

Hopyards were a familiar feature of the countryside around Bromyard and along the Frome and Teme Valleys with a few acres on many farms being devoted to hops up until the late 1950s. This changed with standardization of school holidays by Education Acts, the introduction of large scale mechanization, competition from foreign hops, and the devastating effect of the hop disease, verticillium wilt.



Hop growing was a year round occupation for wirework must be erected and repaired, poles replaced, and anchors adjusted to accommodate the weight of the hop vines. Rows were cultivated, manured, and sprayed for disease, blight, aphids, and weeds. As the vines began to grow in April, local labourers and women started the Spring season stringing, tying and training the best vines. Lower bines were later removed so tractors could pass down the rows. All this with lambing, milking, growing and picking soft fruits, haymaking, and in July and August preparing the hop kilns for drying, and getting ready for the arrival of scores of hop pickers in September.

Nineteen hour days organized into two shifts from 6am - 3.30pm, and 3.30pm – 1am were the order of the day to get the hops picked and dried. Dinners were cooked over big iron grates, (barbecues are not new), and old blackened kettles provided hot water for the thermos of tea taken to the hopyards along with piles of sandwiches. 'Going hopping' for children meant sleeping on straw pallets, rabbit stews, avoiding wasps, picking hops into an old umbrella while their mothers worked at the cribs to fill the greensacks.



It was a hard 'working holiday' but in the evening there was singing around the fires, and places to explore. At the end of the month, they returned home with apples, damsons, potatoes, bunches of hops for their chapel and church harvest festivals, sun tanned, fitter, and with extra money for the months ahead in their pockets.

The society is launching a revised edition of their long 'out of print' book,

## *A Pocketful of Hops*



Available from 7<sup>th</sup> July 2007

The original edition was published in 1988 and has sold all over the world. The text has been revised and additional material describes modern practices and equipment; new maps, graphs and tables have been introduced.

This book is essential reading for those interested in hop growing, and for those curious to learn how the cultivation and marketing of hops fitted in to the local economy of north-east Herefordshire. It will be of approximately 200 pages, profusely illustrated and now includes new photographs.

Visit the Society's Website  
[www.bromyardhistorysociety.org.uk](http://www.bromyardhistorysociety.org.uk)

Founded 1966  
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Open Thursdays and Fridays  
10.0am - 12.30pm  
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Saturdays 10.0am - 12.30pm.

Group visits by appointment.  
For more information phone  
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## WHAT DOES THE SOCIETY OFFER?

**T**he Society, founded in 1966, exists to foster interest, enjoyment, research and publication in the field of our local history. It offers all members a varied programme of events, at least monthly, throughout the year. These are mainly illustrated lectures in the winter and guided outings in the summer. It stages an exhibition every year at the Bromyard Gala and the Society publishes an annual Journal containing items of local history and accounts of its activities.

**A**t the new Local History Centre there are excellent facilities for research and we are endeavouring to make our now considerable archive more available to the public. Many photographs & documents relating to family, trade and property etc have been donated over the years and these are stored in our purpose built archive. Other records include the local newspapers, parish registers and censuses are stored on film and fiche. Changing displays of local interest are staged in the Exhibition Room. If you would like to be involved, we are always looking for volunteers to help and to take part in our activities. Do call in.

**S**ociety publications can be obtained from the Centre's shop at 5, Sherford Street or from Peter Mesdag (01885 482462). The Society also publishes an annual Journal, and some back copies are available from the shop.

## A POCKETFUL OF HOPS A NEW EXHIBITION AT THE LOCAL HISTORY CENTRE 5 SHERFORD STREET BROMYARD JUNE - NOVEMBER 2007



**V**isit our exhibition and recall memories from the society's photo archive of the frantic September harvest month when locals were joined by hop pickers with tin trunks arriving by train, lorry and charabancs from the Black Country and South Wales. Gypsies set up their encampments in nearby fields. During the war years Land Army girls and prisoners of war all helped, and in the 1960s, students, especially from the agricultural colleges.