

From Hetfelle to Hatfield - over 1000 years of history

HATFIELD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER No. 119 December 2020

Another look at New Town By Janet Robinson

The book 'Hatfield's First New Town' provided a history of the 7 acre plot of land once used for the livestock of local butchers which, from 1848, became a suburb of the original town - Janet Robinson (nee Tingey) has revisited its history.

What does the word 'Newtown' mean to you today? Your recollections, like mine, may go further back than the Hatfield New Town that was built in the 1950s. Many of you will have read *Hatfield's First New Town* published by Hatfield This Century in 1992, which described how Newtown came into being in the middle of the nineteenth century. When 'Old Hatfield,' with the re-alignment of the Great North Road and the coming of the railway, was expanding, more houses were needed, and when seven acres of land, shaped like a long thin triangle and bordering the St Albans Road, were sold as a number of building plots in 1848 the first section of Newtown came into being. For a short while the residents of old Hatfield called the area California, it being so far west, but soon it gained its more accurate though less colourful designation.

My great-great grandfather and his family moved there from a cottage in the Great North Road sometime in the 1850s; and one son moved his bakery there from The Baker's Arms in Church Street. In 1869 my great grandfather established his small grocery business on St Albans Road. In 1928, his son, John built a larger complex of shop and store-houses opposite and I was born in the flat above in 1935. I first went to school in Newtown House and moved only from the shop to Cranborne Road in 1953. So, yes, I am interested in Newtown and remember it well.

I decided to limit my study to that seven acres which was the oldest part of Newtown and I have not strayed past the former Robin Hood pub. Consequently, in studying the Census from 1851-1911, I have wandered in my head up the old Right of Ways and the cottages that stood between the 'main' road and the Common. In the First Right of Way I was delighted to find that my great grandparents, then teenagers, lived only three doors away from each other. And I am pleased to see how many surnames were familiar to me when I lived there: Bassill, Hulks, Gray, Doggett, Streader, amongst others. The previous study listed the occupations of the families who lived there from 1841-1881. With the benefit of the passing



Tingey's stoneware flagon.
Picture by Andy Tye

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Chairman: **Phil Marris**



years I have gone further. In 1851 there were 62 houses listed in the section of Newtown under study, and 88 in 1911. In them lived between 350 and 390 people.

What did they do for a living?

Extracting occupations from the Census books has shown quite a few changes. The following table shows a selection.

Males	1851	1881	1911
Agricultural Labourers ¹	46	40	3
Labourers ¹	3	11	20
Tradesmen ²	12	24	24
Railway workers ³	2	34	35
Shopkeepers ⁴	6	15	16
“Professional” ⁵	6	1	6
Females			
Straw platters & hat Makers ⁶	28	0	0
Laundresses & washerwomen	4	9	0
Dressmakers and milliners	4	3	0
Domestic servants	4	10	8
Nurses	0	1	5
Retired⁷			
Chelsea Pensioners	2		

1. The number of agricultural labourers had seemingly declined sharply by 1911 but maybe some of the ‘labourers’ listed worked on farms. Other labourers may have been unskilled men who found work in a wide number of settings.

2. The tradesmen were mainly of the building trades plus a blacksmith and a coal merchant.

3. The increase in the number of railwaymen can be explained by the building of the 3 branch lines to Hertford, Luton and St Albans between 1858 and 1865.

4. As befits the size of the area there was a basic number (2-3) of food shops plus a scatter through the years of a tailor, shoemaker etc.

5. The “professionals” numbered amongst them, a schoolmaster, police inspector, curate and landlord in 1851 but had generally moved on in later years, though in 1911 the Director of the Hatfield Brewery, a Surveyor and two insurance agents had moved in.

6. The biggest change of all was the number of women in the early years who were out-workers in the straw plaiting and Brazilian Hat making industries. There are twelve straw plaiting “manufacturers” in St Albans listed in an 1851 Directory, so I suspect that the women in Hatfield were given out the straw etc. by one or two of them. The number employed reached a peak of 35 in 1861, dwindling to 6 women ten years later and after that there were none. Most married women had no occupation listed [Bringing up and feeding a family of six or eight children, and supporting a husband has perhaps never been regarded as an occupation!]

7. The old soldiers received their pension in cash from an agent and were known as Chelsea

Out-Pensioners. There were none listed after 1861. There were ‘Annuitants’ and Almsmen and women but not in the years that I have selected.

While straw plaiting disappeared, a few occupations were new by the end of the century. There was a gas worker, a coach builder and a motor apprentice amongst the tradesmen, and Newtown boasted a Confectioners.

The number of Publicans was roughly consistent with the number of Public houses: *Robin Hood, Boar and Castle, White Lion* and *The Gun* – nicely quartering the area. Over the years several of the proprietors had part time jobs, and in 1891 Susan Tremlett was the landlord of the Boar and Castle having taken over from her dead husband. The Canham family at The Gun were there from sometime in the 1860s and were still there when I lived in Newtown in the ‘40s.

Of course, there were more public houses down Union Lane - *The Prince of Wales* and *The Rose and Crown*.

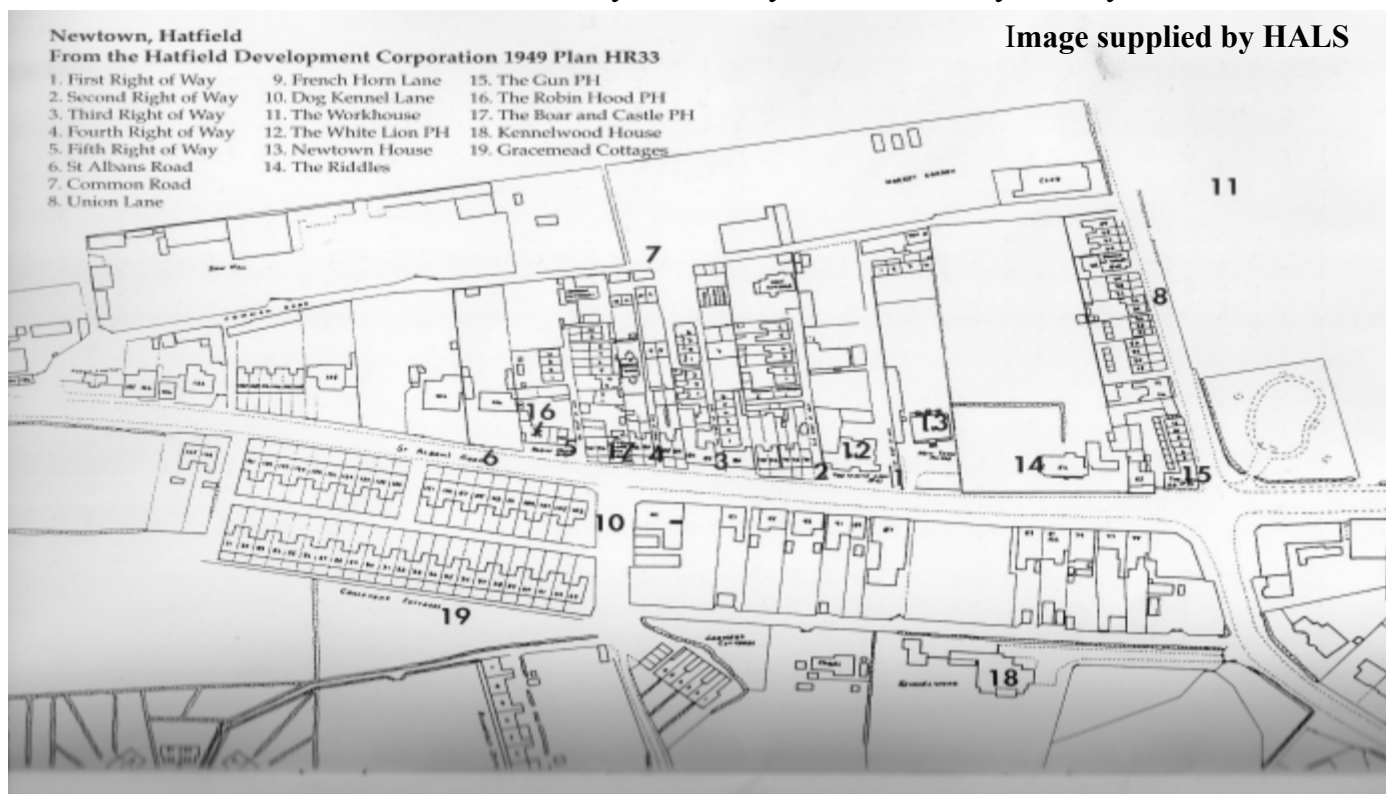
Interesting that in the 1911 census Edward Higgs is living at the Riddles and in the First Right of Way there are three cottages named Higgs Cottages.

Mr and Mrs Higgs were described as “Living on their own means” so perhaps they rented out some of the cottages?

To conclude this little survey of Newtown on a more personal note, I give you thumbnail sketches of my grandfather’s relationship with two of the pubs. It was at The Gun, so he told me, that he once met the Fox twins, Albert Ebenezer and Ebenezer Albert, the notorious poachers from Stevenage. It was at the White Lion – his favourite haunt – where apparently, if he met a soldier in the bar, he would shake the latter’s hand and leave half a crown in it.

Further to Janet’s article, above, we asked her a few questions relating to who built and rented the properties and what living conditions were like:

I know that the “Riddles” was sold in several lots, so I imagine that smallish builders built a few houses each and I remember that they were very different. As you may remember – I



don't know how well you knew them - some houses, like the first Belmont cottages nearest to the St Albans Road were sideways on to the Right of way. I think there were two semi-detached. I believe my grandfather started married life in No. 4 Belmont cottages. He was married in 1906 and was there in the 1911 census – my father having been born there in 1908. I used to visit the Doggetts in one of them. They were quite cosy little cottages built of London stock bricks, but very small. There were 12 in number. I think that, looking at the 1898 map, that the Belmont cottages went all the way up to the Common. Then, of course, there was a row facing St Albans Road that were built of flint.

As always it is a case of “Why did I not ask my father? I am sure he could have told me much more but he did tell me quite a lot. I have just managed to find what he wrote down about the Rights of Way. Of course, when he refers to “the shop” he means Tingeys – and sometimes means the old shop which was on the corner of the third R of W and was later a tobacconist and barbers owned by Charlie Moore. Some of my random memories: In the First Right of Way, when I was a child, there was also a small grocery shop run by a Mrs Winifred Pearman. She used to purchase wholesale goods from Tingeys (No Bookers or local wholesalers back in those days).

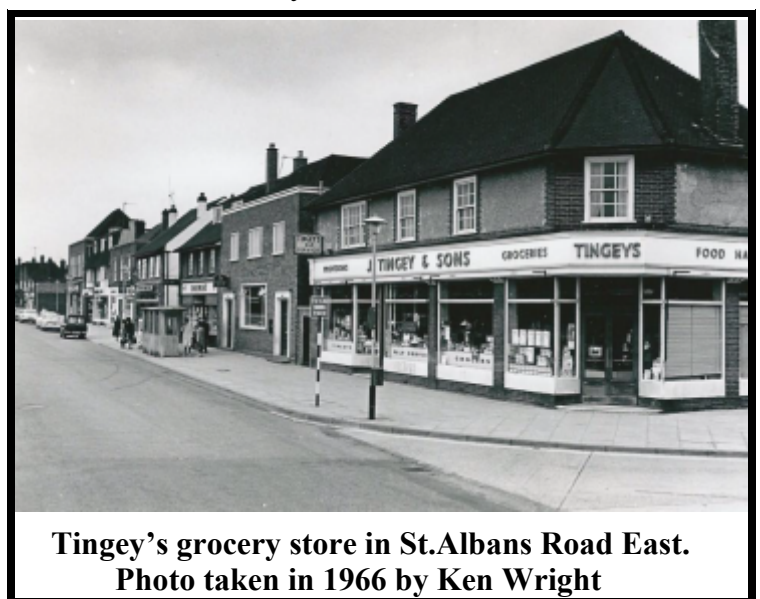
At the top of the Second Right of Way there was quite a pretty cottage with a garden at the front. I knew the daughter, an Elsie Epps – perhaps, like me, she went to Newtown House.

The garden contained a large well which contained clear, sweet water.

There were cottages sideways on behind

the bakery of the Third Right of Way and more cottages further up. Old Mrs Grey lived in one. Her husband had been a fine carpenter. She was an interesting and slightly fearsome lady who knew the birthdays of almost everyone in Newtown. I remember one Christmas my mother and I went up to take her a small present and she insisted on giving us a tumbler each of her blackberry wine. We came away in the dark, stumbling on the rough ground and holding each other with linked arms for we were very merry.

[One of the Powells – a woman called Lucky – was, I seem to remember, a strapping soul. Who lived in one of the two or three cottages on the St Albans Road to the west of the Boar and Castle. My mother told me - and how she heard about it I don't know – that her husband in the pub one night, shouted over to another local man “Was that you in the bed last night? ‘Cos if it was, move over a bit another time. I had no blankets”].



**Tingeys' grocery store in St. Albans Road East.
Photo taken in 1966 by Ken Wright**

The following is an account of the New Town written by Janet's father, Randall, c1980:

Right of Ways

There were five of these and they were known by number, starting at the East end on the stretch of St Albans road from The Gun to the Robin Hood. There were two other pubs in this stretch: The White Lion and the Boar and Castle. I was born in the 4th R of W next to the Boar and Castle in 4 Belmont Cottages, but I remember little of it except that the lavatory was in the garden adjoining the cart shed which belonged to the shop. Each R of W had its

own character and characters. The First was an open path on the left side going up and on the right was the garden wall of Newtown House. In my earliest memory this small private school was run by the two Misses Goody and later by Miss Thomas. Janet attended it in her first school days. At the top of this R of W were several cottages and wooden buildings. In one of the latter a shoemaker or "snob", Mr. Osborne, plied his trade. Vic Cull as a boy delivered and collected boots for him. On the left hand side was a large brick building which had various uses. It was the meeting house for the Band of Hope and the Salvation Army and during the war became the British Restaurant serving midday meals at a very reasonable price. The White Lion was also in this R of W.

The Second was composed of cottages and one block of three storied houses built in the same style and brick as the building on the First R of W, but whether they were in any way connected or erected by the same builder I do not know. The Third was a passage wide enough for a horse and cart to go through to the Common at the top. At the front facing on to St. Albans road on one corner was our old shop and on the other Hulks bakery and shop. The Misses Hulks, Ettie and Nina lived at the shop [though later they moved up to the house that their brother Will, I think, built for them. Nina always wore a woolly hat in the house.] Besides bread they sold Lipton's teas and a few biscuits, Hot cross buns at Easter. The bakery buildings were old but fascinating to us boys watching the bread being drawn from the big brick oven.

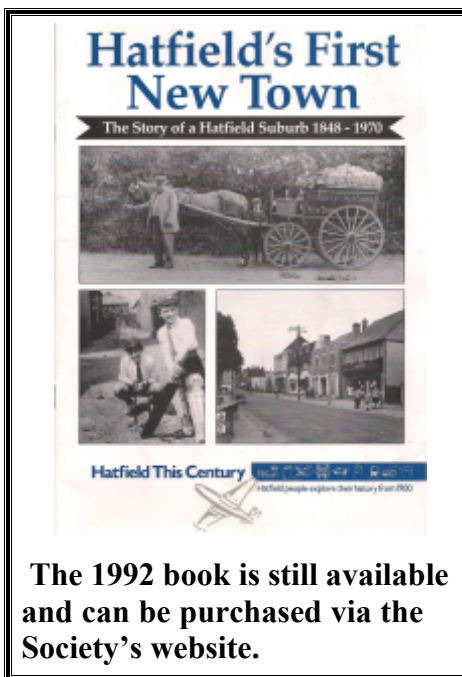
The Fourth was a footpath more or less and had a gate at the top. It was mostly cottages including the Belmont Cottages (of which there were 12) where I was born. One of the cottages had a shed where a barber worked. Although no professional, he was cheap enough charging 2d for boys.

The Fifth was an assortment of old cottages standing back from the track. The surfaces of the road and pathways were nearly all very rough and in a bad state. After rain or snow they were almost impassable. At the rear of the Boar and Castle in this R of W was a cellar which we rented for the storage of cheese, butter and bacon. To get these items into the cellar one had to borrow from the pub the slide on which barrels of beer were lowered. Many a time the cellar was flooded and panic ensued. The goods had to be lifted on to empty wooden crates. At night in the winter the only means of light was a hurricane lantern.

There were several odd characters living in the cottages, one being Kate Bunyan, a tiny little woman with a very large husband whom she ruled with a rod of iron. Some days she would come into the shop twice for a pennyworth of tea. My father would pull her leg. If she were to go on complaining about her husband, my father would say "What did you do, Kate? Hammer his knees till he fell?" And she would laugh, lift up her apron and scurry out of the shop.

Mr. Holmes lived in one of the cottages and for a living went round selling fish from a home made trailer attached to his bicycle.

On the left side of the Fifth stood a cottage and the Robin Hood facing the road. At one time pre-war on Fridays a trader came and rented the space in front of the pub and erected a stall to sell various groceries and provisions. At evening time it would be lit by paraffin lamp which had a wide burner. On other occasions I remember china etc. being sold there.



Since both the Robin Hood and the Boar & Castle were almost opposite our shop there was quite a lot of chatter and shouting at turning out time as the customers shouted their last good-nights. One old farm labourer having been turned out of the B&C for being drunk picked up a brick and threw it meaning to break the pub window. Unfortunately, being somewhat wobbly, he had accidentally twisted round and broke one of the shop windows. Up before the beak he apologized, "Yer honour I am very sorry, I wouldna broke old John's winder for anything."

Draught beer was chiefly sold and it would amuse us to see a number of the nearby residents pop into the Public bars with a jug under their aprons to get a pint.

Mrs. Viner lived in the 5th. She wore voluminous skirts, and was splay footed so that her shoes always appeared much too large. She was a quiet old lady not asking much of life but had a penchant for attending funerals and weddings as an onlooker and could be seen at St Luke's waiting for a cortege to arrive. At the old shop she was known as Clara.

Lucky Powell lived in a cottage beside the 5th, facing the road. The Powell family were contemporaries of our family. One was a friend of my grandfather, Jonathan Edmund. As far as I know he was a man of no fixed trade but engaged in a number. His family had property in the form of cottages around Newtown and I believe in the St. Albans district. He could be seen walking about with a sack of tools or roof tiles to do repairs on his properties. In my youth I remember seeing him building a bungalow near Downs Farm called later Waterdell. This he accomplished almost single handed over a long period. A Mr. and Mrs. Gorton lived there when I started work and I used to deliver there. According to my father, Tom Powell used to walk to London and back in his younger days. As an old man he was pushed about in an old bath chair.

By Randall Tingey

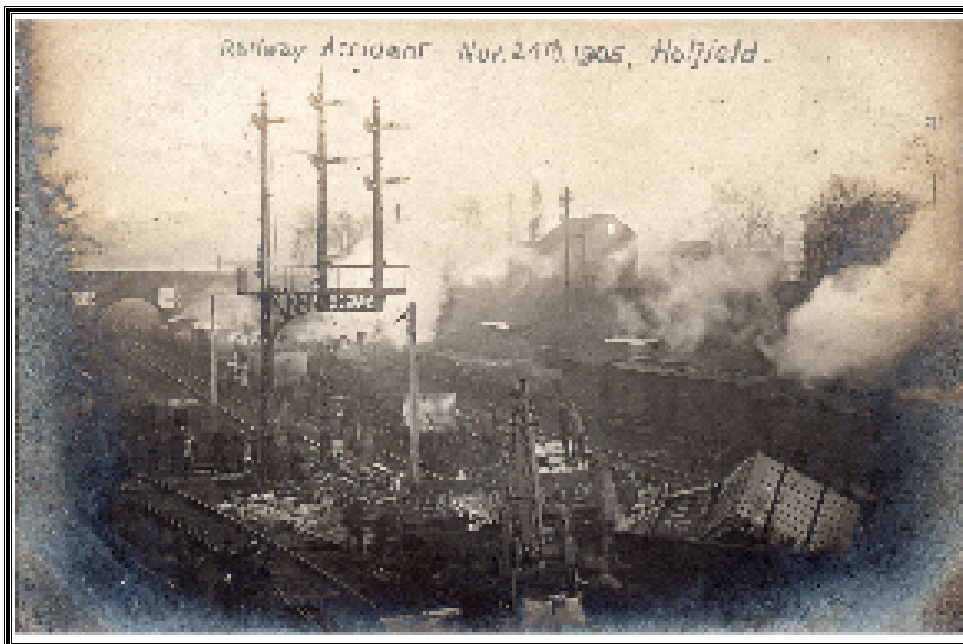
FURTHER INFO Re Terry Cull's RAILCRASH ARTICLE in September's edition From Terry Pankhurst...

Having read the interesting article on Hatfield railway accidents may I add the to the general wealth of knowledge. I have a card (see attached) of an accident not mentioned in the article. It took place 24th November 1905 and within 4 days a postcard was produced and sold to the public. The card was sent to an address in Peterborough, the writer clearly being a railway worker. It reads: This was taken 4 hours after the accident all roads were completely blocked till 10am, then they only cleared up mains.

Wagons were piled 3 high
this is only a mere part of it;
it was a sight, and I had
My work cut out as I was
Early turn I had 30 SP
handed in same time.

Unsigned.

**Quite what SP means I'm
unsure, a railway person
may know, equally mains
must be main line.
I hope this is of interest.*



Message from the Chairman

Covid-19 restrictions continue to limit the society's activities although the committee does hold its committee meetings using the Zoom video-conferencing software. We don't know when talks and outings might be able to resume but will keep you informed. We were unable to hold the AGM this year but hope to do so in 2021. For now, all that remains is for the committee to wish you all a very Merry Christmas.

Phil Marris (Chairman)

David Reginald Willson 23rd March 1931 – 2nd October 2020

It is with great sadness I must tell you of the death of David Willson at the age of 89. David was a loyal member of Hatfield Local History Society and served on our Committee from May 2003 to May 2012. His phenomenal memory was always a great help for any of us researching Hatfield's history. Our newsletter editor Jon Brindle said, "David had been a 'go-to' person for me over the years" when looking for information.

As a schoolboy, David lost his sight in the WW2 St Audrey's bombing on 10th October 1940. Despite this disability, he went on to spend his working life at de Havilland, Hawker Siddeley and British Aerospace. The photograph shows David in May 1971 with his first guide-dog, Trudie, and is believed to have been taken on the day he 'graduated' from his training with Trudie.



I have good memories of David on the Committee and at meetings, but I also remember David walking up Briars Lane with his guide dog before I ever got to know him in the history society. That was quite some time ago!

Chris Martindale

Air-raid shelter at de Havilland

The September 2020 newsletter (No. 118) featured the 1940 bombing of de Havilland. Albert Jackson has responded with some interesting information. He writes, "The article on the bombing of DH's had a photo of an air-raid shelter. There is one still in existence although not accessible. When I worked in the Personnel Dept., we used one that is under the office (now KFC). It was complete even with numbered coat-hooks and benches. It was accessed by a flight of steps and a locked door. The stairway is now covered to prevent access, so I assume not in use. We used it as archive and storage space (e.g. gifts for the children's DH Christmas party.)"

A painting by Beresford Johnson turns up in Australia

From time to time, we receive interesting queries via the Contact Form on the HLHS website (<https://www.hatfieldhistory.uk/>). One such arrived in early October from David E Jackson, who wrote, “I am interested in finding out more about a local artist Beresford Johnson who painted from 1930-60s in the Hatfield area. I have recently found a BJ watercolour ‘Bridge in the Lake District’ signed ‘Beresford Johnson 71’ at my local charity shop in Perth, Western Australia and, although it is signed, I have no idea whether it is genuine. Do you have any information about his works? Any help would be gratefully received”.

David provided a photograph of the painting and the label on the back (see right). Also shown is a blow-up of the artist’s signature. I reached for my copy of *A Walk Around Old Hatfield* by Gladys Brown (published 1997) and there was one of BJ’s sketches with an identical signature. So, David Jackson’s painting was obviously genuine.

And that seemed nicely to conclude the matter – but there was then an unexpected twist. David Jackson discovered a similar painting, with an identical title, which had sold at auction in 2014 in the USA for \$65. David commented on the low price, “Sadly I won’t be able to retire anytime soon”. He added, “I have to say that [the latter] painting is much more subtle. My version is more of a draft or sketch, perhaps a Christmas/Wedding gift for a friend? Which leads me to wonder who the couple are on the bridge. They seem disproportionately large to me, as if the artist was deliberately trying to highlight them; a gift to the happy couple perhaps?”

If members have any comments on this article, perhaps they could let me know. David Jackson is continuing to research his painting and, if more information turns up, it would be nice to find space for it in the quarterly newsletter.

Phil Marris

Facebook

In closing, those of you who use social media may know that Hatfield Local History Society has its own Facebook page. But, in case you are unaware, the page can be found at: <https://www.facebook.com/HatfieldLocalHistorySociety>. Do have a look.

