

# **SunRay Research Report**

Recommendations for naming the  
**'New Build', Hatfield, Hertfordshire.**

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## **Part One : Cockpits and Cocktails**

The *Wetherspoon* site is at the front of Comet Square, next to Comet Way, looking across the dual carriageway to the Galleria retail centre and the *Odeon* cinema. Comet Square is the 'District Centre' of a mixed-use development, built on Hatfield Aerodrome, which closed in 1994. The rest of the aerodrome is divided between the University of Hertfordshire and Hatfield Business Park.

Flying began here in 1930, on the grass airfield used by the London Aeroplane Club. The airfield was immediately behind the *JDW* site, which was then occupied by a large detached house with a large garden, flanked by a similar property on either side. The Club's handbook, published in 1935, claimed that it was 'the finest private aerodrome in the country'. The club house was behind the present *Travelodge*, where members sipped cocktails on 'a spacious terrace on the aerodrome side', ate in 'the first class dining hall' and made use of the 'excellent dance floor'.

Possible name: **The Club House.**

Next to the club house there were squash courts and an open-air swimming pool. The Hatfield Beacon was positioned on top of the squash court building. The large glass beacon was an important navigational device. Its white flashing light guided pilots back home after sunset. It was removed from the site in 1988, but was recently restored and now marks the start of the Hatfield Aerodrome Heritage Trail, at the University of Hertfordshire.

Possible name: **The Hatfield Beacon.**

## **Part Two : The Planemakers**

The aerodrome was owned by the de Havilland Aircraft Company, founded by Geoffrey de Havilland. The pioneering aviator and aircraft engineer moved his company to Hatfield, in 1930, having purchased an area of flat, well-drained farmland belonging to Harpsfield Hall Farm. Harpsfield Hall, itself, was a 'commodious residence' approached by a long driveway across the fields. The old house was demolished to make way for the main runway.

Possible name: **Harpsfield Hall.**

In 1934, Geoffrey de Havilland began building a new headquarters and factory at the aerodrome. New facilities were added in the late 1940s, which included a hangar covering what is now the *JDW* site. By 1960, the aircraft company employed several thousand people and had transformed the small town of Hatfield. In that year, de Havillands became part of the Hawker-Siddeley group, later taken over by British Aerospace. In 1997, a statue of Sir Geoffrey was erected near the entrance to the College Lane Campus of the University of Hertfordshire.

Possible name: **The Sir Geoffrey de Havilland.**

Sir Geoffrey had made Hatfield internationally famous. In 1933, he won the prestigious King's Cup Air Race. The annual round Britain event was based at Hatfield for most of the 1930s. The King's Cup is still held today. In 1934 the de Havilland Comet Racer set off from the aerodrome, winning the England-Australia Air Race in a record-breaking time of 70 hours, 54 minutes and 18 seconds. A replica of the plane is outside the Comet Hotel, at the top of Comet Way.

Possible name: **The King's Cup.**

Hatfield was the birthplace of many planes. The legendary Mosquito first flew from the aerodrome, in 1940. Dubbed 'the plane that saved Britain', more than 3,000 were built at Hatfield. John Cunningham had a distinguished record flying Mosquitos. He became de Havilland's Chief Test Pilot and was at the controls when the Comet taxied down the runway at Hatfield on 27th July 1949. The de Havilland Comet was the world's first jet airliner.

Possible name: **The Test Pilot.**

The Stone House was a well known local landmark for around 50 years. The popular hotel/public house stood in what is now the car park of the Odeon multiplex cinema, opposite Comet Square and the *JDW* site. Built in 1933, by the motor engineers W.G.&F.N.Waters, it was almost surrounded by open fields, alongside the recently-opened Barnet Bypass (now Comet Way).

Possible name: **The Stone House.**

### **Fact File**

- \* Hatfield is a town in Hertfordshire, 20 miles north of London.
- \* In 2011 the town's population was 39,202 - an increase of 9,586 since 2001.
- \* It is also the location of Hatfield House, seat of the mighty Cecil family. It was here, in 1558, that Princess Elizabeth learned that she had become Queen of England.
- \* Hatfield expanded rapidly after the opening of the de Havilland aircraft factory. In 1946 it was designated a New Town and a new town centre was built alongside Old Hatfield.
- \* The University of Hertfordshire dates back to 1952, when Hatfield Technical College was built on land personally donated by the Chairman of the de Havilland Aircraft Company.