Hatfield Local History Society
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HATFIELD CHRISTMAS CARDS



Christmas will soon be upon us and with this in mind here are five seasonal views of Hatfield on cards which are in a collection held at Mill Green Museum.

The first is an impression of "*Fore Street in Victorian Times*" painted by Patricia Hall. This card was sent out by the late Councillor Alf Appleby, then Chairman of Welwyn Hatfield Council, and his wife, Irene. In 1991 Alf was also Chairman of Hatfield Town Council.



The second card has "*Season's Greeting and Best Wishes for the coming year from all at 'Breaks"*. The drawing is of Breaks Manor, built in 1930. It was here in September 1951 that the Hatfield Youth Club was opened by Lady Cranborne. This voluntary organisation is now called Breaks Manor Youth and Community Centre.

The next shows a snowy scene of the cottages in the grounds of St Etheldreda's Church. On the reverse of the card the caption is "*The Bakers Arms, Church Street"* but is this right? Should the caption be Church Cottages?



Following this is a design by Stacy Lawrence-Carr of the Eight Bells public house. The caption on the back of the card is "*A small public house in which Bill Sykes and his dog found refuge when fleeing*

CONTENTS

Hatfield Christmas cards 1
The Architecture of Hatfield New Town: Success or Failure? 2
Book review: *Hatfield, all our Yesteryears* 5
Society News 6





justice mentioned in the book Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens".

Lastly, "*Season's Greetings*" from Mill Green Museum and Mill, with another snowy scene – this time of the Mill and Mill House. Many a Christmas must have been celebrated on this site; the mill was mentioned in the Domesday Book.

Merry Christmas to you all!

Christine Martindale

THE ARCHITECTURE OF HATFIELD NEW TOWN: SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

Addressing the Society on 9 September, Geoffrey Hollis outlined the history of our New Town. He spoke of the coming of the railway workers in the mid nineteenth century, which caused cottages to be built for them — at a distance from Hatfield House, thus changing the topography of the district; of the arrival of Geoffrey de Havilland with his aircraft industry in 1930, necessitating more houses in Birchwood and Hatfield Garden Village; and of Hatfield's being named as one of the satellite towns around London which were proposed in 1944 by Sir Patrick Abercrombie. Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City were declared New Towns in 1948, with Lionel Brett, later Lord Esher, as chief Architect-Planner for Hatfield.

Hatfield already had a significant number of existing buildings and Brett had some difficulty in introducing new developments on a large scale. In the postwar period materials (and men) were in short supply, except for aluminium which was used to roof houses in several new roads near Hilltop. Many of these were blown off in the tornado of 4 November 1957. Several leading architects worked on Hatfield, including Maxwell Fry, Jane Drew, Basil Spence, and the partnership of Taylor & Green; they produced buildings in a minimalist, modern style.

Geoffrey showed us slides of striking architectural features of Hatfield, some now sadly demolished or removed: Trident House in its art deco style, the Head Office of the Lee Valley Water Company in Bishop's Rise, the water feature that once flowed in the market place, Queensway Tower, St John's Church in Hilltop, Marychurch in Old Hatfield, the swimming pool with its paraboloid roof, and the Galleria – built to look like an airport hangar.



Early construction of White Lion Square

Still surviving, but lamentably tucked out of sight in Sparrowhawk Place, is the splendid concrete mural wall by William Mitchell that was originally installed in the main hall of the Lee Valley Water Head Office. When these offices were demolished a new home had to be found for this Listed wall, and so it was moved to a side wall of a block of flats being built on the site. What a pity that it was not re-erected in the Town centre!

Geoffrey showed us pictures of houses in South Hatfield, Park Meadow, and The Ryde, including the Cockaigne. He pointed out interesting architectural features, and some instances of unsympathetic alterations.



Queensway House and the Market Place c.1962
Photo by Ken Wright

Our architecture continues to change, with many new flats in Hatfield Rise at Hilltop, the Town Centre. The town today has many terrace houses, but few semis; sites allotted for new houses have but little garden space. Lord Salisbury is using a neo-Georgian style in the developments of his Gascoigne Estates, in Salisbury Square and the newly christened Ascots Green.

So – success or failure? Our speaker's opinion was

that Hatfield was well-designed within tight space and budgetary constraints. In areas where houses had been well maintained there was keen demand for mid-century modern designed properties. In other areas, primarily used for rentals, some houses had been allowed to deteriorate and appear shabby. Like most of the post-war New Towns it had suffered ups and downs economically, but now there were signs that it was on an upswing, at last.



In my article "A tale of two sisters" in the previous issue I talked about Torilla, a modernist house on the outskirts of Hatfield. It was designed by the architect FRS Yorke, and I said that he had been employed after meeting the mother of the two sisters, Mrs Christabel Burton, on a skiing holiday.

Subsequently I have read a book* about Yorke by Jeremy Melvin; in it he says that Yorke had met the elder of the two sisters while skiing in the Tyrol and she had recommended him to her mother. Burton describes Mrs Burton as "redoubtable" and her picture in his book (see right) certainly seems to capture that quality.

Geoffrey Hollis

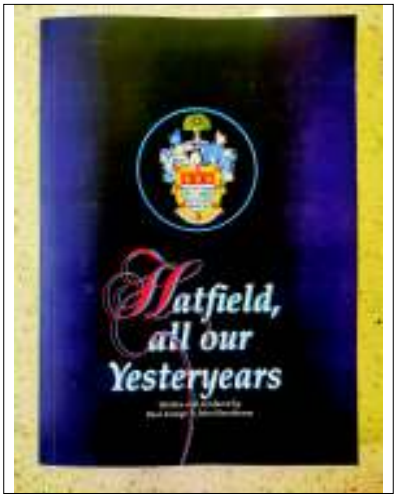
* *FRS Yorke and the evolution of English modernism*,Wiley-Academy 2003

" "



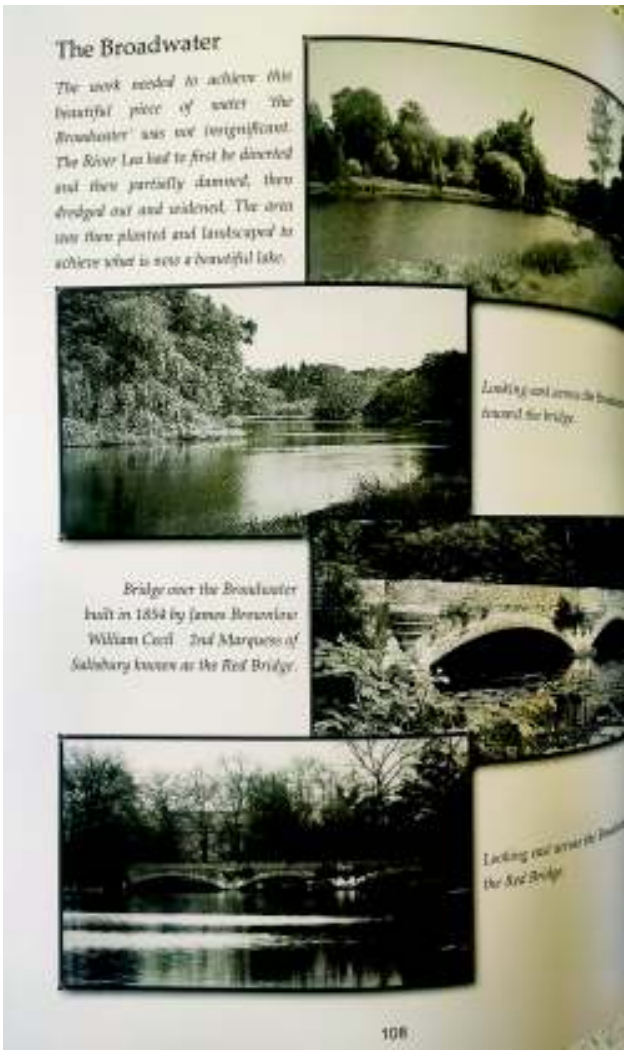
A member of our Society recently passed this pub in Paris. Could some early denizens of our area have crossed the Channel and settled there? ("Hetfelle" is the spelling in the Domesday Book.)

BOOK REVIEW



Hatfield, all our Yesteryears, written and produced by Paul Savage and John Hawthorne, self-published, 2024, £25.00

This new book is a monumental volume, the size and weight of a large telephone directory, covering the history of Hatfield from its early days until very recently. It comes in 17 sections plus an index of photographs and illustrations, totalling 262 pages. It starts with a foreword by the Marquis of Salisbury – about which later. The seventeen sections cover almost everything one would wish to know about Hatfield. They are self-contained and are entitled: Where did we Start; The churches; The old Hatfield scene; Education in Hatfield; The Park, the House and the Cecil family; Breweries; Let's go on a pub crawl; Law and order; The old New Town centre; The start of a new era; When the puffer train came to town; Buses and things; Characters of Hatfield; Hatfield at war; Up, up and away; Business in Hatfield; and finally The Hatfield villages.



Broadwater as shown in *Hatfield, all our Yesteryears*

Just listing these sections shows the wide range of the book, which is supplemented by a large number of black and white photographs, plus diagrams. Most of these came from the studio of Mervyn Powell which stood at the top of Brewery Hill. My understanding is that the discovery of a cache of photographs taken by Powell's studio was the genesis for this volume. The author's preface says "We are not trying to rewrite history, but are trying, mainly through pictures, to help the residents of Hatfield understand the rich history of our ancient town. We have managed only to scratch the surface of our town's rich and colourful past. Finding things to present to you was not difficult. What to leave out was more so." Powell was the only photographer in Hatfield for a significant period and his photographs are a tremendously valuable source of information. No dates are given for him though, and it is to be hoped that they will be included in a second edition.

The same could be said about an index; while there is a comprehensive one for the photographs, there is none for the contents, which is a pity.

Another addition might be a reference to the interesting plaque in St Etheldreda's, sited near the door to the vestry, which records: "On Sunday 27th June 1647, King Charles of blessed memory, having been deprived of the ministrations of his church for a year and two months, while a prisoner of the army of the Scots, worshipped in this church".

Almost everything one would wish to know about Hatfield is contained within these pages. It contains a useful resumé of the early history of the town, up to the coming of Robert Cecil. There is a significant section on Robert and his influential descendants, and towards the end of the book a lengthy one on the other man who also arrived at Hatfield in his forties and transformed it completely – Sir Geoffrey de Havilland.

Scattered through the pages are some personal reminiscences by way of quotations from people who have lived in Hatfield.

The foreword by the Marquis of Salisbury is perceptive. He draws attention to the importance of researching local history and goes on to say: "Hatfield has a long and rich history and still has a sense of community, although the pace of change since the Second World War has sometimes seemed to put that sense at risk. We who live in Hatfield therefore surely need local historians more than ever and we should be grateful to Paul Savage and John Hawthorne for their timely labour of love. Their approach has enabled their readers to meet old characters, old businesses and old ways of life brought together by verbatim reminiscences and evocative illustrations. That they have fitted these things into a comprehensive account of the centuries of our history going back beyond the Norman conquest is a remarkable achievement. In reading the book I have not only learned a lot about the history of Hatfield, but also have had memories reawakened of my early life here and of many of the people I remember from my childhood".

Hatfield, All Our Yesteryears is well designed and easy to read; anyone interested in Hatfield should own a copy.

Geoffrey Hollis

SOCIETY NEWS

Diary Dates

The following meetings have been booked with Hatfield Social Club (76 Great North Rd, Hatfield AL9 5ER) for 2025:

Monday, 9 Dec. 2024 (3-5 p.m.): Christmas social meeting – members are invited to bring along local-history items that may interest others.
Monday, 10 March 2025 (3-5 p.m.): talk, speaker to be decided
Monday, 9 June 2025 (7-9 p.m.): AGM, followed by talk, speaker to be decided
Monday, 8 Sept. 2025 (7-9 p.m.): talk, speaker to be decided
Monday, 8 Dec. 2025 (3-5 p.m.): Christmas social meeting – members are invited to bring along local-history items that may interest others.

Admission: £2 for members, £3 for non-members

Announcement – we have a new treasurer and membership secretary.

The committee is delighted to announce that Dennis Adams has been co-opted as our new treasurer and membership secretary. This is excellent news! Terry Cull will stay on-hand while Dennis gets himself into the two roles.

Hatfield: Some Memories of Bishop's Hatfield and its Past



We have a new publication in the pipeline, a facsimile of the 7th edition of the *Hatfield: Some Memories* ... book written by the Rev. Jocelyn J. Antrobus. The work was first published in 1912 (see right) and the 7th edition in 1950.

The team undertaking this project comprises Phil Marris (editor and proof-reader), Hazel Bell (indexer and proof-reader) and Paul Savage (graphics designer). We hope to publish by the end of 2024.



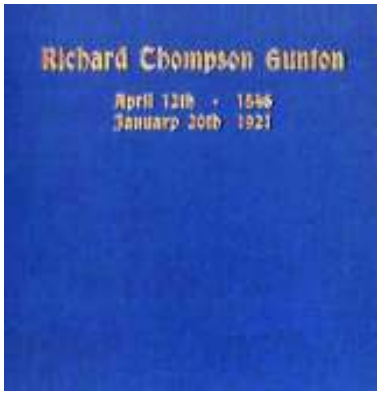
The book has tended to remain an untapped source for local history due to its lack of an index. We hope to have remedied this by appending an index to this facsimile edition.

It must also be said that the original front cover was extremely drab. Paul Savage has come up with a more modern idea (see left), which features Antrobus himself in profile.

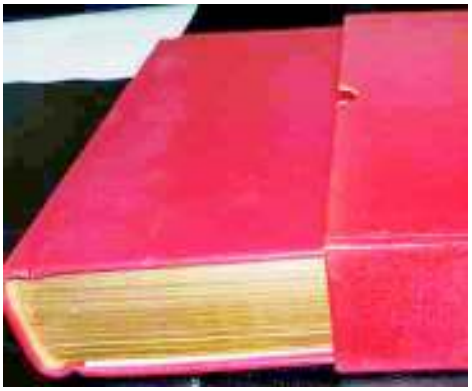
For serious researchers, it is crammed with facts and figures about the parish church, numerous monarchs and politicians, let alone various intrigues. Our newly added index will provide a useful finding aid.

Donations to Mill Green Museum

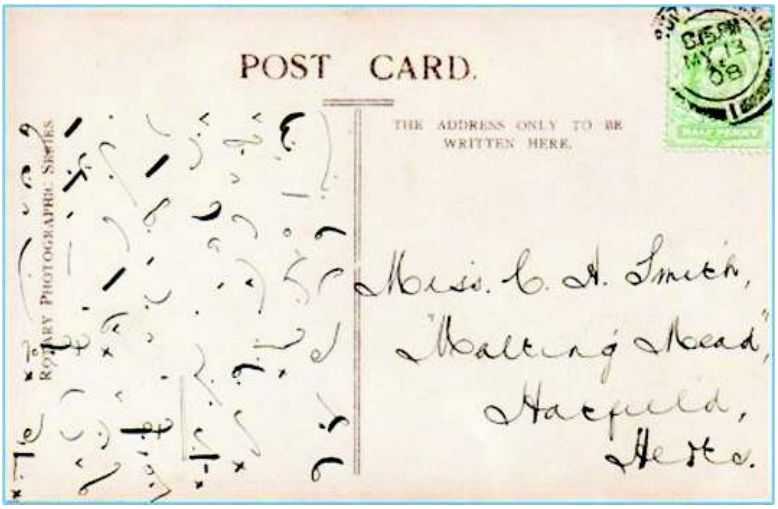
The museum recently appointed Esther Green as its new curator (see overleaf). For some time, Chris Martindale and Phil Marris have been storing various artifacts in need of curation, which Esther has agreed to accept into the museum.



The artefacts accepted to date comprise: a signed biography of R. T. Gunton, former archivist to the 3rd Marquess of Salisbury; a large number of Edwardian postcards, some written in shorthand; and a set of original *Hatfield and its People* booklets, bound in red Morrocco leather.



The postcards were mostly addressed to Miss Cicely A. Smith at 29 Primrose Cottages, Hatfield and then 4 Malting Mead, where the Smith family moved to in 1907. Some of the postcards were written in shorthand (see below), so we are definitely on the lookout for a shorthand expert to translate them.



Other of our Society publications have been noticed elsewhere. John Dean's article in our newsletter of June 2024, about his father and the goods he bought in the early twentieth century, was cited in the issue of *Local History News* for August 2024, described as "a fascinating article ... Many receipts yield interesting details of local and social history". And our booklet, *Poetry about Hatfield*, was reviewed in the Welwyn Hatfield U3A Newsletter for Spring 2024, which opined: "We are given a flavour of the changing fortunes of Hatfield from its Domesday listing through to the plans to build a further fifteen thousand homes by 2036 ... There is much nostalgia for a town some clearly feel has lost much of its past glory and, perhaps, its sense of community, but it is heartening to read more uplifting verses, too".

Phil Marris



Esther Green at Mill Green



Esther

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