

From Hetfelle to Hatfield - over 1000 years of history

HATFIELD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER No. 117 June 2020

THE BREAKS MOTORCYCLE DISPLAY TEAM

In 1959 The Hatfield Youth Centre (known to members as Breaks), had been open for eight years when 15-year-old Chris Moulds became a member.

A year later Ron Innocent also joined. Both lads were motorcycle enthusiasts and gave us their recollections.

When they became members, Chris had a Royal Enfield 125cc and Ron an 85cc Francis Barnett bike. Both of their machines, they agreed, were, "... just about good enough to go around in circles!"

Chris would ride his bike on the 'Laundry field near the railway branch line' around Wellfield Road. Ron started out on the fields around Symondshyde Farm; but had his first taste of racing when he was 9 years old, at Rye House where children were invited to ride on the track after motorcross events which he attended there.

By 1960, a few of the Breaks members were now bringing their motor bikes to the club for servicing in an old shed and they'd ride them through the orchard opposite the centre in what is now the Link Walk / Goldings House area.

In around 1961 the growing band of motorcycle enthusiasts were encouraged to form a display team by club warden Bill Salmon.

Not everyone had motorbikes or, more importantly, suitable ones. But after visiting Breaks, Alec Wright, who was the manager of Slocombe's dealership in Neasden, stepped in and generously donated five all-chrome BSA ex motorcycle display machines plus a sidecar to the club (two 500cc bikes and three 350cc ones).

The Breaks Display Team had begun!

Manoeuvres were initially practised on foot in the club hall where they learnt by jogging 'crossovers' etc.

Soon after that they were using push bikes in the hall to do the same routines before going outside to rehearse on the football field.

The team were quick to learn and soon they were performing at events such as fetes and open days. Their proficiency drew them to the attention of the Army's Royal Corps of Signals who came to Hatfield to offer advice and to film the Breaks' team in action. On one occasion they were asked to perform their 'pyramid' routine where up to seven members would be mounted on a



**Members of the Breaks Display Team
practise on the football field c1962**

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Chairman: **Phil Marris**



single 500cc motorbike. It was a well-rehearsed manoeuvre which they had mastered. Nobody wore helmets either. However, perhaps for comedic effect, they were asked to fall off at a certain point, which they agreed to do. As Chris recalled, "We'd never fallen off before". But unfortunately, someone broke his collar bone in the arranged tumble. It was the first time they'd ever had a casualty!

Ron, with his skill and daredevil attitude, was to emerge as the teams' main motorcycle stunt man and was trusted to perform leaps over a line of prostrate fellow members; ride through flaming hoops and shoot up ramps to fly through a 'wall' of paper held up by team mates.

Another stunt involved a pillion rider using a lance to hit a high swinging target. A miss -hit would tip a container of water over the riders. *See the photo below.*

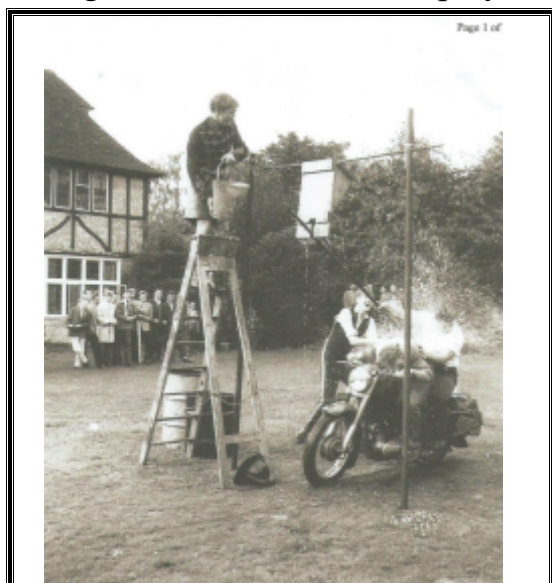
On one display day, a 15 foot steel frame 'tunnel' was erected with straw piled up on either side. The straw was to be doused in slow burning paraffin and then lit.

Ron would then drive through the flames.

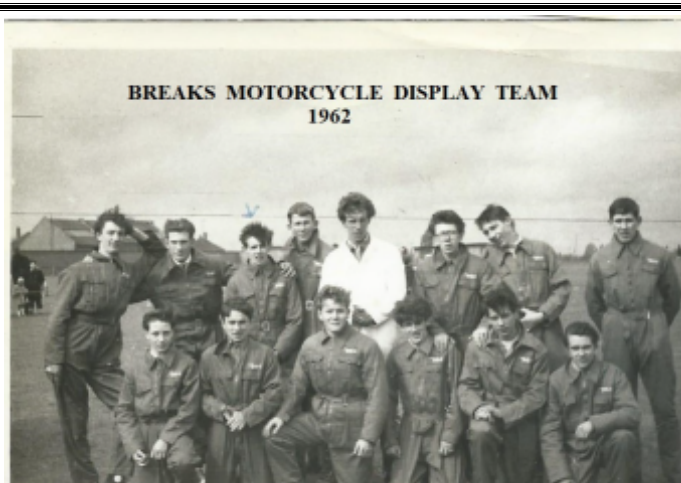
But on the day, and unbeknown to Ron, club Warden Bill Salmon had picked up the wrong can, and doused quick burning petrol on the straw which had a far greater incendiary effect and cost Ron his eyebrows! When he came out of the flaming tunnel, he found that they had been singed off! He was the Display Team's casualty No. 2. One wonders what Health & Safety officers would make of all this now?



Only the wheels of Ron's motorbike can be seen as he drives through the flames on the way to singeing his eyebrows!



Missed! A pair of jousters get soaked in the garden of the Breaks building.



**Back row: Ron Innocent is in the white boiler suit
Front: Chris Moulds kneels 3rd from right.**

LOCAL MEMENTOS

Souvenir cups given to children at De Havas Propellers (Dynamics) in June 1953 to commemorate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

Do you have any souvenirs from those far off days?

Images by Roger Taylor



Nast Hyde Golf Club, Hatfield

In June 2011 we wrote about a pre WW2 golf course on the old airfield, site. In 2018 more information of it was published in the Herts Memories website by Mike Neighbour:

The dawn of the 20th century was a period of building development along the road from St. Albans to Hatfield. The air strip would later be laid on part of the former Harpsfield Hall Farm – Ellenbrook Fields occupies part of this land today. A row of large mainly detached homes began to line the airfield side of St. Albans Road West from opposite Ellenbrook Lane as far as the access road to the police station opposite the Galleria. None of these homes remain today. The occupiers were in well-paid jobs: banking, accountancy and other City based careers. This was the clientele the developers were anticipating, and on the back of the promise of a large number of similar homes – most of which never materialised – and this optimism persuaded the Great Northern Railway Company to construct a halt at Nast Hyde for residents to make the connection at Hatfield for trains to the City.



The houses Mike refers to c1920:

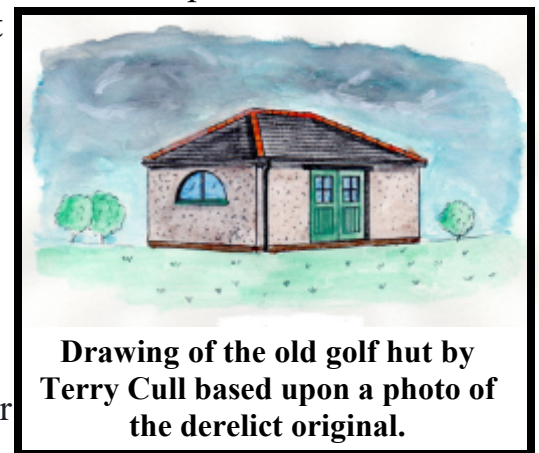
- 1. Holly Close**
- 2 + 3 Northside**
- 4. Highlands**
- 5. Mile House**
- 6. Brook Lodge**
- 7. Longfield House**
- 8. Oakengates**
- 9. Nast Hyde Lodge**

C = Future site of The Comet Hotel

A golf club would be a further social benefit to the residents and was likely to be the kind of facility provided by a developer. So, where was this club? There is a former golf course which identifies it as Nast Hyde Golf Club. I guess the text originally came from a golfing yearbook of 1910. "...the opening of a new railway station about a mile from Hatfield, on 1st February. The station had been built to serve a fine new residential site, and among other features will be an eighteen hole golf course. In 1914 the Secretary was Colonel Schreiber and the professional, E Gow. An eighteen-hole undulating course on good turf, well drained on gravel soil. Subs for gents were £3.3.0 (£3.15) and for ladies £1.1.0 (£1.05). Visitors' fees were 1/- (5p) at any time." Very promising. It seems from the above information that during the period 1910 to 1914 the course was in development; hence the identification of nearby residents as workers on the golf course in the 1911 census. The course, and the houses were part of an attempted sale of land at Great Nast Hyde as early as 1889. The manor house was also a working farm, separate from Little Nast Hyde Farm, and the estate included land on both sides of St Albans Road, including Beech Farm. Eventually, over a period of a decade, some thirty homes were erected, but it was clear that many more were anticipated. By 1914, as soon as the golf course had opened, the dark clouds of war approached and large numbers of men volunteered or were later conscripted for military service, and were therefore lost to the local community and its trades. A further attempt to sell 441 acres of Nast Hyde Estate was made in 1925 by Foster & Cranfield London EC, including what had been the formative golf course, now clearly identified as *36 acres between Coopers Green Lane and St Albans Road West, immediately south of a block of woodland with shooting rights, known as Home Covert. **The average 18 hole course requires 112 acres; A 9 hole course between 20 and 60 acres.-Ed.* The 1925 estate sale brochure gave the option to re-open the former golf course or develop it stating the land was: "eminently suitable for the erection of medium-sized detached houses or bungalows, for which there is a great demand as very little building has been carried out in the district for some years past."

On the bulk of the land available north of St Albans Road, I think it is fair to say not a single additional house was built. The intervention of aeronautical activity at this time – de Havilland Aircraft Company – put paid to that. Most of the activity went on south of St Albans Road West. Although it took a further five years, two fields were developed as the Selwyn and Poplar estates, only part of the latter having been completed before the onset of the Second World War. And the part of the 1927-built Barnet Bypass between the Roehyde Interchange and The Comet Hotel is on former Nast Hyde land purchased at the time. Nine of the homes were constructed on the north side of St Albans Road West, Ellenbrook; on wide plots from the Ellenbrook Lane junction to the later built Harpsfield Shops. Of these number the first four now lay under the University of Hertfordshire de Havilland Campus car park, and another under Mosquito Way roundabout. The last surviving house, called Ellenbrook House when new, and then Ellenbrook Club once the aircraft factory had arrived, was later converted into Hatfield Lodge Hotel. Today, Beale's Hotel is on the site. The two built on the south side of the road, near Ashbury Close, survive, as do those in Wilkins Green Lane. Although the pair of detached homes built on the bend of the original St Albans Road, and the adjacent roadhouse called the Stonehouse, all succumbed to the expansive Galleria car-park. In spite of everything, the land which had just about become a golf course, is still undeveloped. It is within the boundary of Ellenbrook Fields, the country park which has yet to be officially created – look forward to some gravel extraction first, maybe – so there is yet the opportunity for a golf course, though perhaps not 18 holes. It may even sport the title Nast Hyde Golf Course. Speculation!

Footnote: I have yet to discover any photographs of the now-demolished homes, and I still seek an explanation for the naming of the Selwyn estate – possibly the developer, but who, exactly, was he?



Drawing of the old golf hut by Terry Cull based upon a photo of the derelict original.

COVID 19: HISTORY IN THE MAKING

How often do you stop and consider that we are living through history?

This was a question the Newmarket Historical Society put to its members during the current war on the 'invisible enemy', namely the coronavirus pandemic, which has put much of the country into virtual paid house arrest and crashed the economy within just a few weeks of the virus arriving in Britain. It also led to the grim daily death toll announced by news media reminiscent, perhaps, of town criers from centuries ago ringing their bells and giving a roll-call of plague victims.

Things may never be the same again. Pubs, shops and businesses have closed; not all will reopen. Cash payments are now frowned upon and we endured the stockpiling of toilet rolls! And who of us before were familiar with such terms as: furlough, lockdown, self-isolation, social distancing and herd immunity?

They say that the first casualty of war is the truth, and questions are now being raised about the medical validity of the terrible official statistics. Our NHS frontline staff are lauded as heroes whilst hospitals, A&E departments and doctor's surgeries have been strangely quiet. In years to come we will probably have a clearer understanding, and hindsight will inform how effective our handling of the pandemic was.

But, as we are now living through it, what is your perception and experience of the current crisis? Perhaps the Society will consider another Hatfield Voices type book of short quotes?

About this Edition

Due to the Coronavirus, our printers (STEPS) are closed, so we are initially sending out this newsletter as an email attachment. Once things get back to normal, we hope to send out the paper copy.

Dates for your Diary

Due to the “lock-down” and “social-distancing”, diary dates cannot be confirmed. The AGM and other meetings will be rescheduled in due course. Please refer to the HLHS website for further updates:

Mon. 8 June (7.15 p.m. for 7.30 p.m.) – AGM followed by talk – (to be rescheduled):

– “The decline of the many inns of St Albans” by Jon Mein (with some Hatfield inns as well)

Thu. 18 June – visit by coach to de Havilland Aircraft Museum, Salisbury Hall – (to be rescheduled)

Mon. 13 July (2.15 p.m. – 4 p.m.) – Summer social meeting – (perhaps, but to be confirmed)

Mon. 14 Sept. (7.15 p.m. for 7.30 p.m.) – talk by Alastair Cameron:

– “The varying fortunes of the Hatfield & St Albans Railway” – (perhaps, but to be confirmed)

Mon. 14 Dec. (2.15 p.m. – 4 p.m.) – Christmas social meeting – (perhaps, but to be confirmed)

Meetings are held at Friendship House, Wellfield Close, AL10 0BU. Non-members are welcome.
Entrance: £1 for members, £2 for non-members.

The Newsletter (an appeal to members)

This is an invitation for members to submit items to appear in the newsletter, either snippets or full articles. Many of you must have memories or local knowledge (and old photos). We would be delighted to include anything of interest. Please submit ideas to Jon Brindle at editor@hatfieldhistory.uk.

Latest addition to the HLHS Website

The most recent website addition, prepared by Derek Martindale, is a fascinating article (with pictures) taken from the diaries of Sapper Edwin Payne. Edwin was a Hatfield man who kept a diary, took photos with his Box Brownie and made numerous sketches while on military service in WW1. Point your web browser at <https://www.hatfieldhistory.uk/ww1-solders/extract-from-edwin-payne-ww1-diaries/>.

Please email contact@hatfieldhistory.uk if you have ideas for the website (www.hatfieldhistory.uk).

Do you recognise these views of Old Hatfield? (cont’d)

Members will no doubt recall the unidentified Hatfield photos from the 1960s which featured in our recent newsletters. Paul Savage has identified No 91 as the rear of the old London Road (National) School, which was located at the bottom of French Horn Lane near the present-day car showrooms. He remembers going round the back of this building in the 1950s.



No 91 (1968)



No 93 (1968)

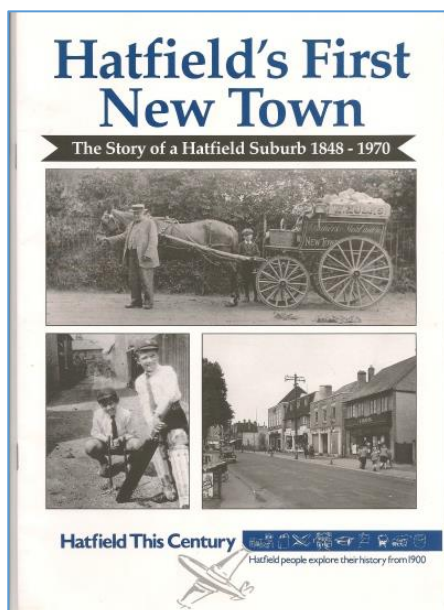
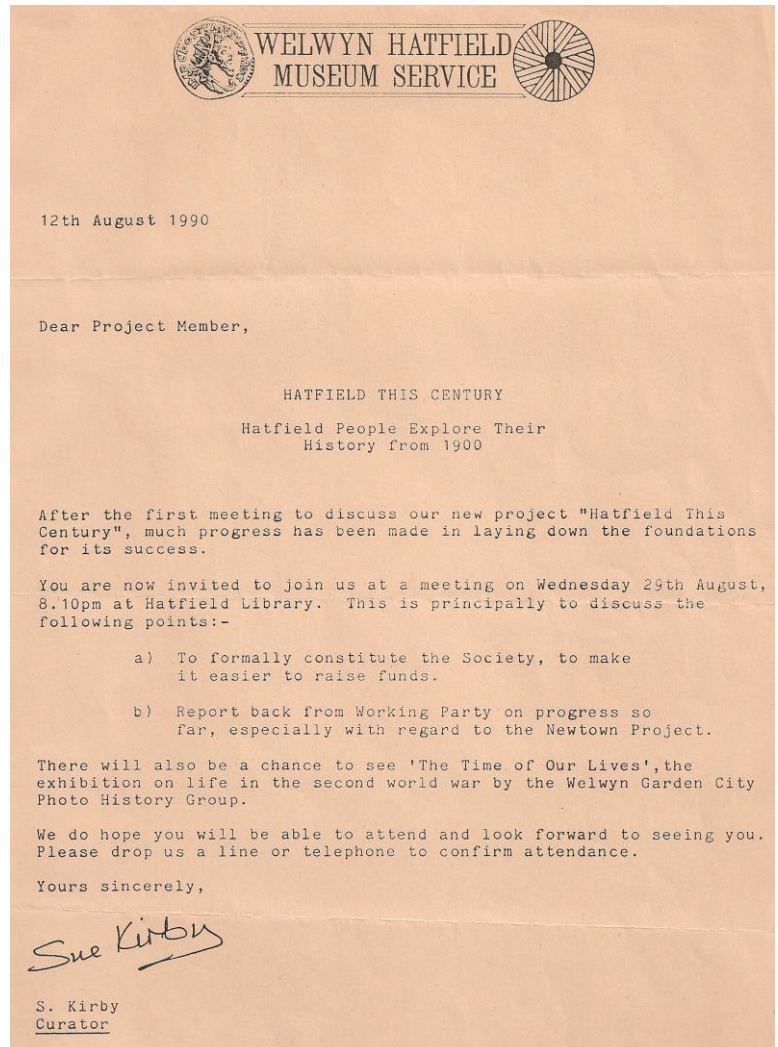
Paul also thinks that No 93 may be Mill Green Lodge, located by the T-junction in Mill Green. Your chairman (who writes this newsletter insert) wonders if other members could comment. The present-day building no longer has an extra gable roof perched atop everything else.

This year marks the Society's 30th Anniversary

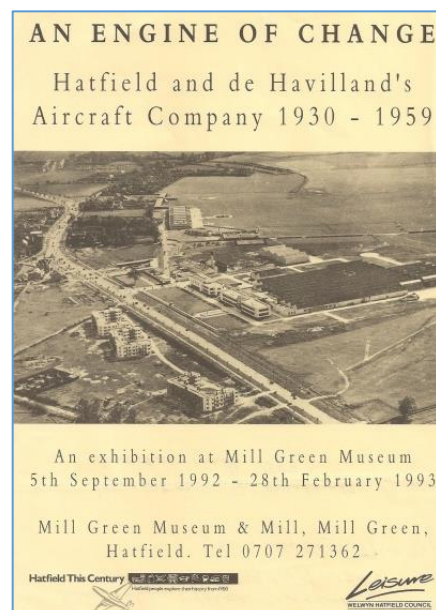
The first meeting took place at Mill Green Museum on 24 May 1990. The society was originally named "Hatfield This Century", with the aim of continuing the work of the W.E.A., which had produced the *Hatfield and its People* series of booklets in the 1960s. At the first AGM, on 2 October 1990, the following officers were elected: Eric Sherrard (chairman), Lynn Smith (secretary) and Derek Jenner (treasurer). Also elected were: Audrey Chapman, Reg Coleman, Stella Cunningham, Shirley Knapp, Karen Smith, and Dennis Watson, with Sue Kirby, curator of Welwyn Hatfield Museum Service co-opted.

The first project was to research the history of the original Newtown, which had been demolished by the Hatfield Development Corporation to make way for the new Town Centre development in the 1950s & 60s. This culminated in *Hatfield's First New Town*, published in 1992. Other early projects included "Oral History Recordings" and the social impact of de Havilland moving to Hatfield.

Towards the end of the 1990s, the society considered a new name for itself in time for the new millennium. One tongue-in-cheek suggestion was "Hatfield Last Century". The name "Hatfield Local History Society" was agreed at the AGM held at Oxlease House on 10 May 1999 – and that is the name we have gone by ever since.



First Publication



First Exhibition