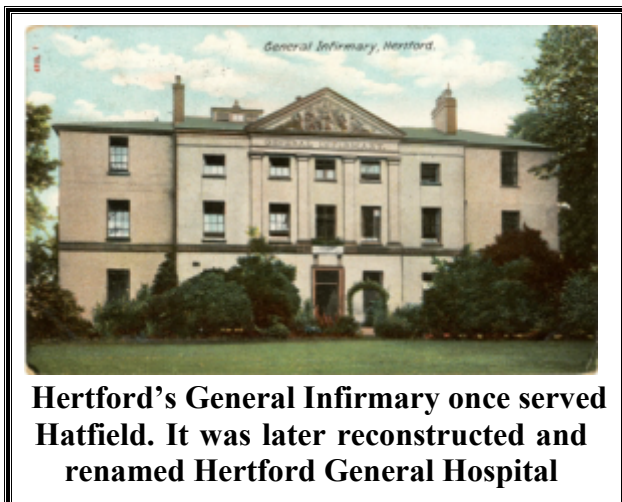
Ten years later in 1958, Hatfield's population was 17,000 and steadily increasing.

And whilst the town's biggest employer, De Havillands, with 9,000 employees, ran its own Health Society, Hatfield New Town now had:

11 Doctors; 4 Dentists; 3 Midwives, 4 Health Visitors; 5 Chemists plus 3 Public Health Inspectors.

By then, Hatfield was mainly served by the St. Albans City Hospital with maternity cases dealt with at WGC's Peartree Hospital.

However, in 1957 construction work on the QE2 site had begun.



Brian Lawrence recalls:

I'm not really sure that I am the best person to compare the pre-NHS with the 1948 NHS as I was only 10 when the NHS was launched and remember very little of what things were like before its introduction. You may need someone a little older and there ain't many of those left!

I was born at home, as many babies were in those pre-War days and as far as I know there was the GP and a District nurse in attendance. Our family was registered with a local doctor, Dr Burvill-Holmes who lived in a large house on the Great North Road, called Eastcote, backing onto the railway, alongside the alley that led up to the footbridge. He was one of the local GP who ran a single practice though he probably had an informal arrangement for one of the other local GPs to cover his absences. Access to his waiting room was through a door from the alley into a small, dark waiting room with just a high window. You sat on benches around the walls and just waited for the GP to call you in – no receptionist or checking in. His consulting room was a shambles and if he prescribed any medicine he would go off to another small room and prepare it. Presumably he would send you off to the local

pharmacist (McSweeney) for other things not in stock? I was never aware of making any payment to him but I know that my father used to pay a small sum each week, in cash, to the National Deposit Friendly Society and maybe that provided some form of insurance. Though the NHS came into force in 1948 its structure was being put in place almost as soon as the Labour government came to power in 1945 and some of the things I recall may have been in that transition period before it effectively started.

I recall a district nurse visiting us at school (Countess Anne's) from time to time to check our ears, nose and throat, to make sure that we had clean hands and finger nails and had no lice in our hair. I also remember one medical examination by another local doctor, Dr. Cardinal who was based in Batterdale and a visit to the school dentist at, I believe, Northcotts.

Before QE II was built most Hatfield people who needed to go to hospital seemed to go to Hertford, though Barnet and St Albans were also used, I believe.

THE COMET: 70th ANNIVERSARY OF THE JET AIRLINER

In 1947 De Havillands completed the building of a 6,000 foot long concrete runway. Being over a mile in length, it was designed to be used for the development of new 'jet age' aircraft. Plans were already in place to construct a passenger jet aeroplane which could carry 36 passengers and mail at high speed and high altitude across the Atlantic and work commenced apace at the Hatfield factory.

On 27th July 1949 the first Comet airliner took off from the runway, piloted by John 'Cat's Eyes' Cunningham and John Wilson, the test run being successful.

The Comet was then acknowledged as the world's first commercial jet to reach production. The Government; BOAC (British Overseas Airways Corporation) and British South American Airways were early customers.

The Americans, perhaps wary of air industry competition, took a keen interest in proceedings and the New York Times' headline about the maiden flight was:

"500 M.P.H. Jet Airliner Is Tested by British; 36-Passenger Craft Will Fly at 40,000 Feet"

The newspaper described some technically advanced features of the Comet and reported De Havilland company officials stating that there was still two to three years work left before "...the craft might be considered as a standard commercial airliner".

During 1951-52 a test hangar was built and named the Comet Shed. A control tower and fire station were added.

Although the early versions of the Comet suffered crashes through design faults,

the various models had a long life in service. The last flight of a Comet was 'Canopus XS 235' in 1997, when operated by the British Aeronautical Society from Boscombe Down. It now resides at Bruntingthorpe Aerodrome and is maintained in "fast Taxi" condition.



This Comet 1 was built in Hatfield in 1952 for the Canadian Pacific Airlines. Unfortunately, due to pilot error, the plane crashed on take-off the day after delivery on March 3rd 1953.

LAW and DISORDER: 1950

In April 1961 the WEA published another booklet as part of their *Hatfield and its People* series. It was titled Law and Disorder. It recorded some criminal activities, court proceedings and policing from the 1400s but stopped short of commenting on aspects of the then more current issues.

In 1948, with Hatfield designated as a New Town, a massive house building programme started and its population was to rapidly treble in size.

And by 1950, the lack of infrastructure planning for one section of the community was becoming quite evident: Teenagers.

And these young incomers soon bemoaned the lack of social amenities – especially compared to WGC – and rising crime was blamed upon them. A newspaper reporter noted that nearby villages fared better than Hatfield.

In 1950, the town's main club was still the parish church's Youth Fellowship and its members weren't particularly welcoming to newcomers.

In commenting about the high rate of juvenile crime, Ron Menday of the Development Corporation called those rootless, teenagers, "scallywags" and he thought they should all attend youth centres. But, in response, two young correspondents to the local 'paper provided their own views about local social problems:

New arrival, Edna Kay (17) wrote, "...just because 90% of of the youth of Hatfield does not belong to a youth organisation, I don't think Mr. Menday has the right to condemn us as young hooligans.... I have heard vague mention of youth clubs but I have never heard anything definite about them.... But I have read about the opportunities of what the (*proposed*) new Technical College will be able to offer and I think this is just what the 90% of 'Ill behaved' young people are after..."

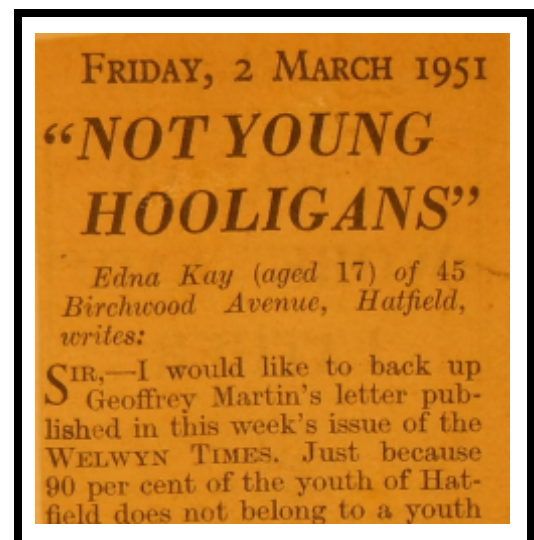
Brenda Smith (17) also bemoaned the lack of recreational facilities, "....and it rankled her that unless one can afford an exorbitant subscription to a tennis club, one has to journey out of Hatfield". Brenda also mentioned the "clique-ishness amongst those few clubs which do exist... and that unless you are born and bred in this town it is with a feeling of being an intruder or upstart that one enters a clubroom".

These comments, it seems, were actually backed by one of the established 'clique' of Hatfield's only thriving youth club; the Parish Church's Youth Fellowship, as member Ann Whittenham (19) replied, "It is true we have cold-shouldered people".

A solution needed to be found, and Breaks was bought, with its 8 acres of land, by the Development Corporation, to become the Hatfield Youth Centre.

When it opened in September 1951 its membership was already full with 168 having joined plus a waiting list too.

And by the end of the decade further youth clubs had been established in the South Hatfield area at Downs Farm, Roe Hill House and St. Johns church.



Important Announcement – The Future of our Society

After more than ten years in the role, Chris Martindale has decided to step down as Chairman of Hatfield Local History Society. Similarly, Heather Richardson, after many years of dedicated service, will be relinquishing the role of Treasurer.

This leaves the committee critically short of volunteers, without which the

Society may have to close at the end of 2019.

The AGM on 10th June 2019 will therefore be important in deciding the Society's future – and we hope that as many members as possible will be able to attend.

The Society requires a number of key roles:

- Chairman
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Events Organiser (Margaret Stephens)
- Publications Officer (Jane Teather)
- Newsletter Editor (Jon Brindle)
- Web Master (Phil Marris)
- Publications Editor (Phil Marris)

The committee therefore invites members to volunteer for the roles of Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer.

Phil Marris has volunteered to take over as Chairman and Chris Martindale has offered to take on the role of Secretary. But the committee would also welcome others to throw their hats into the ring for these two crucial roles.

But what about the Treasurer?

Without one, the Society will be unable to function.

Heather Richardson has kindly offered to stay on as Treasurer until the end of 2019 but, without a replacement, the Society will have no choice but to close at the end of December 2019.

Please consider putting your name forward for Chairman, Secretary and **ESPECIALLY** Treasurer.

The Society will be thirty years old in 2020. What a pity if it fails to reach that milestone and must be wound up.

For more information contact Chris — contact@hatfieldhistory.uk

Dates for Your Diary

Mon 10th June 7.15 pm for a 7.30 pm start.

AGM

Note change of Programme

Old Hatfield Then and Now

A slide show of photos taken by
Martin Stevens in the late 1960s and 2018.

Mon. 9th Sept. 7.15 pm. for a 7.30pm start

Jon Mein
The Revd. Henry Small and
the missing £2000.

Mon. 9th December 2.15 pm
Our Christmas Social meeting

All meetings held at Friendship Hse. Wellfield Road, Hatfield, AL10 0BU
members £1 non-members £2



Park Street in 1968 and (insert) 2018

Visit to Place House, Ware



'The Blue Coat Boy' a restored
statue which formerly stood in a
niche at the entrance to Bluecoat
Yard.

On the 8th May the Society's annual outing visited Place House in Bluecoat Yard, Ware. We were greeted by the Chair of the Hertfordshire Buildings and Preservation Trust (HBPT), Dorothy Abel-Smith who gave an interesting talk on the history of the building as well as outlining the work of the Trust.

Place House was built in the late 13th or early 14th century as the manor house of Ware and was owned by several important people including royalty. In 1685 the building became a school for the young Blue Coat Boys of Christ Hospital. Twelve cottages were built adjacent to the Hall to house the boys and schoolmasters. In 1761 the school moved to new premises in Hertford, but Christ Hospital retain the freehold until 1900 when it was sold.

By 1970, when the Hall was offered to the HBPT, the building had fallen into disrepair. In July 1978, a newly restored hall, was opened by Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. Today the Hall is an amenity for local people.