

The de Havilland Aeronautical Technical School

Enterprising Activities at Hatfield College and Elsewhere

Epic Adventures, Races, Stunts and Rag Days

When Hatfield Technical College opened in 1952, it wasn't long before students took part in attention-getting activities. These can be classified broadly as adventure, stunt and rag. Some of the adventures could be called stunts, but they had an objective. For example driving a lawn mower from Edinburgh to London could be called a pointless stunt, but it did have an objective in that it aimed to prove reliability. Driving an Isetta round and round Piccadilly Circus was really only a stunt, although the determined drivers may well disagree. The following list of activities, mostly aimed at raising money for charity, is bound to be incomplete!

1959 was a busy year with a Ransomes' mower driven non-stop from Edinburgh to London, entries in the "most unusual means" category of the London-Paris air race, a record 19 students crammed into a standard telephone box and an Isetta three-wheeler driven endlessly around Piccadilly Circus. As early as April "The Oracle", the Official Bulletin of the Hatfield Technical College Students' Union, reported these triumphs – see page 2.

In 1961 a kart was driven from Lands End to John O' Groats. Students took part in university pram races between 1960 and 1963, at least. An iron bedstead supported on oil drums and powered by outboard motors was sailed across the English Channel in 1966 and in the same year the College won the London-St Albans chariot race..

The first Rag Day at Hatfield was about 1955. They continued through the 1960s and into the 1970s. For a time in the 1960s Rag Day concluded with a Rag Revue performed by a talented group of students.

"Sixty Years of Innovation", the history of the University of Hertfordshire published in 2012, has a section on this aspect of student life. Among the events recorded in "Sixty Years", but for which there is no other information, are in 1966 a world model car racing record set by completing 10,000 laps in 48 hours on a special circuit set up in the Co-op Store in White Lion Square, Hatfield and in 1971 a tea-trolley race from Hatfield to Blackpool.

This document sets out to record some of these events, using whatever sources have come to hand.

Roger de Mercado, DHAeTS 1957-62

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OPERATION MATADOR - EDINBURGH TO LONDON BY MOTOR MOWER

In 1959, Tom Hudson, Mike Smith, Mike Savage, Hugh Tansley and John Wilson, de Havilland Aircraft apprentices and students at Hatfield Technical College, decided to test the reliability of small petrol engines by driving a lawn mower from Edinburgh to London. They contacted the management at Ransomes, Sims and Jeffries, the forerunner of today's Ransomes Jacobsen company, who agreed to help them out. Mark Grimwade, an engineer and former apprentice at Ransomes, was given the task of selecting the right model. A standard Matador walk-behind mower with the addition of the optional seat was chosen, slightly modified with a larger sump added to the 288cc Villiers engine to provide enough lubrication for the non-stop 400-mile trip. A team of four Ransomes apprentices tested a couple of prototypes, running them



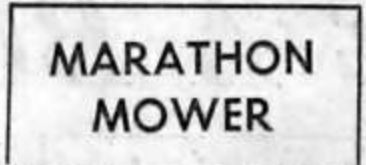
Mike Smith, John Wilson, Mike Savage, Tom Hudson, Hugh Tansley



Hyde Park, 1st April 1959

around Ipswich for 90 hours, which was the estimated time it would take to travel at 3 mph down the A68 and A1. The project was named, appropriately, Operation Matador.

With the trials successfully completed, the date for the journey was set for Easter 1959. Tom Hudson drove the first leg and the others followed in a Bedford Dormobile, their home for the next four days. They were accompanied by Mark Grimwade in an A40 pickup truck as technical support. A haggis was placed in the grass box of the mower to be presented to the Keeper of the Royal



Parks in London – a Scotsman – at the end of the journey. Four days and three nights after leaving the appropriately-named Lawnmarket in Edinburgh, the team arrived at Hyde Park to be greeted by a reception committee of Royal Park's staff, Ransomes top management and dealer representatives, a BBC TV crew and the press. The haggis was handed over to the Keeper of the Royal Parks and a ceremonial strip of Hyde Park grass was mown.

Tom Hudson's report for Embryo begins overleaf



THE Edinburgh-London non-stop 373-mile motor mower marathon successfully completed, Mike Smith cuts the grass in Hyde Park yesterday. Five Hatfield Technical College, Herts, students made the drive for a bet of a bottle of beer each. The mower was slowed only when its escort van broke down. Mike said they had planned an average speed for the journey which started on Saturday but "the trouble was we could not go slowly enough."

News Chronicle & Daily Despatch Thurs Apr 2 1959

FIVE MEN WENT TO MOW

From Embryo June 1959

On the evening of Friday, March 27th, five members of the College Motor Club, Tom Hudson, Mike Savage, Mike Smith, Hugh Tansley and John Wilson, assembled in Edinburgh in preparation for an historic non-stop journey south to London, with a motor driven lawn-mower. This was the culmination of many weeks' work after Ransomes, Sime and Jefferies of Ipswich had very kindly offered to loan the Motor Club a mower to settle a wager, made by Pat West, that the journey could not be done.

After having been entertained in traditional style by the staff of Ransomes' Edinburgh branch, the team eventually retired to bed and awoke next morning feeling somewhat groggy. The prospect of worse to come, however, stirred them to action and at 11.45 a.m. the whole party assembled outside the Castle with the mower. After satisfying the insatiable appetites of a multitude of reporters and television cameramen, the mower was started and a four-pound haggis was handed over to Tom Hudson by Mr. Strachan, Deputy Superintendent of Edinburgh Parks, to be conveyed to Hyde Park. Then, accompanied by the strains of "Scotland the Brave" droned out on the local musical instrument, the mower started off in a series of spasmodic jerks in the direction of London. The first few hundred yards provided many anxious moments due to the highly irregular pattern of the local cobblestones. These were negotiated successfully, however, and soon the mower was climbing Soutra Hill with the Edinburgh skyline merging into the haze behind.

Soon night fell, but the mower continued on its epic journey, reaching the top of Carter Bar, 1371 feet, in swirling mist at 2.54 a.m. At this point the mower encountered a grey Ford Prefect, its carburettor in pieces, with a tall individual under the bonnet who exclaimed: "No, thank you, I do not want a tow!" when the driver of the mower offered his assistance. This Ford Prefect was subsequently to cause more headaches than the mower.

A rota for the journey had been worked out whereby each member of the team had shifts of eighteen hours on duty and twelve hours off. The eighteen hours on were divided into two-hour periods of driving the mower, resting in the chase car, and driving the chase car, while the twelve hours off were spent sleeping in the accompanying Dormobile caravan conversion which met up with the mower every six hours for the transfer of one crew member. This sounds easy going in theory; in practice, however, things were vastly different. As soon as one went off duty and got into the Dormobile the rest of the team were demanding food. Before this could be prepared the washing-up had to be done and by the time this was finished the mower was two miles down

the road. Having caught up, overtaken, prepared food and eaten, one was ready to go to bed, after having driven to where the mower should be at the next changeover time. Unfortunately as soon as one got into bed the mower arrived and the whole process had to be repeated. Granted, one had a certain period in bed in the latter part of one's twelve hours off, but you try sleeping at sixty-five m.p.h. in a Dormobile. Mike Savage still has nightmares when he recalls the time he awoke to find his bed snaking, feet first, down the A1, out of control, at seventy m.p.h. It was never driven that fast again.

All next day, Sunday, the machine trundled south in incessant driving rain along the switchback roads of the Cheviots. With contemptuous ease, and a little wheel-spin, gradients of up to one in four were disposed of. Just outside Corbridge Mike Savage received an offer of marriage from a "luscious bit"



"Somewhere between Edinburgh and London"

(quote) who will be twenty-one in August, but unfortunately he was unable to stop. That was just one of the tragedies of having to do the journey non-stop.

In the wee small hours of Monday morning the Great North Road was reached dead on schedule. The early morning mists dispersed gradually and a warm, sunny day greeted the mower's crew as they passed through Wetherby. Throughout the day the cheerful holiday traffic swept past, waving and hooting, until Doncaster was reached at opening time; but the mower could not stop!

The third night passed uneventfully but was enlivened by two visits from members of the College (they get everywhere) and by a visit from two policemen who merely wished to interrogate the driver regarding the progress of the mower in connection with a bet they had on at the local police headquarters.

Lunch-time, Tuesday, saw the team moving

through the narrow, winding streets of Stamford and then along the dull, straight stretches of dual carriageway through Huntingdonshire.

As dawn broke for the fourth time, on April 1st, the mower was chugging merrily over familiar ground and soon the white facade of de Havilland's appeared,



Mike Savage driving south along the A1 at Hatfield. On the pavement, left is Pete 'Zeke' Harris; on the right is Roger 'Jim' Coasby (photo via him)

every window packed with white faces. At the College a wonderful reception was waiting. Crowds of students, who had accompanied the mower for a mile or so, and Dr. Chapman, stood in solemn silence as Mike Savage was interviewed by John Tidmarsh for BBC television. It was a fortunate coincidence that Mike was mowing at the time since he was probably the most photogenic team member and admirably suited to the task. The rest of the team were each caught by a reporter who thought he was getting an exclusive scoop!

Within a few minutes the mower was off again to complete the final stages of its journey through the crowded London streets. An attempt to capture the machine by London University students was successfully thwarted and it arrived in Hyde Park exactly on time, at 3 p.m., after a 375-mile non-stop run in ninety-nine hours.

The haggis was found and presented to Mr. Barbour, Chief Superintendent of the Royal Parks, the wager of half a pint of beer each was honourably settled, the mower left for the showrooms of Sir W. Godfrey in Marylebone Lane, and the crew were entertained to a meal at Ransom's and a visit to the "Windmill" where they all fell asleep.

After two or three days' sleep some statistics were evolved which may be of interest to anyone planning a similar venture. Out of a total of £7 15s. 0d. spent on food, which was purchased in ten minutes from the local Supermarket at 7.50 p.m. on the eve of the departure for Edinburgh, articles to the value of £5 15s. 0d. remained. This represents a specific fuel consumption to the value of 2/- per person per day, mainly in the form of jam sandwiches. The average time spent sleeping per person per day was about two hours, some which was spent on the mower, hence the battered chain-case cover, The quantity of fuel consumed by the mower was about eighteen gallons and one Ford Prefect was completely ruined.

Each member of the team has his own memories and anecdotes which will last well into the coming winter in the local hostelrys. Hugh Tansley recalls the sandwiches and lemonade given to him in Jedburgh and the interview for the French radio, in French, which was recorded in Hyde Park. Tom Hudson remembers the friendly farmer who offered him a large bottle of warm milk with a rubber teat on the end, the girls who kissed him goodbye in Edinburgh and the pint of beer, presented to him by a generous landlord, which splashed all over his face when he hit a bump. Mike Smith still trembles when he recalls the policeman who tried to stop him for speeding. Mike Savage has gone back to Corbridge* and John Wilson is still trying to make his car go again.

The mower is now circulating around the various County Shows and there is a rumour that the Russians are trying to get hold of it.

Tom Hudson

*Embryo stated Cambridge, but as Hugh Tansley pointed out in July 2022, it was to Corbridge that Mike allegedly returned - see previous page. Ed.

See next page for the team reunions in 2009 and 2019

‘Operation Matador’ Team Reunions 2009 and 2019

In 2009 Ransomes Jacobsen helped the team to celebrate their 50th anniversary by organising a replica of the mower complete with the number plate and signage from 1959. Mike Smith reported at the time:

“This was a most enjoyable two-day affair starting at Hatfield Tech (as was), where the five of us met up with a replica of our original Ransomes Matador machine. We presented Professor Tim Wilson, University of Hertfordshire Vice-Chancellor, with a haggis and a memento of the occasion. The media turned out in force with the event being featured on BBC London News that evening, and a feature article in the Welwyn Hatfield Times later.

We then travelled up to Hyde Park with the mower (but not on it!) where we again presented the Assistant Keeper of the Royal Parks with a haggis and memento, just as we did 50 years earlier. Later in the afternoon we travelled up to Ipswich where we had a celebratory dinner with Peter Driver from Ransomes Jacobsen, and Mark Grimwade, who had been our engineer from Ransomes on the original trip.

The next morning saw us reporting to Portman Road, the home of Ipswich Town F. C. where we met Alan Ferguson, the Head Groundsman. Here we were interviewed by BBC Radio Suffolk for a feature which went out live. Alan gave us a very detailed, and interesting, chat on the art of looking after pitches. Indeed the main pitch had been played on the previous evening and to our untutored eyes looked to be in perfect condition. Naturally they use Ransomes mowers at Portman Road. A tour of the factory, followed by lunch with the M.D. David Withers, completed the trip. Four of us went back to Ipswich the following week for more TV filming for a feature to be sent out later in the year.”



Hyde Park 2009

L to R: Hugh Tansley, Tom Hudson, John Wilson, Mike Savage, Dave Jordan (Asst. Keeper of the Royal Parks), Mike Smith.



Ipswich, 2009

L to R: Mike Savage, Hugh Tansley, Mike Smith, Tom Hudson, John Wilson, Mark Grimwade (Ransome’s project support engineer)

For the 60th anniversary in 2019 the mower, now in the safe hands of the Ipswich Transport Museum, was taken to the University of Hatfield and parked on the lawn for a team reunion, below right. Professor Quintin McKellar CBE, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive of the University of Hertfordshire, welcomed the team saying “I am delighted to welcome you all to this amazing celebration, some 60 years on from that epic Easter weekend back in 1959. It was an incredible feat and a credit to yourselves, Hatfield Technical College as it was then, and the Ransomes company. You have entered the annals of the history of the University and it’s a pleasure to welcome you and your wives on this historic occasion – and to get a shot driving the lawn mower!”

Hatfield, April 2019

Mike Smith, Mike Savage, Tom Hudson, Hugh Tansley, John Wilson



TELEPHONE BOX CRAMMING MARCH 1959

In 1959 there was a craze, allegedly originating in South Africa, for seeing how many people could be fitted into a telephone box. London University managed eighteen. Students at Hatfield College of Technology decided to have a go at the record and a team of people of small stature, including some girls from secretarial courses, was selected. On 17th March 1959 the team assembled in the open space outside the Cavendish Arms pub not far from the College (see right and centre). A passing policeman asked what was going on and told them to disperse.

Two days later a different group again assembled at the Cavendish to act as a decoy while the real team made their way discreetly to the junction of Ellenbrook Lane with St Albans Road West. There it was just possible to fit nineteen people in and close the door. The event was reported in the Herts Advertiser of 19th March; the "crowd of 100 students" was a slight exaggeration. Unfortunately it is difficult to count the number in the second photo, which had to be taken quickly. However by zooming in it is possible to see parts of nineteen different people.

Photos above and below by Mike Wearing



Photo via Ray Sore



Visible above and below, in no particular order, are xx Bell, Peter Kirk, Helen Payne. Mike Savage, Moira xx, RdeM.



HERTS ADVERTISER 19th MARCH 1959

STUDENTS SET UP WORLD RECORD



PILLAR BOX CLING-ON, 1959

Near Bournemouth Municipal College, on 22nd April 1959, 15 people clung to this pillar box. All but one person were DH apprentices from 1953, 55, 56, and 57.

Photo below Garth Rogers



19 Squeezed Into Kiosk

Nineteen Technical College Students packed themselves into a telephone kiosk in a quiet corner of Hatfield on Wednesday afternoon, and beat the world record of "eighteen all-in" set up on Monday by students at the University College of London.

The nineteen students fitted themselves into a kiosk on the corner of Ellenbrook Lane, like sardines in a tin. They were in layers of four, and five 17-year-old girls were among them.

A 21-year-old student, Derek Mott, of 83, Oakwood Drive, St. Albans, directed the operation, which took sixteen minutes.

A crowd of about 100 students danced with excitement as the teenagers selected for experiment tumbled out of the kiosk and were counted. When Mr. Mott announced the total, there was a shout of triumph.

Nerves had been a little on edge, for two uniformed policemen dispersed an earlier gathering at a kiosk in another part of the town.

Police prevented the attempt at the Cavendish Hall, Hatfield.



EASTER, 1959
NEXT WEEK'S
"Herts Advertiser"
will be published on
THURSDAY, MARCH 26
at the usual hour

All news items intended for next week's issue should reach

Fifty Years A

But the defiant students packed themselves like sardines into the telephone box at Ellenbrook Lane.

LAPPING PICCADILLY CIRCUS, 1959

The first recorded attempt on the number of consecutive laps around Piccadilly Circus appears to have taken place in March 1959, when a Major Draper made 50 circuits. DH apprentice Barry Kensett bettered that handsomely on 5th April, achieving 137 laps before being stopped by the police: "We had been circulating for some time keeping 180 degrees apart. Eventually they stopped, forcing us to do likewise. They said if we didn't go away they would book us for obstruction to which I replied that they were actually the obstruction. However no point in provoking them further as we had stopped anyway."



DAILY EXPRESS MONDAY APRIL 6 1959

The craze for zany records is with us again. Last month Major Christopher Draper, who achieved fame by flying a plane under 15 Thames bridges, drove a bubble car round Eros nearly 50 times. Yesterday student Barry Kensett achieved 137 circuits in a bubble car before police stepped in.



The Kensett team L to R: John Wearing; ?; John Randall; Adam Bridgland; Alan Southgate (not DH); ?; Barry Kensett

CAR'S 150 LAPS ROUND EROS

RECORD CLAIMED Daily Telegraph Reporter

Early yesterday morning a small saloon car set up what is claimed to be the record for endurance in lapping Piccadilly Circus. The car completed 150 laps in 54 minutes.

The driver was Mr. David Dobbie, 19, stockbroker, of Sydney Street, Chelsea. Mr. Richard Seth-Smith, 19, aircraft firm trainee, of Radlett, Herts, was the navigator.

The feat attracted a small crowd which, on realising that the circuits were intentional and not the result of locked steering, cheered the record-breakers on. The gruelling journey began at 2.54 a.m. and ended at 3.48 a.m.

The car averaged a circuit every 22 seconds, and was stopped by traffic lights about once in every nine circuits. On one of the later laps the car was accompanied by a police car but was not stopped.

Barry's record was broken on 17th June by a pair including DH apprentice Richard Seth-Smith, as reported in the Daily Telegraph of 18th June 1959.

The University of Hertfordshire 'Sixty Years of Innovation' records that in 1961 John Clubley achieved 225 laps, only stopping because his neck was aching from looking to the right. A cyclist, Roger Duncan, joined him and made 80 laps before going to Trafalgar Square to make 372 circuits.

LONDON – PARIS AIR RACE JULY 1959

In 1959 the Daily Mail sponsored an air race to commemorate Bleriot's Channel crossing in 1909. The route was from Marble Arch to the Arc de Triomphe. The total prize money for this event was £10,000. The £5000 first prize was won by RAF Squadron Leader Charles Maughan who used a motorbike and Sycamore helicopter to get to Biggin Hill airfield. From there he flew his Hawker Hunter to Villacoublay airfield, a helicopter to Issy heliport just outside Paris and finally rode a motorbike to the Arc de Triomphe arriving 40 minutes 44 seconds after he had left Marble Arch.

Twelve special prizes were awarded for inventiveness and ingenuity. One of these was won by British European Airways. They entered a team known as the BEAline syndicate and were awarded a prize of £1000 for 'originality and ingenuity' by using existing transport facilities to get from London to Paris. They succeeded in cutting the normal 3hr 15min scheduled airline time to 1hr 10 min. G-APMA, the first production Comet 4B, had only made its maiden flight the month before (27th June 1959). BEA crews had not accumulated sufficient hours to operate the 4B, so de Havilland provided pilot Peter Bugge and flight engineer Ted. Young. The team started on a double-decker bus, took a train from Paddington to Ruslip Gardens and from there a car to Northolt Aerodrome. Eleven minutes after take off the 4B crossed the French coast and the touch down was achieved at Le Bourget airport after just 28 minutes.

There were two entries by Hatfield Technical College. One was by Derek Mott, who used student-built cars at each end and the student-built Druine Turbi to cross the Channel. He won £100 for his 'notably enterprising entry'. Sadly, the other entrant, Hugh Tansley, failed to win a prize despite his also-enterprising journey using, on land, the Ransomes mower of Edinburgh-London fame. The report below was published in Embryo Vol 7 No 3 Dec 1959. The pictures are from an Aeroplane magazine article in June 1919, written by the late Lewis Benjamin.

EMBRYO

London - Paris Air Race

by HUGH TANSLEY

LAST June the *Daily Mail* announced that it was organising a race between London and Paris to celebrate the 50th anniversary of

Last June the *Daily Mail* announced that it was organising a race between London and Paris to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Bleriot's first crossing of the Channel by air. The race was to be between individual competitors, who could travel by any means they wished between the two control points at Marble Arch and the Arc de Triomphe, the only stipulations being that the Channel had to be crossed by air, and any one attempt had to be completed between 8 a.m. and 9 p.m. on any one of ten given days at the end of July.

Tom Hudson and myself decided that we would like a few days in Paris and we found that Ransomes, who were still somewhat overwhelmed by the publicity they had received from the Edinburgh to London lawn-mower run, were very ready to help us again and provided two mowers, one in London and one in Paris. The entry was made in the name of the Motor Club, and the toss of a coin decided that I should be the official entrant, whilst Tom flew over as my manager.

As this was to be a race, rather than a reliability trial, both mowers were modified to give a top speed of 6 mph, as opposed to the 4 mph we had during the Easter run. This modification was carried out without any apparent effect on the mower's rather frightening acceleration.

The outward journey was to be made on Thursday, 16th July. A few seconds after 8 o'clock I stamped my route card and after a spectacular, if rather undignified

start, in which the mower got out of control and plunged towards the crowd, finally cruised off through Hyde Park and down Exhibition Road towards the Albert Bridge.

The journey through London followed a route carefully planned to avoid the worst road surfaces and most of the traffic, and eventually after an uneventful trip, the mower arrived at Croydon Airport at 10.30 after a journey of some 13½ miles.



The Tiger Moth

Waiting on the apron was Tiger Moth G-ACDC, the oldest still flying in this country, piloted by Lewis Benjamin of the Tiger Club. The engine was already running, and within a few seconds we were airborne and headed south.

Before crossing the Channel, however, it was first necessary to land at Lympne to refuel and to clear customs. Lewis stopped the aircraft within a few feet of the pumps, we dashed through customs almost without stopping, and, after a very fast down-wind take off, were headed out across the sea within a few minutes of landing.

Soon after one o'clock Paris came into view and at 1.15 we touched down at Toussus airport, south-west of the city. Here Tom was waiting with Monsieur Perrier, Ransomes' agent in France, who had made all the arrangements in Paris. However, as it was now lunch-time, M. Perrier insisted that we stop for cocktails and a meal at the airport restaurant; despite the fact that we were in a race, this seemed an admirable idea.



Hugh Tansley and mower on the cobbles

Thus, not until an hour later, and full of good French food and wine, did I take over the controls of the second mower and head towards Paris in a mixed cavalcade of cars, which included M. Perrier's Cadillac, his wife's Dauphine, his nephew's Aronde, a Citroen van full of spares and mechanics, and a Daily Mail Consul. This was the first time I had driven

on the right hand side of the road, and for those who are rather nervous of driving on the Continent, mowing can be recommended as the ideal way to learn; at 6 m.p.h. there is plenty of time to work out in which direction to look at T-junctions or which way to go round a roundabout.

For the first few miles, the mower cruised along quite happily to the incredulous looks of the local inhabitants. The road surface remained good until we reached Versailles where the cobbles began — not smooth, well-worn cobbles, but great lumps of stone jutting up every few inches. It became a physical effort to keep the mower moving in a straight line, and it was impossible to control its speed except by a varying pressure on the foot brake. As it lurched slowly over each stone, every part of the machine rattled and shook and eventually, whilst in the middle of trying to cross a wide dual carriageway road, there was a crack from the front, the casting which held the petrol tank in place snapped and the tank crashed down on to the road.

The mechanics tumbled out of the van, lashed the tank on to the handlebars with rope, and we were off again. Outside Versailles, to my great relief, the cobbles gave way to smooth tarmac, until Paris itself was reached. But now the engine stopped, and refused to go again. Evidently there was a fuel blockage, so whilst the carburettor was being stripped, I took the opportunity to have a long, cool and very welcome drink.

Eventually we bumped off over the cobbles again, and down to the edge of the River Seine. Here the engine stopped once more. Again the carburettor was stripped, and we were soon off again on the last stages. We crossed the Seine, were carefully chaperoned by the Cadillac and Dauphine across several wide squares full of fast-moving traffic, and a short time later saw, at the far end of a tree-lined avenue, the Arc de Triomphe. To enthusiastic clapping and a battery of cameras, the mower came into the check point and I clocked out. The whole journey had taken 10 hours 43 minutes 8 seconds.

We knocked over 10 minutes off this on the return journey, but unfortunately our time was bettered by the R.A.F. using Hunters and motor cycles, to the extent of some 9 hours 50 minutes, so we did not qualify for any award.

Hugh Tansley

LANDS END TO JOHN O'GROATS BY KART, 1961

Initial publicity for the trip

1,000 Mile Trip by Kart.

Object:- A group of six Students from Hatfield College of Technology intend to drive a Kart from Land's End to John O'Groats by 1,000 mile route.

Reason:- (i) To prove the reliability of Kart.
(ii) To prove the reliability of Engine.
(iii) To maintain the tradition and reputation set up by those before us at this college in the field of unconventional travel.*

Start:- Land's End 6.30 p.m. Friday, 13th October.

Route:- It is hoped to pass through the following places at the times stated:-

Saturday.

Exeter 1.00 a.m.
Bristol 4.15 a.m.
Warrington 10.00 a.m.
Lancaster 11.30 a.m.
Ambleside 3.15 p.m.
Carlisle 5.30 p.m.
Glasgow 10.00 p.m.
Rest & Be Thankful 12.00 p.m.

Sunday.

Glen Coe 3.30 a.m.
Fort William 5.00 a.m.
Inverness 7.30 a.m.
Lairg 10.30 a.m.
Durness 1.30 p.m.
Dounreay 5.00 p.m.
John O'Groats 6.30 p.m.

Finish:- John O'Groats 6.00 p.m. Sunday, 15th October.

Method:- The six students from this college will take it in turns of one hour to drive the Kart and chase van, which will follow the Kart for the whole journey. When not driving members of the team will take it in turn to eat, sleep and navigate.

* It may be remembered that it was students from this college who drove a Lawn Mower non-stop from Edinburgh to London in 1959. This college also entered two teams for the Daily Mail London to Paris Air Race.

LANDS END TO JOHN O'GROATS

This report is from Embryo of Dec. 16th 1961. The author was not named. A longer article, by Pat Culshaw, appeared in Karting World of Dec. 1961.

EMBRYO



Volume II Issue I
Week Ending
Sat Dec 16th

MATFIELD - WELWEN INDEPENDENT STUDENT NEWSPAPER PRICE 5d

The project had been under consideration for more than two years by various groups and not until 13th October this year did the final lot of students embark from the College on the trip. This group consisted of Robin Dandy (Chief Kart Engineer), Mick Bright (Chief Van Engineer), Peter Comben as Treasurer. and three late arrivals, Dave Field as Chief Navigator and Photographer, Pat Culshaw as Public Relations Officer, and Don McNicholl in charge of equipment.

With mixed feelings the six of us awaited the hour of 12.30 p.m. on Thursday, October 13th 1961. After a "Good Luck" speech by Dr. Chapman, amidst a large crowd in front of the College, we were off, much to our relief. Not for long though; through a slight misunderstanding the Kart, driven by Mick, went along the St. Albans Road, both headed for St. Albans, where, after a frantic search, they met. The Kart was loaded on top of the Dormobile and we headed for Robin's father's cottage at Helston in Cornwall. This time was used to give everybody experience driving the van. A policeman was encountered but quickly



Pete Comben, Mic Bright, Don McNicholl and Robin Dandy with the Kart, lent by Aero Controls of Northampton.

official tour guides of West Penwith and a Cornish Pasty. After handshakes all round and photographs, we were off.

The Aero Kart had been modified to meet MoT regulations. Mudguards, lights, mirror, number plates, speedometer, brakes and a horn had been added. It was taxed and insured and the police notified, so with confidence we started on the first leg of the trip. A comprehensive rota system was used so every one periodically drove the Kart, cooked, navigated, drove the van and slept.

In order to make up the one thousand miles, the route was not a direct one. The first stage took us through Exeter and Bristol to Worcester. The first four hours were very enjoyable and then trying to catch rabbits on the road across Dartmoor provided excellent occupational therapy. Pairs of green lights encountered here gave a few hair-raising minutes, as those belonged to horses wandering about on the road. Once Robin in the Kart went up a slip road, motored off round a corner and Don got covered in soup during a fast stop. Cooking in a moving van provided great hilarity but presented no real problem.

North of Bristol we encountered thick fog and after Worcester the navigator, who shall be nameless, became very popular because he had the chase van going south on the A449, instead of north, so unfortunately Mick had an extra long spell in the Kart. The effects of metal fatigue were encountered near Bridgnorth. The licence holder fell off, and a crack in the front mudguard necessitated a quick running repair.

The thick fog persisted all morning far as Whitchurch and again a 2/6 welding repair had to be



L to R: Chairman of West Penwith Rural District Council, Mayor of Penzance, Peter Comben, Mic Bright, Don McNicholl, Robin Dandy, Dave Field, Pat Culshaw.

bribed with a packet of Rolos. (One of the sponsors, Mackintosh's Ltd, had provided 72 packets of Rolos.) Most of Friday was used for final preparations and Kart driving practice.

At Land's End we were seen off by the Chairman of West Penwith R.D.C., the Mayor of Penzance, a BBC television team, and a local reporter. A speech was recorded by the Chairman, which was later delivered to the Provost of Thurso along with two

carried out on the front mudguard. These factors put us five hours behind schedule, hence we missed the Midlands TV team on the Preston By-pass. It was decided to go down the Lancaster motorway to save time, but Pete was driving very enthusiastically in the heavy traffic and we unable to catch up to tell him. A small diversion in the Lake was cut out to save time so we went through Kendal and over Shap, which the Kart took beautifully in third gear leaving many amazed lorry drivers behind. Fast stretches of dual carriageway on the A74 enabled us to make up some lost time. We were met in Hamilton by Pat's parents with flasks of coffee and cans of beer to be opened at John O'Groats.

Don had a very bone-shaking experience in Glasgow. Harassed by irate and disbelieving tram and taxi drivers, hooted at by alcoholic Scotsmen (public houses and dance-halls were emptying), who thought it very amusing to see a Kart clambering over the cobble-stones, and pursued down Argyle Street by a large and indignant Alsatian. This stretch was the worst on the trip. Shortly after Loch Lomond came our first encounter with the police. Two carloads of them caught up with us at the bottom of the Rest-and-Be-Thankful pass, but we quickly gave them a hand-out and lightheartedly passed the time of night. They were very helpful in warning us of road-works ahead.

From here onwards, the driving was the most enjoyable of the trip. Since it was the middle of the night no traffic was encountered. The roads were beautifully twisted and the surface excellent.

The next fuel stop, scheduled for the Bridge of Orchy at 2 a.m. caused some consternation and rude words because we could not arouse anyone at the filling station which was supposed to be open. However, we managed to reach Inverness on the original schedule. We found petrol in Inverness and sped on and our befuddled minds realised the end of the trip was at hand.

Waking after two hours sleep was a miserable experience and generally this person was ignored for two minutes because he was not inclined to carry on an intelligent conversation. Change-overs did help,

however, in that a blast of cold air swept through the van, blowing away most of the cobwebs.

As we were now on schedule we decided to drive



Running repair somewhere en route

up the east coast instead of across to Lairg and take some cine film of driver changes and also of the scenery. As Pat sped along the single track road Highland sheep jumped six feet off the road into the bracken. Later, on this same road which is classed as an 'A' road, the Kart nearly collided with a Jaguar that would not give way, and forced the Kart into the heather.

We arrived at Thurso hours early, and found the streets crowded. We telephoned the Provost, and while we were waiting for him outside the Council Offices a large crowd gathered. He arrived fifteen minutes later and took us into the Council Chambers, where we discussed the journey and signed the visitors book. We presented him with the guide books and the pasty, and then drove to the Royal Hotel, where six dirty and unshaven students were entertained to tea by His Worship.

We did not stay long at the Hotel, as we wished to arrive at John O'Groats by 6.30 p.m., and so we set about the last twenty miles of our journey. Unfortunately it started to rain for the first time in two days, and our arrival at John O'Groats was somewhat damp. However, we were pleased at having accomplished what many people said was not only impossible but illegal. Thence we retired to bed in the Caber Feidh Guest House, very tired but very satisfied.



John O'Groats.

All photos courtesy of Peter Comben.

LANDS END TO JOHN O'GROATS

This article was written by Pat Culshaw

1080 Miles by Aerokart

The conception of this project took place two years ago when the lawn mower team considered an attempt to drive a kart from Land's End to John O' Groats. However, they came upon what they thought were insuperable snags, and hence allowed the project to drop. Last February the nucleus of the present group heard that one kart manufacturer—namely Aero Controls Ltd., of Northampton—were prepared to lend a kart to the College to be modified for use on the road and then to be used for a reliability trial over public roads. It was hence decided to form a group of six students to carry out the necessary work.

The manufacturers were again contacted to see if they were still prepared to assist us and we had a favourable reply from Mr. Palmer, the Sales Manager. He suggested various manufacturers who might be interested and letters were sent out. Dr. Chapman was also approached and he wholeheartedly backed us and gave us every possible help, including making the initial contact with the Villiers Engineering Co. Ltd. of Wolverhampton with regard to the loan of a spare engine.

After four months of letter writing the enthusiasm began to wane slightly with only one or two favourable replies being received, the notable ones being from J. W. & T. Connolly Ltd., of High Wycombe, who agreed to give us spare wheels and tyres, and Lodge Plugs Ltd., of Rugby, who supplied six spare sparking plugs. Insurance was the main difficulty, but a contact eventually arranged this and with some financial backing we knew we would be off. Again Dr. Chapman came to the rescue and very kindly wrote to the Governors of the College who were most generous in their donations.

Some of the firms who were contacted late came to our aid with fire extinguishers (Antifyre and Minimax), tape recorders for a message from the Chairman of the Rural District Council of West Penwith to the Provost of Thurso (Grundig Ltd. and Channel Instruments Ltd.), 300 cigarettes (W. D. & H. O. Wills Ltd.), 72 packets of Rolos (Mackintosh's Ltd.), and for the kart, a speedometer from Smiths Instruments Ltd., of Cricklewood.

Our next problem was to obtain a vehicle to act as chase van carrying all our equipment and spares and, again, we received several negative replies. However, Popes Ltd., of Finchley, said they could lend a 15 cwt. Bedford van, but as we needed it for five days we decided it would be rather inconvenient for them and also it was restricted to a 30-m.p.h. speed limit.

Our next step was to borrow enough money to purchase a vehicle and this was eventually done and taken to Popes to be serviced, free of charge, as there were one or two parts broken or missing.

Since the start of the project certain people had dropped out and new members invited, and the final team consisted of three of the original members: Robin Dandy, chief kart mechanic, Mic Bright, chief van engineer, Peter Comben as Treasurer, and the three later arrivals, Dave Fields as photographer and navigator on the journey, Pat Culshaw as public relations officer, and Don McNicholl in charge of equipment. The route was planned mainly by Roger Duncan, one of the original

four, and indeed Roger's hard work was a very great factor in ensuring the success of the venture.

Everything was now set and some intensive work, making and painting notices and assembling the kart, was put in by several outside helpers together with the team.

On the Thursday morning of October 12, the van was packed with all our equipment and a large quantity of food provided by E. V. Carter of St. Catherine Street, St. Albans, and at 12.30 p.m. the kart and van were driven round to the front of the College where a large crowd had gathered to hear Dr. Chapman make a "Good Luck" speech.

Then we were off.

Midnight saw us at a cottage near Helston, Cornwall, where we had a good night's rest before our journey. Friday was spent on final details and at 5 o'clock the group set out for Land's End. Here we were met by the Chairman of the Rural District Council of West Penwith and the Mayor of Penzance. B.B.C. cameramen then arrived and films and photographs were taken, and after recording a speech by the Chairman and his presenting us with Guides of West Penwith and a Cornish Pasty for the Provost of Thurso, we started our trek at 6.45 p.m. It was planned to change kart drivers every 30 miles, the rest of the team either driving the van, navigating, cooking or resting. The route had been divided into sections planned to give stopping places on convenient stretches of road.

The first few hours were very enjoyable and trying to catch rabbits on the road across Dartmoor relieved the monotony slightly. As far as Bristol everything went perfectly and we were slightly ahead of schedule, but then fog, which had been present all through the night, thickened considerably in the early hours of the morning and we gradually began to lose time. Up to this point it was not possible to gauge people's reactions, but as it began to lighten it was very noticeable that there are two sections to the community. One, who disregarded the kart altogether, and the other who suddenly realised there was something different on the road and just stopped and stared or nudged their companion and pointed quickly. Most people seemed to laugh, and with one or two exceptions, we found drivers most courteous, very often stopping just to see what was going past. Traffic lights were our only stopping places in towns and here we distributed most of our literature describing the event. Two disturbing events occurred while travelling through the West Midlands—both near Bridgnorth. The first one was that the licence fell off and in spite of a search lasting several minutes it could not be found. Immediately after this we stopped for petrol and noticed that the front wing had cracked and a hasty repair was carried out. Unfortunately, the quality of out-of-the-way garage mechanics is very low, and only 100 miles elapsed before the trouble was again evident. From Wigan onwards we looked for a garage and eventually found a place where a welding operation was carried out resulting in an excellent repair for 2s 6d. At Wigan the rear wing stay suffered from fatigue and two lengths of welding wire were needed to "tie" it together again.

Continued...

The breakage troubles and fog had delayed us by five hours and hence we missed the Midlands T.V. team on the Preston by-pass, and we decided to cut out the Lake District and so were only two hours late on crossing the Scottish border.

Waking after two hours' sleep was a miserable experience and generally this person was ignored for ten minutes because he was not inclined to carry on an intelligent conversation. Change-overs did help, however, in that a blast of cold air swept straight through the van, blowing away most of the cobwebs.

Night now descended and so did the fog, but fortunately only in small patches. The road towards Glasgow is being made into dual carriageway and it was worrying sometimes to see a road on the left apparently ready for use, but empty.

We were met in Hamilton by Pat Culshaw's parents, who handed over flasks of hot coffee and a can of beer each for celebrating our arrival at John O' Groats. Cooking on the move caused us some anxiety before we set out, but we took a large butane cooker, and a piece of wire tied a deep pan down where we cooked sausages, brewed coffee and boiled soup, but even this did not prevent the floor of the van and the cook's feet being somewhat dampened on occasions.

Glasgow was a very bone shaking experience, harassed by irate and disbelieving tram and taxi drivers, hooted at by alcoholic Scotsmen—the public houses and dance halls were empty—who thought it was very amusing to see a kart clambering over the cobblestones, and pursued down Argyll Street by a large and indignant alsation, made this section one of the worst on the trip. The vibration caused another failure when the spot light ceased to function, but some hasty soldering on the bulb cured this and the vehicles began to move onward once more.

Down the side of Loch Lomond we sped with no opposition and then came our first encounter with the police. We had stopped for a driver change at the bottom of the Rest and Be Thankful Hill, when two cars stopped behind us. Three policemen got out, but we quickly gave them a handout and lightheartedly passed the time of night and when we were ready to go they warned us of road works ahead and cheerfully waved us on our way.

Our next petrol stop was scheduled for 2 a.m. at the Bridge of Orchy and, according to all reports, the filling station

would be open. When we arrived, however, everything was in darkness and some cursing resulted but we did not manage to arouse anybody so we decided to make for Inverness and hope our calculations of fuel consumption would allow us to arrive in this town with both engines still running.

We ran into Inverness on our original schedule and drove round the town once or twice before finding the back street garage. This was our last scheduled stop before John O' Groats and we began to realise, through the haze of sleepiness, we had nearly succeeded with our project.

As the calculated mileages appeared to be incorrect, we found we could complete 1,000 miles by driving up the east coast instead of heading for Lairg, hence we decided to stop and take some cine film of the driver changes and scenery. Also on this part of the run we watched the reactions of the many sheep that inhabit the Highlands. If they were standing on the road they would just take one leap and land six feet away with a look of surprise on their faces. In the empty areas, feathered birds were a menace flying up and nearly hitting the driver in the face, but even greater hazards were ahead. In order to call at Thurso we took the A897 from Helmsdale to Melvich, and in spite of its classification this road turned out to be just about wide enough for the kart and the middle had grass sprouting freely through it, only leaving a small ground clearance. A large car coming in the opposite direction necessitated manoeuvres up the bank as the driver would not give way and we had no means of reversing our vehicle. There was only about an inch of daylight between his wing and the kart wing and we all breathed a sigh of relief when the vehicles had passed.

Being Sunday the streets of Thurso were crowded and as we arrived two hours before schedule, we telephoned the Provost of the town and while we were waiting outside the Council Offices a large crowd gathered. The Provost arrived about 15 minutes later and took us into the Council Chamber where we discussed our project and he asked us to sign the Visitor's Book. We presented him with the Guide Books and the pasty and then we drove to the Royal Hotel where six dirty and unshaven students were entertained by His Worship.

As we wished to arrive at John O' Groats by 6.30 p.m., we left the hotel at 5.30 p.m. and set about the last 20 miles of our journey.

Reprinted from
KARTING
 December 1961, issue

LANDS END TO JOHN O'GROATS

When and where this was published/displayed is not known.

SUCCESS
SIXTY ONE



1080 MILES, 47 HOURS,
21 M.P.H. 54 M.P.G.

Robin Dandy Mic Bright
Peter Comben Pat Culshaw
Don McNicholl Dave Field

Several difficulties had to be overcome and a lot of people said it was impossible, but as was proved these problems can be solved.

This College is becoming renowned for its unconventional activities. We once held the World Record for the number of people in a telephone kiosk, a student cycled 372 times round Piccadilly Circus non-stop, a mini van toured Trafalgar Square 100 times, a team of 20 students take part in the annual London-Leicester pram race, a Lawn Mower was driven from Edinburgh to London non-stop. Two teams entered the Daily Mail London to Paris Air Race - the Lawn Mower and a team of two home built cars and aircraft which won a consolation prize of £100. The last event was a record breaking trip from Lands End to John O'Groats in a Kart.

It is now rumoured England will be toured on a motorised lavatory in the near future. Why not keep this tradition at its present high level and continue the spirit of adventure by being an intrepid student using an unconventional method of travel.

Several of these projects could not succeed without the support in every direction of Dr. Chapman and the College Governors and any new ideas which you think may be possible should be communicated to any member of the Students Union who will be only too willing to assist.

PRAM RACES

The University of Leicester organised pram races, at first mainly between their own colleges, from St Albans to Leicester in the mid to late 1950s. In 1959 the race started in Leicester Square, London. Hatfield first took part in 1960, when they were sixth. In 1961 they came third, as recorded in this report in Embryo, provided by Barry Kensett.



She didn't like it at all when I left her at 9 o'clock on Sunday night. "Must get back to Hatfield for the Pram race." Incomprehensible reply sounded like "Muddy pools", or something.

Fellow idiots were congregating, intoning like the experienced mechanics that they weren't, over the new formula G.P. pram just delivered with seat still hot from baby's bottom. Into the coach it went, together with a spare which had to be dismantled before it would go into the boot.

The first part of the annual pram race, organised by Leicester University, was a parade from Leicester Square to Regent's Park: the Blue-bottles considered it unwise that we should actually start running in the West End. At about 12.45 a.m. we were off amid cries of "Cripes" and "How does one leap off a bus at this speed?" Each runner was to sprint for 20 seconds; after this time the driver braked hard, forcibly ejecting the next runner onto the pram. One gasping, spent runner was unceremoniously hauled aboard and the coach accelerated again on the cue of "Aboard" shouted by a little fellow with a funny hat up front. Disaster struck almost immediately: little wheel, big drain, asymmetric moment and the tyre was off.

Out leapt the maintenance team with tools but we lost valuable time, possibly costing us a place in the final result. On the road again and soon all runners in the team had had their first run. We soon mastered the routine, and then came our second mishap: the handle came completely adrift. More hurried repair work before we were under way again to suffer no more mechanical failure throughout the race. We then passed a stationary coach with an all girls' team from Leicester. They were only running a nominal race through towns; hoisting their pram aboard for the rest of the journey. They proved to be a continual and attractive source of encouragement, inspiring renewed effort whenever they were in sight.

We took no notice of traffic lights: a bluebottle at every major junction gave us priority, we only had the race to think about. The field of twenty-four were started at minute intervals, Hatfield being 3rd away. We were now lying 4th due to the mishap, but soon had our sights on the coach in front. A quick burst and a cheer, and we were through, aiming up the Great North Road, through Whetstone, Barnet and St.

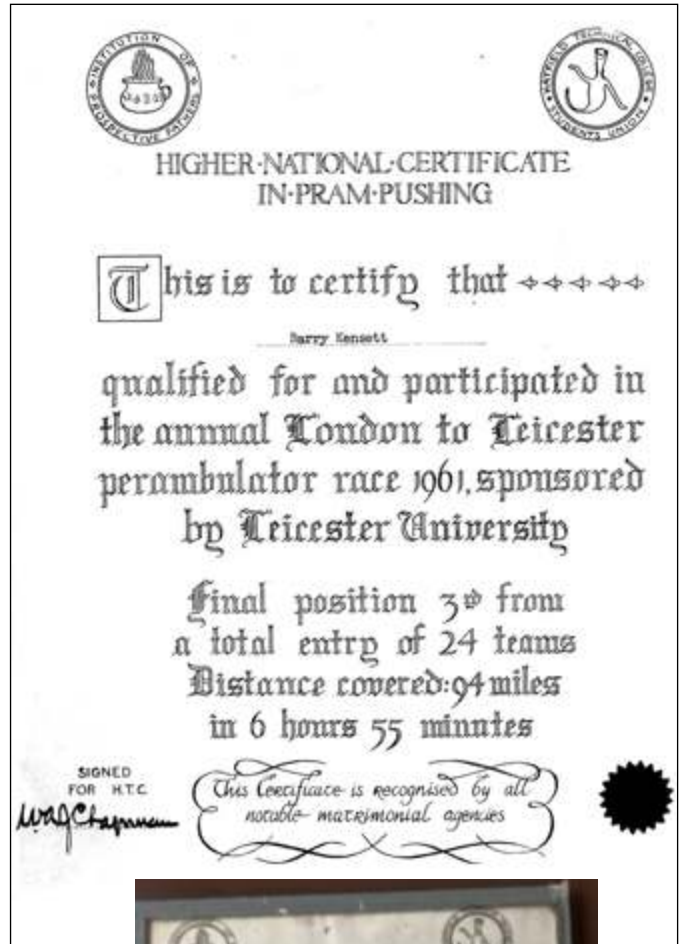
Albans, running like spit off a shovel. Somewhere along the London Road a cyclist seemed rather peeved at being passed amid cries of "It's quicker by pram!" He obviously wasn't English because he interposed his verbal objections with adjectives I hadn't heard before; still my mate Gus was much travelled and good as a linguist, and he was able to reply on equal terms before we left him behind. (The cyclist!) Into St. Albans Market Place to cheers from local supporters for a scheduled ½ hour break for the consumption of many oranges. 23 miles down, 71 to go. We learn that we are lying 4th, morale climbs. The next leg was to Dunstable for another orange-sucking ½ hour break, where we had climbed one place to third - a position we were to keep to the finish. Then on to Newport Pagnell by which time daylight had dawned in more ways than one - muscles were beginning to get a little stiff and the call "Embrocation" was heard many times above the cheers of encouragement. We passed the Leicester Training College team on this run but as we were running to aggregate time and were started at 1 minute intervals after each break this did not affect our overall race position - they were eventually placed second. Off again after a ½ hour break on the way to Northampton. Slight hesitation while leaping off the coach to be confronted with "un chat noir" in the path of the pram. A blood-curdling yell caused it to retreat with fluebrush tail held high in defiance. Into Northampton at 8.30 a.m. amidst rush hour traffic for a 2 ½ hour breakfast break. Food and rest proved almost disastrous, causing tired leg muscles to seize solid but after a little prising and a liberal embrocation we were place able to set off on the undulating 22 mile run to Market Harborough. Progress was rather slow at first and the following coach nearly caught up with us. Renewed efforts and they were left in the dust many furlongs behind; this was a short stage, however, and although we got sights on the Training College we were unable to overhaul them. They admitted afterwards that we caused them to "extractus digitum". At Market Harborough we were met by two carloads of H.T.C. supporters who were to cheer us on the final leg to Leicester, our finest and most painful run.

The final reckoning? "Never again!" was the immediate thought, but now, nearly two weeks later, "Roll on the next Pramdemonium."



Barry Kensett earning his HNC in pram-pushing

All on this page from Barry Kensett except Roger Gawthorpe's certificate, centre right

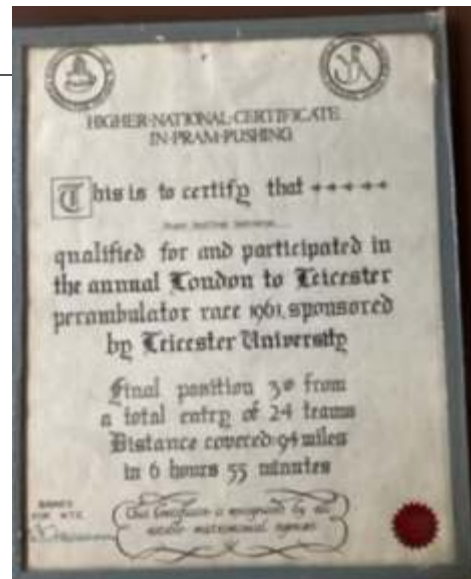


PRAMDEMONIUM



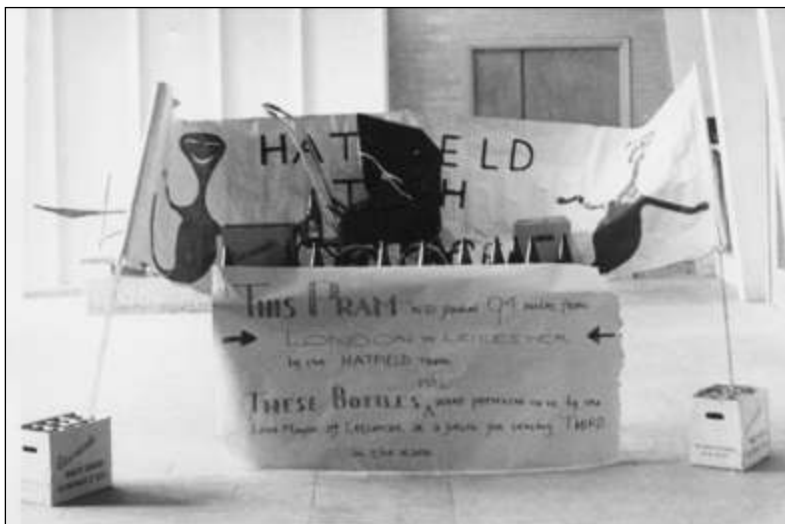
Just one of the thousand one hundred and ninety-three change-overs which took place between Leicester Square and Leicester. The photograph shows John Harris taking over, while Gay Ryanhart prepares to haul in Mike Smith.

The Hatfield team came third out of 24 teams; nine minutes behind the winners and three minutes behind the runners-up.





Photos above Barry Kensett



From Pete Comben

THERE WERE 20 PRAM PUSHERS

A borrowed pram was apologetically handed back to its Hatfield owner this week. Rather worse for its week-end wear, it caused the owner to bear no hard feelings to the borrowers.

In fact the owner expected it to come back a little shabbier in appearance than in actual fact it was.

For the pram had been pushed on a 94-mile route from Leicester Square too Leicester by 20 students from Hatfield College.

And with it they won third prize in the annual race, organised by Leicester University "rag" committee. Their prize: 48 bottles of frothy brown ale.

THE CHANGE-OVER

Needless to say it was welcome refreshment for the stu-

Continued on back page

Continued from page 1

dents who left Leicester Square at midnight on Sunday.

So as not to upset traffic unduly, only five members from each of the competing 23 teams took pushing turns to Regents Park—and then the race was on.

The Hatfield team, riding in a coach, took 20-second dashes. The relief man alighted from the vehicle, still in motion, to swap places with the student who had finished his burst. Then he would mount the bus, still moving.

One thousand and ninety three bursts later, the team reached Leicester. There were no casualties—apart from a few inevitable scratches, caused by the unorthodox change-over routine.

The pram itself presented a couple of problems. Once a tyre came off and then a handle-grip became loose.

IMPROVEMENT

Otherwise there was no break in the pram pandemonium.

Hatfield improved on their last year's effort when they were sixth out of 14 teams. This year they were third out of 23 in 6 hours 55 minutes, runners-up to Geography students from Leicester University and Leicester Training College.

Actually Hatfield's entry was doubtful at the eleventh hour. They had cash problems.

Then someone put an idea abroad—and a sweepstake was organised. The winner, Liz Last, secretary of the Students' Union guessed nearest to the winning team's time and £15 was raised—15s.—less than the total cost.

1962 was the year in which the College finally won the pram race, on Monday 5th March (not the 4th as reported in Embryo!).

EMBRYO



Volume II Issue IV
Week Ending
Sat., March 24th 1962

HATFIELD--WELWYN INDEPENDENT STUDENT NEWSPAPER PRICE 3d

HATFIELD WINS RACE

VICTORY AT THIRD ATTEMPT BY PRAM PUSHERS

Hatfield won the Leicester University Pram Race for the first time on Monday 4th March.

Against greater opposition than in any previous year, Hatfield College became the first non-Leicester team to win the prize of a barrel of beer when they beat last year's winners, Leicester Geographical Society, by one minute.

Icy roads, which almost caused the cancellation of the race, necessitated the cutting of the 100 mile run to 55, which the Hatfield team covered in 3 hours 38 minutes.

The team is unanimous in praising coach-driver Reg Hunt who entered wholeheartedly into the spirit of the race, and saved many precious seconds by some skilful driving.

At Leicester on Monday afternoon the Team's Manager, Jim Albani, was presented with his token engraved tankard by the Mayor of Leicester. The team went through the familiar routine of putting anyone they could lay their hands on in the pram, and lifting them to shoulder height - just to prove that "they still had it in them". This year the unfortunates were the charming Leicester Marshall 'Anne' and an innocent Hatfield supporter.



Jim Albani, Team Manager, is shown above with members of our winning team, immediately after he had been presented with the trophy.

We have much pleasure in printing the following note from the Principal, which is representative of all the interest aroused by the Pram Race:

TO THE PRAM RACE WINNERS

Your performance on behalf of the College deserves the highest praise, and I should like to thank you all for your enterprise in keeping the flag of Hatfield flying in the face of such stern competition.

W.A.J. CHAPMAN

A full account of the Race is given inside on page 6.

MAY 19th

8-12pm

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RAG BALL

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GAYTHORNE
ORCHESTRA

TOOLS
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POND TOOL CO

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Team workout. Photo from J E Albanie.

SEE HOW THEY RUN...

The starting marshal raised his loudspeaker and cleared his throat - 'Alright Hatfield? 5 4 3 2 1 GO!'

A fraction of a second later Ken Evans had passed the pram round the corner from Gloucester slips and was heading up the A5 followed by a tremendous cheer from the other runners in the coach and the Hatfield supporters. The coach driver, Mr. Reg Hunt was amazed, 'Are they all as fast as that? He's clocking 22 mph. Meanwhile Pete Valentine, timekeeper, was doing the count down for the first change-over.

After all the weeks of planning and practising, IT was ON!

DOUBTS

Jim Albani, Team Skipper, admitted that he had had worries. 'Weather conditions had been very much on my mind in the past month. Would we have rain, sleet, snow, fog, severe frost?' In fact we almost had all these. The weather was terrible. Ice and snow almost caused the race to be cancelled, but after the organisers, Leicester University, had consulted with other entrants by phone, it was agreed to continue the race.

Hatfield started in third place by virtue of last year's position. In front were the two scratch teams from Leicester - the Teachers' Training College, and last year's winners the Geographical Society.

ICY ROADS

Change-overs were a little hazardous at first until runners became familiar with the technique of leaving and re-entering the coach moving at 10 mph on icy surfaces. With in five miles Reg Hunt and the runners had developed the process to a fine art.

Pace cars were a great help. Derek Mott and a van-load of enthusiastic supporters and the spare pram were in front, shouting encouraging remarks, and Gordon Ward was behind, using his spotlight to illuminate the pram, which facilitated change-overs.

Conditions became steadily worse as London was left behind. An unlucky runner from another team was taken to hospital after falling on ice, so everyone was very careful about leaving the coach. However, as we entered Hertfordshire, the thought of being on home ground spurred the Hatfield runners on to gain a minute on the leaders. Holywell Hill must have been a hard grind for the others, but our lads knew that at the top lay St. Peter's Street and a half an hour rest.

In St. Albans, in view of the accident, and the awful conditions, it was decided by a meeting of team captains to abandon the St. Albans - Northampton stretch. Similar

conditions - ice and snow - prevailed right to Northampton, so that, in order to keep to the original schedule, it was necessary to wait for 3 hours in Northampton.

During the morning, teams and supporters canvassed Northampton with collecting boxes, invading the sanctity of ladies' hairdressers and holding up 'bus conductors.

THE RESTART

The minute we had gained over the first section gave us second position on the grid for the restart at 12 noon. Less than two minutes later, we were within overtaking distance of Leicester Geog. Society. Here Reg Hunt excelled himself - with hand firmly placed on the horn button, he weaved through the lunch-time traffic to pass the 'Geog. Soc.' coach as 4-D Jones took the pram.

But.....after the elation of overtaking our first victim - tragedy! A misdirection on the outskirts of Leicester cost the coach six minutes, while the correct route was found. This delay caused us to be caught at a level crossing. While the coach was forced to wait, the long-distance runners - Steve Forrester and Pat Culshaw - held the lead with an admirable run.

really came into their own, and Medical Man John Keeble was kept very busy rubbing in the embrocation and massaging dead muscles back to life. The sense of urgency and the indefatigable energy of the Hatfield team forced them on until the last magnificent inch. And five minutes later we knew that we had won and suddenly it all seemed worth it.

The teams were admirably fed and entertained by their hosts at the University, and we settled down to enjoy our prize - the barrel of beer - in the customary style.

Those who ran:

1. Ken Evans
2. Dave Patey
3. Russ Nathan
4. 4-D Jones
5. Dave Field
6. Roy Milton
7. Pat Culshaw
8. Steve Forrester
9. Tony Booth
10. Dick Waltringham
11. Dave Irvine
12. John Arrowsmith
13. Colin Thompson
14. Ricky Bould
15. Dick Williams
16. John Waggott
17. Mick Maunsell
18. John Lewis
19. Pete Surrridge
20. Barrie Cunningham



Above: Jim Albani receives the sword from the Lord Mayor of Leicester.

In an attempt to regain our position a cracking pace was set up. This proved too much for the two coaches following close behind, whose prams collided and halted their coaches.

At the stop for tea at Husband's Bosworth a claim was made for the six minutes lost, which were subtracted from our total time. With this encouraging news and the thought that there were only 13 miles left, the team was in high spirits for the final run into Leicester.

At this stage in the Race, the bursts were shortened and full use was made of the four speed boys - Ken Evans, Dave Patey, 4-D Jones and Russ Nathan. Hatfield's supporters

PROPRIETOR
R. HUNT

REG'S COACHES

FOR

** PRAM RACES

* MYSTERY TOURS * PANTOMIMES

* COASTAL TRIPS * THEATRES, ETC.

29, 33, 41 SEATER COACHES FOR PRIVATE HIRE

** REG'S COACHES CARRIED H.C.T'S
WINNING PRAM RACE TEAM 1962

* REG'S COACHES ARE ALSO AVAILABLE
FOR THESE AS WELL.

32 CRANBOURNE GARDENS,
WELWYN GARDEN CITY.

TELEPHONE: WELWYN GARDEN 4182



John 'Jim' Albanie & Russ Nathan, 1962. Photo from Ricky Bould.



Hatfield College of Technology won again in 1963, the prize this time being a barrel of beer, presented by Leicester City footballer Len Chalmers. Leicester Evening News Mon 4 Mar 1963

ASTWICK MANOR PHYSICAL EXERCISE 1964

LEN CHALMERS, Leicester City player, handing over the barrel of beer to the Hatfield Technical College team, winners of the Leicester Rag pram race from London, which finished at Victoria Park, Leicester, yesterday. Another picture will appear in tomorrow's Star—lunch time—edition.

300 JOIN IN PRAM RACE

BOGUS POLICE SEND CITY TEAM ON DETOUR

ALTHOUGH pram-pushing may be considered an unthinkable occupation for the average bachelor, more than 300 young men yesterday chose to lose face for charity's sake.

They were students taking part in a London to Leicester pram race, organised in connection with Leicester University Rag Week.

Despite the efforts of a group of bogus policemen, who managed to direct the race-leaders on a 10-mile detour, all 17 teams were able to complete the course in something like 11 hours.

The race was run on a ribbon basis and the 20 members of each team took it in turns to leave the accompanying coach and push the pram a few hundred yards nearer the goal—the Victoria Park, Leicester.

Great cheers

As the leaders pounded towards the finishing line students gave out great cheers of encouragement to the Beaumont Hall team who were fighting out a neck and neck battle with the Hatfield College of Technology.

Success for the Leicester team was not to be, however, and the Hatfield men crossed the line just three seconds in the lead.

Leicester can justifiably claim to have been singled by bad luck, however, for as well as being one of the victims of the bogus

policemen prank — thought to be the work of a rival University — they twice had mishaps with prams they were using.

Their first pram came to grief when its axle broke after it had turned over. And when the reserve pram was brought into service, while the other was being repaired, the handle came off.

Beer prize

This was the first time that the Beaumont Hall team had entered the race and for their achievement of winning second place they secured a gratifying share of the prize — several gallons of beer.

For Hatfield, it was the second year running that they have carried off the first prize. Three Leicester City footballers, Albert Cheesbrough, Ken Keyworth, and Len Chalmers presented the prizes to the triumphant and thirsty winners.



Top tier: Geoff Pyne (dark clothing), Alan "Sammy" Speller (white shorts), partially hidden Malcolm Isbister. Bottom tier: Lance ?? (white shorts), John Elliott (dark shorts), Derek Vanstone (grey trousers), probably John Bass to his left, plus ?? at the back. Photo via Geoff Pyne.

ACROSS THE CHANNEL BY BEDSTEAD, 1966

The following account is condensed from that given in 'Sixty Years of Innovation', which gives its source as the Welwyn Hatfield Times, and from other newspaper reports.

On 14th March 1966 Gus Blanchard, Leslie 'Blod' Mountain, Johnny Hatch, John Rice, Alec Curmi, Malcolm Burch and Sue Spearing set sail from Dover, destination Calais, 22 miles away. Most, if not all, the men were HSA apprentices. Their craft was an old bedstead, acquired either from a local Scout troop or bought at a jumble sale for 6d (sources differ). It was mounted on a tubular metal frame some 10ft by 8ft, was fitted with flotation tanks supplied by Hawker Siddeley Dynamics at Stevenage and with two outboard motors. It was tested at Abbey Cross Pit, near Cheshunt, by a number of students jumping up and down to see if it would sink. Apparently it overturned, temporarily trapping some underneath. Nevertheless it was seemingly declared seaworthy, although by whom was not recorded.

It was launched on the afternoon of Monday 14th March, the crew allegedly attired in nightshirts and bedcaps, with what was described as 'polythene

undersealing for warmth' — but the photograph overleaf does not support this description. Progress was slow and came to a halt once beyond Dover harbour entrance, the craft's speed of three knots being countered by the incoming tide of three knots. Two of the smaller flotation tanks (oil drums?) were discarded and three of the crew were transferred to the support motor boat; they reboarded later on. The voyage to Calais harbour reportedly took eight hours and 40 minutes. Accounts vary of what happened to the craft.— 'Sixty Years' says that it was towed by the escort boat to just outside Calais harbour where an attempt to sink it was made by firing bullets into the tanks, but it remained afloat and the coastguard agreed to tow it back to England (which sounds unlikely!) but it broke free and was never seen again. The Torquay Herald Express reported that it was the escort boat from which the craft broke free.



Torquay Herald
Express Tues 15 Mar

From BRIAN HITCHEN
Paris, Monday.
SEVEN students chugged across the Channel yesterday— aboard a double bed.
And despite what appeared to be a most unseaworthy vessel, the students (pictured above) made the trip from Dover to Calais in less than nine hours. It was, needless to say, a rag week stunt.
The students— six youths and an 18-year-old girl, all from Hatfield Technical College, Herts

OVER THE WAVES ON A DOUBLE BED

—bought the bed for sixpence at a jumble sale.

They called it "Wet-bed." And, for the occasion, they wore pyjamas under layers of sweaters.

To keep the brass bedstead afloat, they rigged eight oil drums underneath it. At the back of the bed they fixed two outboard motors.

But just in case the bed sank, there was a motorboat escort.

After the students landed at Calais, one of them said: "The crossing was great. We may go back the same way."

Daily Mirror Tuesday 15 Mar 1966

The sailing bedstead abandoned in the Channel

SEVEN students from Hatfield College of Technology (Herts.), who crossed the Channel to France on a floating bedstead yesterday, returned to Dover today after abandoning their raft.

The only girl in the crew, 18-year-old Sue Spearing, said at Dover that the raft was twice in danger of being run down by ships. Sue, from Stevenage said the crossing was otherwise uneventful, apart from fog patches.

Tow snapped

Another of the students, Leslie Mountain (19) from Bassaleg, South Wales, said: "Everything went according to plan until we set off for England again. We were towing the floating bedstead with the escort boat when the towline snapped. We decided to try to sink the bedstead, using a .22 air rifle. We fired over 100 rounds into the buoyancy tanks but it failed to go down.

"When I last saw the bedstead, it was floating towards the beach at Calais. We warned the authorities that it might be a hazard to shipping."

The students were camping at Dover before returning to Hatfield by road late today.

They took 8 hours 40 minutes to cross to Calais, using an iron bedstead, complete with ornamental brass knobs, which they had fitted to a raft made of tubular steel and empty oil drums.

The picture below was found on the internet. It is a copy of a photograph cable by United Press International. The caption reads:

KXP/CLR1509592-3/15/66 - DOVER, KENT, ENG.: Two Hatfield College of Technology students, part of group of seven, including one girl, wave to cameraman while crossing English Channel to Calais, France, on iron bedstead 3/15. They made the 8-hour 40-minute crossing to publicize week of frolicking called "Rag Week". The bedstead, bolted to empty oil drums, is powered by two 20-h.p. Motors. UPI CABLEPHOTO LN-195

KXP/CLR1509592-3/15/66-DOVER, KENT, ENG.: Two Hatfield College of Technology students, part of group of seven including one girl, wave to cameraman while crossing English Channel to Calais, France, on iron bedstead 3/15. They made the 8-hour 40-minute trip to publicize week of frolicking called "Rag Week." The bedstead, bolted to empty oil drums, is powered by two 20-h.p. motors. UPI CABLEPHOTO LN-195 -hgr-



CHARIOT RACE 1966

This annual twenty-mile race from Marble Arch, London, to St Albans Town Hall was organised by St Albans College during their Rag Week. From a series of Herts Mercury newspaper reports about the (unsuccessful) East Herts College of Further Education entry, it seems that the rules were written around a female passenger weighing not less than 7½ stone, pulled by chaps taking turns out of a team of 16. Hatfield College of Technology were the winners of the 1966 (13th March) Race, in a time of two hours, 12 minutes and 15 seconds. Martyn Ames was one of the cyclists riding to and fro conveying messages between the chariot and the supporting minibus with the resting pullers. The photos below are his.

PETITE 16-year-old East Herts College of Further Education student Martine Rogers has a weight problem — she doesn't weigh enough!

At least, that was the opinion of her fellow students on Monday when it came to the weigh-in for the big fight.

The "big fight" is the annual St. Albans College Rag Week chariot race from Marble Arch to St. Albans, which will be held on March 13.

Monday was the occasion for checking that all the chariots—assorted contraptions on four wheels, to be pulled by four sturdy gentlemen—were in a roadworthy order, and that the pretty female passengers weighed at least seven and a half stone.

And that's the trouble—Miss Rogers is rather on the light side. So it meant Miss Rogers had to eat and eat like a glutton.

"She ate like mad," commented Miss Linda Nunn, who handles publicity for the student union and is herself a lecturer at the East Herts College. And sure enough, the scales tipped the wrong way for most young ladies, but the right way as far as the college was concerned.

POUND ABOVE

It was a near thing; by the time she had finished she weighed only seven stone eight pounds—just one pound above the minimum.

"We've certainly got the best girl and the best chariot for the race—but we do not know about the runners yet," said Miss Nunn.

EAST HERTS CHARIOT TEAM BEATEN

THOSE magnificent men of the East Herts College of Further Education and their chariot machine (plus one pretty female passenger) could not pull off their hoped-for feat of winning the Marble Arch to St. Albans chariot race last week.

After starting second in the line-up of staggered starts in this rag week stunt, devised by the St. Albans College of Further Education, the East Herts team arrived at the finish in two hours, 14 minutes, 15 seconds, two minutes behind the leaders.

Winner of the event was Hatfield Technical College. Second was the Oaklands Agricultural Institute.

Five cars of students from the East Herts College accompanied their team to cheer them on.



Although the Herts Mercury referred to four pullers, both photos show just two.

The winning team, with prize of case of beer held aloft. The site looks like St Peters St, St Albans.



Two pullers, location unknown.



RAFT RACES 1966 & 1967

The issues of Pylon for Winter 1966 and Winter 1967 reported raft racing on the Thames at Marlow. The accounts are reproduced here.

From *PYLON* Winter Edition 1966

The Raft Race, by Maurice Parfitt

Maurice Parfitt wasn't even there, but he was none the less browbeaten into writing the following account, which he claims is a close approximation to the truth.

Early this year it came to the notice of the chairman of the Apprentice Association, Martin Woodall, that an annual raft race, between apprentoids from all different industries, was held at Marlow – the race being run over a 250-yard course on the Thames. Like a good chairman, Martin decided it was about time H.S.A. Hatfield made its esteemed mark, and an application for entry was made. It was soon after that he left the scene for a three-month stay in Germany – the best place for him, I should say.

A few days later the organizers, Bristol Siddeley Engines Apprentices, forwarded a set of regulations and, apart from somebody to organize it, everything was ready. Unfortunately, vice-chairman D. J. Vanstone was, as usual, in the Tech. School at the wrong time, so he faced his new responsibilities and took the job on. Simply, the rafts were to consist of a buoyant body, comprising at least two floats, with a surface area of between 50 and 100 sq. ft and capable of carrying the compulsory crew of four.

After a consultation with the oracle, Mr Bevan, it was decided that the construction should be carried out as a special project at Astwick Manor, under the auspices of Mr Oaten. In order to create as much havoc on the day as possible, two rafts were entered: this required twenty volunteer apprentices to help with the – dare I say it – creation. As we had never entered before, the design and fabrication methods presented a formidable problem, but like all formidable problems it was overcome within a few minutes – after many words from many people, like O. Hopkin. It was, I recall, suggested that he should be allowed to build his raft, so long as he was pushed out to sea in it; needless to say, this motion was unanimously carried.

With the design as finalized as the Trident's, work was started three weeks before the race. One raft was to be built of two 17ft-long, top-hat-sectioned, 22 gauge dural floats, each containing three separate buoyancy tanks. These were to be mounted 3ft apart with three similar, but much smaller, top-hat-sectioned cross-members. The other design consisted of two floats, each made up of 10 five-gallon oil drums soldered together in pairs, with a sheet of tin over the top and bottom surfaces, this giving a rectangle with semicircular sides, when viewed from the front. A generous offer from Mr Jones enabled these to be capped by 3ft cones, front and rear. These two floats were to be mounted 4ft apart in a wooden frame, planked over the top. Once the main construction was started the question of superstructure had to be decided,

and after consulting various expert canoeists, the “pros” for sitting equalled the “cons” for kneeling, so Terry Pankhurst took on the job of making seats for the aluminium raft and kneeling pads for the other.

During this time, Hawker Siddeley Dynamics had managed to infiltrate the Manor to build what appeared to be a most peculiar wooden floating contraption, much to the derision of the residents.

Within a week the basic floats were complete and a suitable idiot was selected to brave the saline depths of Manor Pond, only to prove what everyone expected, they were all O.K. This pond, however, was not suitable for any serious practice, so arrangements were made to transport all three rafts to the reservoir at Cheshunt for a day's “boating” on the Wednesday before the race.

Things progressed and eventually an immaculate, polished, aluminium raft emerged, fitted with four bucket seats, on varnished whitewood decking, along with the other raft. This was quite an aesthetic shape, but painted in a colour scheme sufficient to wound any interior decorator.

Back on the ranch, Dynamics were still finishing theirs. Still farther back on the ranch, they were still finishing it when Wednesday morning arrived, along with the transport. The mass migration from Astwick Manor to Cheshunt ensued, but all three rafts were successfully launched, much to the delight of Terry Pankhurst, who hadn't enjoyed himself so much since his childhood days on the local pond.

A group of potential crew members was assembled to enable a selection to take place to see who should paddle the aluminium *Quicksilver* and *Pink Panther* on the following Saturday. After a general practice both rafts were seen to be surprisingly fast, and the hitherto neglected Dynamics entry proved to be a definite challenger, as opposed to the previous unofficial titles with which it had been endowed. A series of heats was run and the two crews and reserves selected. Lunch followed for recuperation, except for what was possibly the finest crew of the day. On the water were Jack Oaten and Terry Pankhurst with two relative youngsters who had to admit exhaustion before they could drag two otherwise unaffected instructors to the bank, to continue lunch.

After lunch, the three teams lined up on the water and, when given the off, two proceeded at high velocity up the lake whilst *Pink Panther* performed a series of high-speed gyrations and veered off into the bank. Modifications were required! As the afternoon

progressed, the sailing fraternity came out in force but were driven back by three rafts proceeding in their respective high-speed directions, although one dinghy provided much amusement. Whilst in a semi-submerged state it became detached from its bucket, which was thrown overboard by a frantically bailing crew member, who repeated a series of choice colloquial phrases as it floated away.

Next day, back once again at the proverbial ranch, modifications were started. With only two days to go the *Pink Panther* had to be made narrower by a foot, and fitted with a rudder and seats, whilst *Quicksilver* required a different bow to reduce the drag caused by the interference of the bow waves. Competence reigned and everything was ready for loading on to the lorry on Friday night, ready for an early start next morning.

Despite some very suspect navigation, everyone arrived at Marlow on time and the rafts were lowered into the water, much to the awe of the other competitors



Quicksilver and Pink Panther waiting for "the off".

who owned a series of craft ranging from four 50-gallon oil-drums, roped to a wooden frame, to a competent hovercraft but a poor contender for fastest time of the day. Unfortunately, one team was so discouraged they

paddled their raft about twenty yards out into the Thames where it was heard to give a few last desperate gasps before it sank. This left only fifteen other entries to beat, over the now-shortened course of 150 yards. After several heats it became quite evident that *Quicksilver* was living up to its name by putting up the fastest time, but the Dynamics entry was still not out of the running, despite sabotage attempts at Cheshunt.

I don't know whether it was the incentive of the prizes or the quality of the rafts, but the final brought a decisive win for *Quicksilver*, *Pink Panther* being narrowly beaten into third place by Dynamics – a deserving result after the effort put into all three rafts.

The prize-giving was rather like a Hawker Siddeley sports day, with our team taking a barrel of beer for winning, and a crate for fastest time of the day; Dynamics took another barrel as runners-up and one for raft designers winning the raffle, in all a very satisfactory result.

During the afternoon, a challenge was issued by B.O.A.C. to race across the English Channel, on similar rafts. Needless to say, the first to reply was Hawker Siddeley Aviation, closely followed by several other firms, so as soon as spring comes I should travel to the Continent by air – just in case.



The victors come ashore

From *PYLON* Winter Edition 1967 Raft Race II, by John Hatch

John, who is a keen sailing enthusiast, was one of the intrepid crew members of "Wallaby".

Last year, if you remember, was our first year of entry in the Raft Race at Marlow-on-Thames, an event well supported by many other apprentice organizations in Great Britain. We certainly made an impression last year, coming first and third, with Hawker Siddeley Dynamics coming second.

This year the result was a little different with Hawker Siddeley Dynamics coming first and our two rafts a close second and third; still a very good result for Hawker Siddeley, Hatfield.

During the summer, the organizers, Bristol Siddeley Engines, sent the entry regulations. As happened last year a number of experienced apprentices were sent to Astwick Manor to work on the construction of two rafts as a special project, under the guidance of Mr Jack Oaten and Mr Terry Pankhurst. Maurice Parfitt, who had the pleasure of writing about the race last year, had the pleasure this

year of organizing and ensuring the smooth running of the raft work at the Manor. It is perhaps a pity that his pleasure extended to a say in the design of the craft! In his article last year he mentioned that the raft *Pink Panther*, designed by Mr Hopkin had an unfortunate characteristic of "performing a series of high-speed gyrations", so I must mention an unfortunate characteristic of the new raft, of wallowing rather violently with little resultant speed. Hence its christening – *Wallaby*. This was rather disappointing for Maurice, especially as he had gone to a lot of trouble in seeking the advice of water-tank hull designers of Vickers, who told him that narrower, deeper hulls were preferable!

Last year's winning raft, *Quicksilver*, which was made of two 17ft, top-hat-sectioned, 22-gauge dural floats, was used again this year with modified bows to prevent turbulence between the floats. This

modification was quite effective in reducing turbulence, and the fitting of rather smart aluminium rudders increased its manoeuvrability considerably. I won't mention Maurice's rather ineffective wooden rudders, as he may think I am digging at him! *Wallaby*, except for the deeper hulls, was similar to *Quicksilver*, with smart all-aluminium construction and light wooden bucket-seats, foot-rests, and decking.

By the first week in September the rafts were reaching their final stages and it was time for test runs and the selection of the crews. It was decided to do this on the Wednesday before the race, the firm kindly lent us a low-loader and the rafts were transported to the Herts. Young Mariners' Base at Cheshunt where we had our first look at the new Dynamics raft. This gave us quite a shock after their effort last year. They had obviously been secretly spending a lot of time on it. They had built two very slender, two-seater, moulded-ply, racing canoes and fastened them together to make a "raft". It looked as though they were going to do well and sabotage was in many people's minds! A little disheartened, we went about launching our rafts and choosing crews.

It was quite noticeable that *Wallaby* was the slower of the two rafts and a heavier crew was needed because of her height above the water-line, which made paddling with the regulation length of paddles uncomfortable. She also had rather a bad leak, apparent by the way her water-line rose during the day. After an exhausting day, two fast crews of four were chosen and were well practised in the art of keeping in stroke. With final instructions to give up "fags and beer" until the weekend, the party broke up and the rafts returned to the Manor for final modifications.

Wallaby was fitted with a stabilizer which effectively damped the wallowing but unfortunately increased the drag. However, the leak was cured and all was set for the race.

We arrived at Marlow on Saturday morning (16 September) and proudly joined our rafts at the launching-ramp. It was a fine day and the many different rafts from all over the country were a colourful sight as they awaited their escort up river to the site of the race. A critical eye was cast on our competitors and it was

hard not to laugh at some of the rough-and-ready designs, the roughest of which was perhaps the Simms entry consisting of three oil drums fastened together loosely with scaffold tubing and "U" bolts. This "craft" was found to be very unstable by its crew and it was a good thing for them that they could swim. Perhaps the most elaborate raft was the Bristol Siddeley entry with aluminium floats surmounted by a fine model of a helicopter. The "flower power" was represented by the "Pye" apprentices, who entered a very pretty craft and spent a good part of the day running along the bank shouting: "We are the Bell Bunch".

The organizers had erected marquees on the river bank and refreshments were available for the crews, and included free beer and as much food as could be eaten. The racing started at 2.30 p.m. and the banks of the river were crowded with noisy supporters and good-humoured spectators.

There were several heats with the rafts split into two sections, A and B, or fast and slow. There was a short interval during the afternoon for a very greasy "greasy-pole" contest, in which few people managed to get the bottle of beer from the net at the end of the pole, and many people managed to get wet!

After three heats *Quicksilver* was in the final with the Dynamics raft. We had been trying to establish an official protest against the Dynamics design all day with no success. We knew that we could not win on speed so with yours truly at the helm we accidentally rammed the Dynamics raft at the start of the final; this gave us quite a good lead and even appeared to be an accident to the officials but unfortunately we were pipped on the line and had to accept second prize: still, an exciting final and good fun was had by all!

A very adequate evening "nosh" was provided at the Bath Hotel for the crews and this was followed by a dance supported by a fine jazz group.

The Raft Race was a memorable occasion for all who took part and I hope that events like this will continue to grow and be well supported, as they incite an active interest and good fellowship within our own apprentice organization and with others throughout the country.



Wallaby!

RAG DAYS

The earliest Rag Day image to hand happens to be not of the event itself, but the advertising poster (or was it a warning poster?) supplied by Denis Bindoff about the 1957 event. Like most Rag publicity, it featured Krud, a life form existing in the imaginations of the college students. It materialised from time to time and lent its name to the Rag Magazine.

Krud bore what surely was an entirely coincidental general likeness to The Oracle, the 1952/53 art work of Reg Butler that was displayed in the entrance hall of Hatfield Technical College. It was commissioned by Howard Robertson, architect of the College, where it was unveiled in December 1952. The Oracle also gave its name to early issues of the College Student Newspaper. Made of lead on a bronze armature, The Oracle is still on display at what is now the University of Hertfordshire's College Lane campus, site of the Technical College.



The Oracle in the entrance to Hatfield Technical College. Image from "Sixty Years of Innovation", University of Hertfordshire, 2012.



The Oracle now, at the University's College Lane campus. Image from <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/the-oracle-269150>

COMET AT THE COMET

BY NICK RUSTON (1952-1957)

THE COMET PUB HATFIELD CIRCA 1956

Sometime around 1956, the exact date escapes me, four DHAeTS students, of whom I was one, decided that it would be a good idea to publicise the forthcoming Hatfield Technical College Rag Day by removing the model of the Comet mounted on a pylon in the front of the Comet Pub. The idea was to cover the Comet with stick-on Kruds and take it to the Daily Express Offices in London. Some students may remember that the Krud was the unofficial emblem associated with the College Rag Day and was a cartoon character. The Comet Pub was a well-known landmark to all DH employees being located at the junction of the A405 Hatfield to St Albans road and the old A1.

This article, originally published in Pylon 2011, page 35, is the first known account of a Hatfield Rag stunt. In addition to the 1968 stunt mentioned at the end, the University's "Sixty Years" book states that the model was again 'kidnapped' in 1971, a ransom of £50 being paid by the pub manager.



In this more recent photo of the Comet the tube between the column and the Comet is about twice as long as it was when we climbed up the column! Johnny and I sat on top of it, facing each other. The fixing bolts were just above head height...

We did a reconnaissance and I climbed up the column and measured the Comet's wing span. Then we had to find someone with a car with a boot large enough for it; this turned out to be Geoff Greatwood. At about 1am we went to the Comet. We had two look-outs in John Gandon and Geoff Greatwood and whilst Johnny Coombs and I were up the column undoing the fixing bolts we were warned of an approaching police car. This stopped directly beneath us and two uniformed policemen got out for a fag and a chat. They were flood-lit, but luckily we were in total darkness. In due course the police got back in their car and drove off.

At the Daily Express office we handed the Comet to the night-watchman at his desk – he merely said "oh fanks" as though the whole thing was totally normal. No payments were made to charity and I don't remember seeing anything in the local papers.

About a week later we were called from our various departments and told to go to the Personnel Office. When I saw my fellow conspirators going into

the office I realised that we had been found out; so I ran out of the main gate to the factory and into a garage. I called out "the police are after me – where can I hide"? A law-abiding mechanic took pity on me and led me into an inspection pit. However the police soon found me and escorted me back to the Personnel Office in great good humour.

It transpired that a fellow student, whose name I forget had worked out that only Geoff Greatwood had a car with a boot large enough for the Comet and guessed who might have been with him, so he sneaked on us.

So we ended up on £5 bail and had to get police permission to go more than ten miles from Hatfield. This was no problem for me as the Police happily gave me permission to go home every two weeks on my motorbike with all my dirty washing. The police told us they'd advised Watneys the Brewer to take no action, because no harm had been done. But this plea was rebuffed, after which the police 'were on our side'.

In due course we went to Court in

Hatfield and the police sergeant said it was a silly student prank and no harm had been done. They regarded the whole affair as a waste of police and magistrates time. In fact Watneys had planned to take the model down for repainting and had already received a quotation for the work. We had saved them the cost of taking it down.

The Magistrate was a very sympathetic woman; we pleaded guilty and were fined £1 and given six months to pay. We were also instructed to go and apologise to the Comet's manager. This we did with our fingers crossed. The manager asked me whether I would behave well in future. I replied "yes, but I won't drink Watneys beer any more". I am now seventy-six and have kept my word and never ever drunk Watneys beer!

Looking back, my engineering apprenticeship was great fun; my only responsibility was doing enough work to pass my exams each year; which I'm very glad I did. The whole Comet affair was really very funny and makes me remember what immature young men I and the others were.

POSTSCRIPT

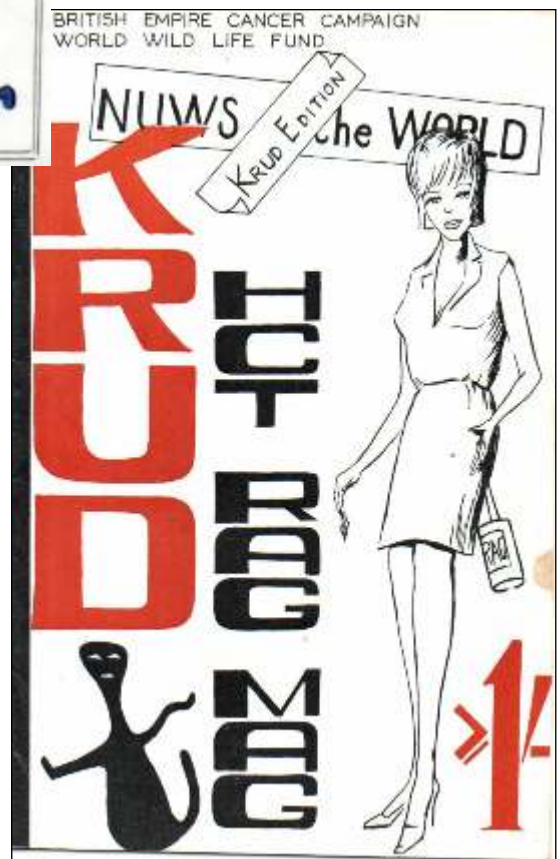
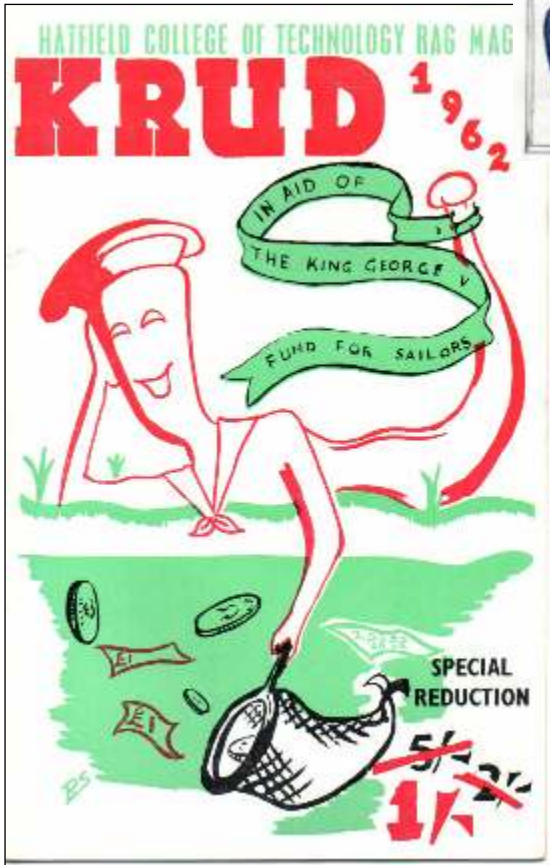
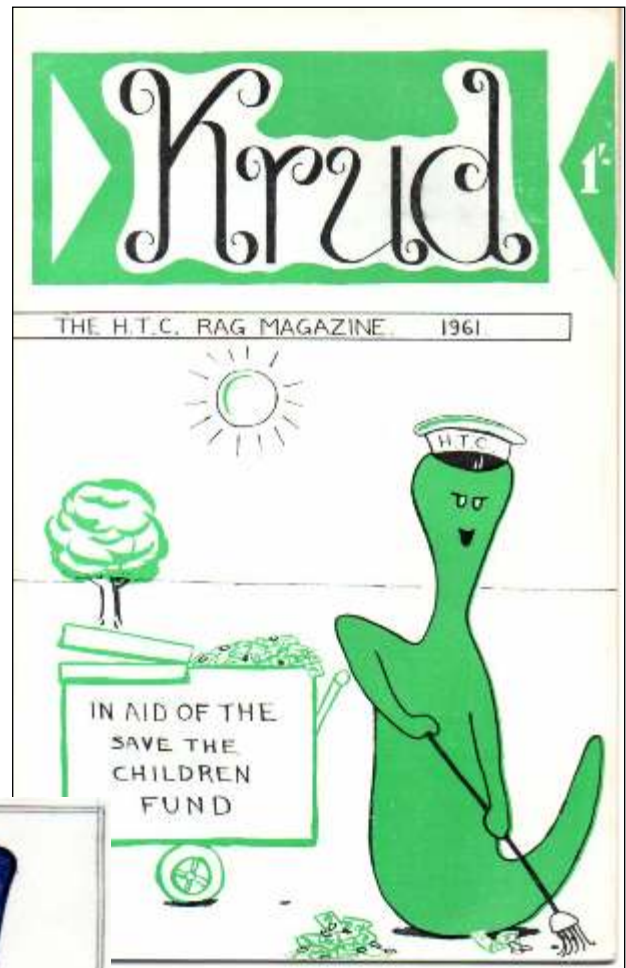
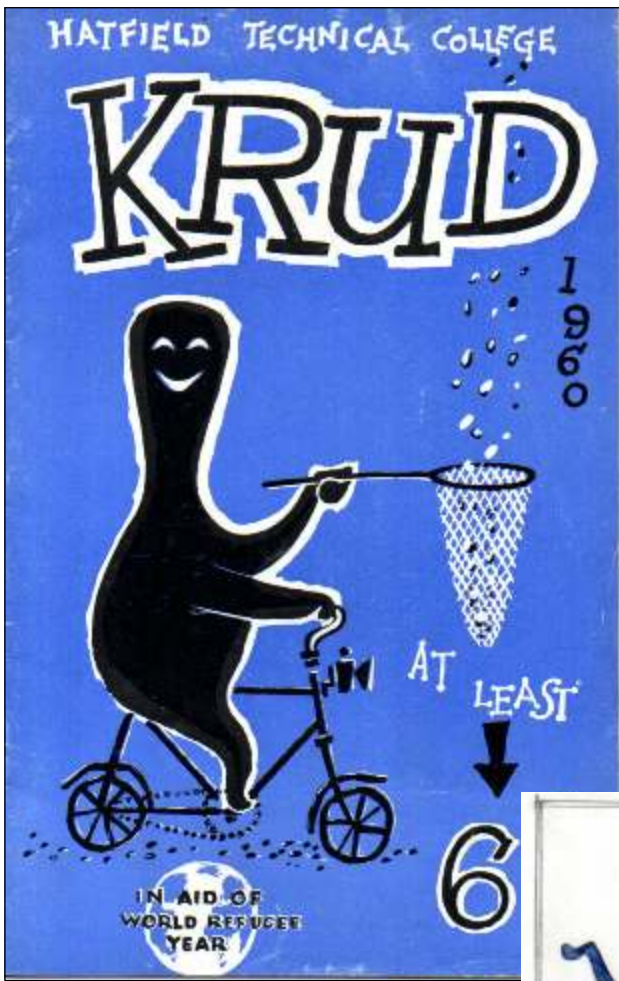
In 1968, eleven years after Nick's exploit, Hatfield College Students again liberated the Comet for publicity purposes, as reported by Bill Gunston in *Aeroplane Monthly*.

RAG WEEK STUNT

'In 1968, doubtless on a dark night, students from Hatfield came with a long ladder and stole it 'for ransom' during their annual Rag Week. This was some achievement, because the model weighed some 150lb. I am advised that the factory, by this time Hawker Siddeley Aviation, stumped up the cash for a charity named by the college and gave it back to the hotel with little damage.'

RAG MAGAZINES

Below are the covers of Krud, the Rag Magazine, 1960 to 1963. In the centre is a surviving example of art work.



RAG DAY PHOTOGRAPHS

The following pages contain a collection of photographs, in approximate date order. Individuals identified (some tentatively) where possible. Photographer's name/initials where known; source as 'via'.

24th May 1958



The Druid float. Above left, Ray Sore standing in front of trilithon. Photo above right Peter Bristow, via Bob Langley.



Ray Sore



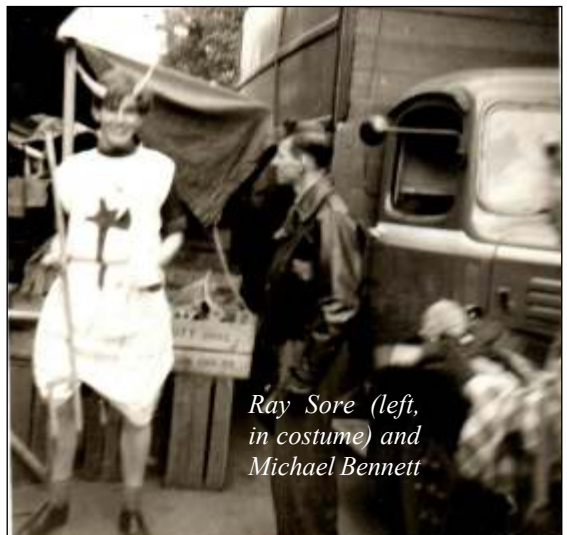
Bob Langley, left. Photo Peter Bristow



The Belles of St Trinians, St Peter's Street, St Albans



Four photos above and photo bottom right via Ray Sore. Whose BSA Three-wheeler was this?



Ray Sore (left, in costume) and Michael Bennett

24th May 1958

All photos this page by Bob Langley's stepfather Peter Bristow, except bottom right.



Rag day 24 May 1958



Rag day 24 May 1958



Rag day 24 May 1958



Rag day 24 May 1958



Rag day 24 May 1958



Rag Ball 24th May
Tony Middleditch, Pete Jones, Bob Langley, unknown

24th May 1958

The two photos this page from trumpeter Ken Colthorpe, centre in upper photo, left in lower photo.



25th APRIL 1959

All photos RdeM



Building the 'Purge' float: Alan Perry standing left, Alan Sheppard kneeling, Bob Langley right



The 'Purge' float: Alan Sheppard



Rag parade leaving College, heading down Roe Green Lane

Right: the 'Purge' float on Stanborough Lane. Names of those aboard are written on the back.

- Roger Coasby
- Pete Jones [1]
- Nigel Finch [2]
- Ray Sore [3]
- Alan Perry [4]
- Don Lack



APRIL 1959

More views of the Purge float



Students in rag attire, and a tableau, pictured at Welwyn Garden City.



Rag day 1959



Nigel Finch, Dave Anderson, Alan Perry.
Photo via Bob Langley.

"Has any one seen my float?" - A lost washerwoman. Photo of and via Bob Langley.

25th APRIL 1959



Fully - clothed, 22 year-old Barry Fleming was flung head-long into the ice-cold water of WGC fountain on Saturday morning.

With a shudder, a shake and a jerk he quickly whipped off his soaked clothes. Much to the amazement of shoppers.

No cause for alarm, though—Barry had a swift suit underneath.

BREATH-TAKING DIP

After a brief breath-taking dip he crawled out, stammering "it was damned wet."

"I half expected it."

You could have expected anything. It was Hatfield Tech's fifth Rag Day.

Three-hundred or so students boarded 12 gaily decorated floats in costumes equally as imbecile.

Even a downpour didn't detract from the high spirits as they ran amongst pouring water, water everywhere, sprinkling game colleagues in self-raising flour and causing traffic jam after traffic jam.

All the way from the College students, pyjama clad many of them, produced collecting cans. No one escaped.

Not even the Law. Though it took two plucky members of the fair sex to venture into Hatfield Police Station.

THE MOTOR-MOWER

Flags were even fixed into convenient spots on the Marquis of Salisbury statue opposite the station.

Then headed by that record-breaking motor-mower, the party descended on WGC stopping traffic with their jiving and at the same time nearly



These students look a load of mischief and they took part in the Rag Procession which passed through Hatfield, Welwyn Garden City and St. Albans last weekend

stopped the fountain with soap powder.

Barry Kensett, who caused a sensation recently by driving a Bubble car 137 times round Piccadilly Circus at 4 o'clock in the morning didn't make the start.

His machine broke down the night before.

Another car developed engine trouble en-route.

WET DAY

Rag organiser, Dave Rumball, 21, said students had telephoned the meteorological office in London where rain was confirmed.

This was the third Rag Day in rain in so many years.

He said "we were going to hold it for the Save the Children's Fund, but this was the only date we could have because of the exams."

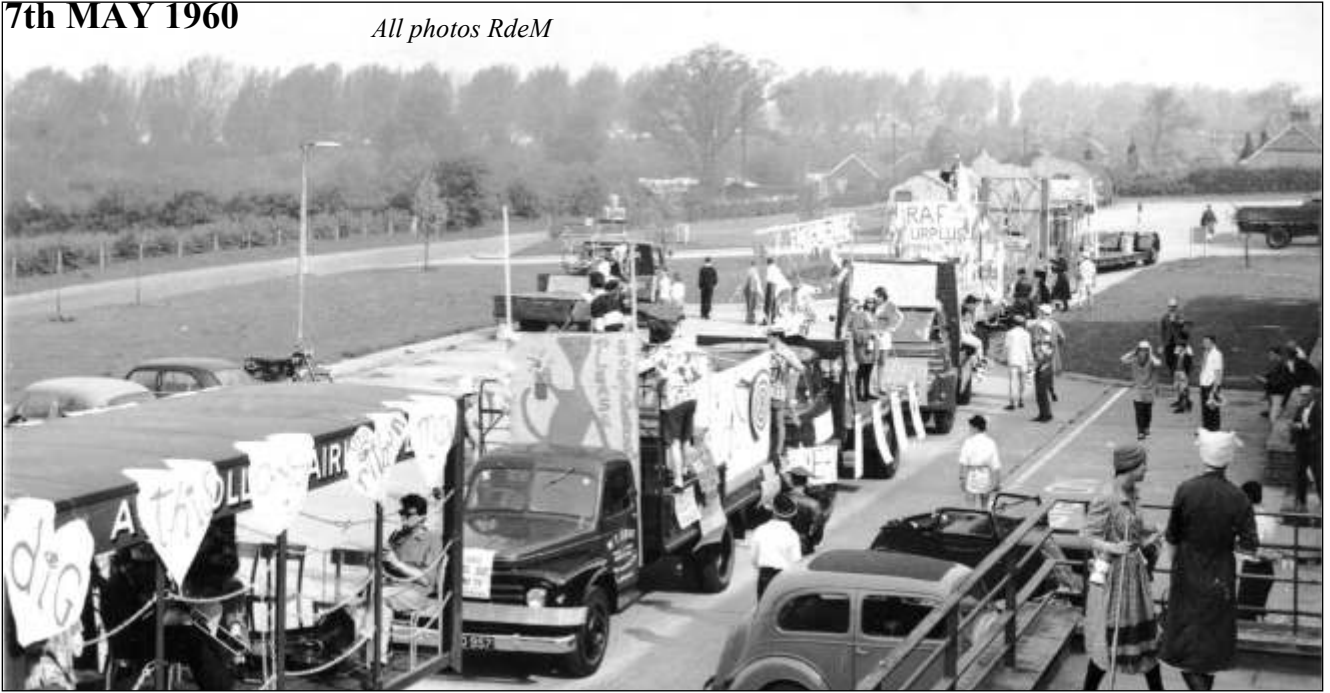
So proceeds went to the blind.



The Ransomes mower taking part in the parade (photo via Keith George)

7th MAY 1960

All photos RdeM



Above, lineup at the College in readiness for the parade.



College Principal, Dr W A J Chapman, always took a keen interest.



Welwyn Garden City railway station yard.

7th MAY 1960

The Blue Streak Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile was cancelled in mid April 1960. Top & centre photos RdeM, bottom photo R Coasby.



On float L to R: R de M, Alan Sheppard, Pete Jones, Bob Langley, Del Parker. Standing beside: Tony Bevan, Roger Coasby



Sitting on the edge of the float L to R are Tony Bevan, Roger Coasby and Pete Jones.

7th MAY 1960

All photos RdeM



Welwyn Garden City fountain



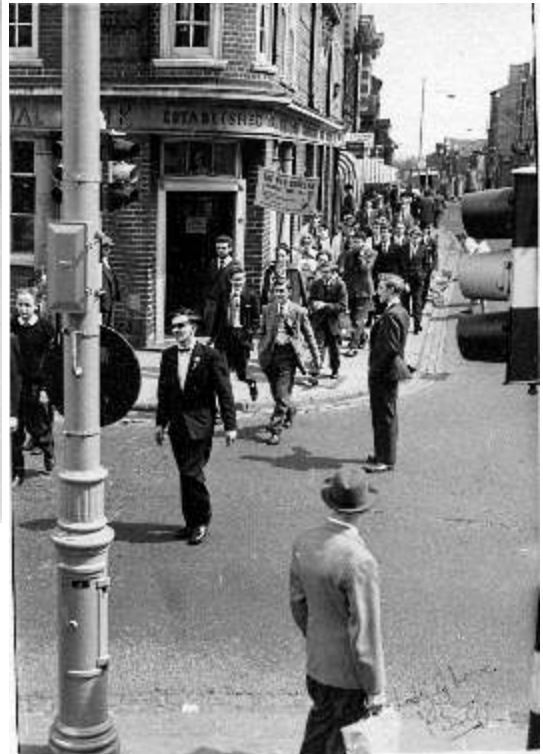
Welwyn Garden City Railway Station

7th MAY 1960

All photos RdeM



17th MAY 1961
Publicity for Rag on 20th May



Top and right: a mock wedding was staged on the steps of St Albans Town Hall. In the photo above are Dennis Bruin, John Keeble, Pat Morris, Beryl Murphy, David Römer and Rowland Butt. That on the right includes Dennis Bruin, David Römer, Martin Clements, Beryl Murphy, Gerry Verrill, Clive Eames and Ned Lawson. Photos via Pat Potts, née Morris.

ANOTHER WEDDING '1960s'.

This mock wedding was staged on a pedestrian crossing in St Albans, year uncertain. Photos via Barry Kensett.



20th MAY 1961

EMBRY DRAG SPECIAL²⁴

WEEK ENDING SAT. 27th MAY.

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 10



HERE IT IS. Embryo brings for your enjoyment a special pictorial issue - the first fully-illustrated account of Rag Day, 1961.

A Rag is the co-operation of a group of students to collect on a large scale for charity. We feel it should be anonymous. Suffice it then to say that on 20th May the students of Hatfield Technical College with many of their friends visited Hatfield, Welwyn Garden City and St. Albans on behalf of Save the Children Fund. Of the show they made and the fun they had, let the pictures speak for themselves.

For the Rag Committee: many thanks to all helpers contributors and participants, to the suppliers of transport and materials, to the police and all those who helped to make the Rag successful.

For ourselves: many thanks to our advertisers and to our printers, without whose help this issue would not have been possible.



More from the 1961 Ebryo Rag Special



20th MAY 1961

All photos via Roger Coasby



20th MAY 1961

*Right and below
via Roger Coasby*



Above from the 1961 Embryo Rag

Below: the whole Embryo centre spread



1962 Rag Procession Saturday, May 19th

will proceed as follows

HATFIELD

9.00 a.m. - Start at College
9.00 a.m. - 10.00 a.m. South Hatfield
10.00 a.m. - 10.15 a.m. White Lion Square
10.20 a.m. French Horn Lane
10.30 a.m. - 10.45 a.m. B.R. Station, Old Hatfield

WELWYN GARDEN CITY

11.00 a.m. Woodhall Lane
11.15 a.m. - 11.25 a.m. Cole Green Lane Shopping Centre
11.40 a.m. Bridge Road
11.45 a.m. - 12.00 B.R. Station
12.00 - 12.15 p.m. Handside Lane

ST. ALBANS

1.45 p.m. Oaklands
1.45 p.m. - 2.10 p.m. Hatfield Road
2.10 p.m. "The Crown"
2.30 p.m. - 2.45 p.m. Marshalswick Shopping Centre
2.55 p.m. - 3.05 p.m. Sandridge Road
3.10 p.m. St. Peters Street
3.25 p.m. London Road
3.45 p.m. - 5.15 p.m. City Centre

LOOK OUT !

For "THE CAGE"
"THE BALLOON RACE FLOAT"

Buy a balloon and win a camera or its cash value £10

W. A. GURST (Printers) Ltd., HATFIELD PRESS.

The Procession route was much the same every year, certainly from around 1959.

19th MAY 1962

The event was reported fully in Embryo, to be transcribed when the scribe has time to do so.



From The Oracle, 1962; photos by Roy Chilvers. The pram-pusher is Roger de Mercado. The passengers are unknown.



Soviet aero instruments drop in Surrey

A CONTAINER with scientific instruments attached to a parachute was found on Mitcham (Surrey) Common yesterday.

It was sent by police to the Meteorological Office, Air Ministry Harrow (Middlesex).

The container had a flashing light on it and nearby was found a label marked "C.C.C.P. 13, 21-7-19" and directions in four languages asking that if the cylinder was found it should be returned to the Soviet Aeronautical Institute.

An Air Ministry spokesman said: "The cylinder is being examined at Harrow. When we find out what it is we may have a statement to make."

Image from British Newspaper Archive

The 'Flashnik' Hoax 1958

The Northern Daily Mail of Monday February 3rd 1958 reported the discovery on Mitcham Common, Surrey of Soviet aero instruments. The discovery was made at twenty minutes past midnight on that Monday morning, not "yesterday". All the early reports were deadpan, but it was soon announced that it was a hoax and for the next few days accounts appeared in many newspapers nationwide. The plan had been made by Reading University. One of the team was a Croydon friend of de Havilland apprentices Alan Sheppard and Pete Jones, also of Croydon, who along with Bob Langley undertook to make the nosecone at Astwick Manor. The body was part of a marine buoy.

The Russian Sputnik 1 was launched on 4th October 1957 and fell back into the atmosphere on 4th January 1958. Sputnik 2 was launched on 3rd November 1957 and was still in space at the time of the hoax. It re-entered the atmosphere on 14th April 1958.

FLASHNIK WAS A "HOAXNIK"

'RUSSIAN' OBJECT ON MITCHAM COMMON

DAILY TELEGRAPH REPORTER

The Flashnik, or C.C.C.P.13, a metal cylinder, with a flashing light and parachute attachment found on Mitcham Common, Surrey, early yesterday, was revealed at the Air Ministry, London, to be, as somebody put it, a "hoaxnik."

But not is who a hoax and qualified as one of the most successful efforts of the Space Age. (Definition: To deceive or take in by inducing to believe an amusing or mischievous fabrication.)

This is how P.c. Z176 might have described the discovery:

Proceeding across Mitcham Common at 10.30 a.m. on Feb. 3 my attention was attracted by a flashing light. On investigation I saw that the light was attached to a metal cylinder about 2ft long and 5in or 6in in diameter.

TICKING SOUND

Approaching the object, I saw what appeared to be a parachute attached to it, and I heard a ticking sound like an alarm clock. I discovered a label marked: C.C.C.P.13, 21-7-19, with instructions in four languages. The English said: "Please return to Soviet Aeronautical Institute."

At the police station it was recognised that the letters C.C.C.P. represented the initials in Russian of the Soviet Union. The four languages were English, French, German and Russian. The object was sent to the Meteorological Office of the Air Ministry at Harrow, Middlesex.

Then the object, still ticking, was transferred to Air Ministry headquarters. There it was found to contain English batteries and surplus United States Army radio equipment to provide the tick-tick and the flashing light.



The Daily Telegraph of Tuesday February 4th had a photo on the front page and a long report inside. Copies from Bob Langley.



SCIENTIFIC HOAX. A pencil-shaped metal cylinder, found on Mitcham Common early yesterday, being examined by Mr. A. I. Maidens, an assistant director, Instrument Development, at the Royal Air Force Meteorological Department

SCIENTIFIC HOAX. A pencil-shaped metal cylinder, found on Mitcham Common early yesterday, being examined by Mr. A. I. Maidens, an assistant director, Instrument Development, at the Royal Air Force Meteorological Department at Harrow. It was said by the Air Ministry to be a hoax.

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But not.....

the...

a hoax and qualified as one of the most successful efforts of the Space Age. (Definition: To deceive or take in by inducing to believe an amusing or mischievous fabrication.)

This is how P.C. Z176 might have described the discovery:

Proceeding across Mitcham Common at 12.20 a.m. on Feb. 3 my attention was attracted by a flashing light. On investigation I saw that the light was attached to a metal cylinder about 2ft long and 5in or 6in in diameter.

TICKING SOUND

Approaching the object, I saw what appeared to be a parachute attached to it, and I heard a ticking sound like an alarm clock. I discovered a label marked .C.C.C.P.13, 21-7-19, with instructions in four languages. The English said “Please return to Soviet Aeronautical Institute”.

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From Jill Shepherd, niece of Alan Shepherd, far right middle row SL: 44-49

