

Newsletter

DUNSTABLE & DISTRICT
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

N°10

September 1998



From the Chairman

Welcome to our new programme of meetings, which I hope you will enjoy. I look forward to seeing you whenever you can come, and a particular welcome if you are a new member. As well as your official programme card we do have a single sheet outlining the meetings — these are available at our evenings for the benefit of visitors or for anyone who would be interested in joining or coming along, so if you do know someone who would like details, please do take one. Alternatively if you let any committee member know, then we shall be pleased to see that that person receives a copy.

One comment about the December Christmas Social evening. Please note that, as mentioned on the card, members **must** purchase tickets beforehand, as we do have a limit on numbers for that event. Tickets will be available at our November meeting.

These notes are being written just after the second outing to Lavenham, and once again we have enjoyed dry weather (for the first Lavenham trip almost the hottest day of the year !) for all our journeys, so we have been fortunate indeed. We have had very enjoyable outings to Little Gaddesden church and Frithsden vineyard (I hope you enjoyed the wine purchased), Hitchin for the walk around and the museum, and to Lavenham, via Finchingfield outward and Cavendish on the way back, on our all-day trips. Although we have two or three places noted down for 1999, suggestions will always be welcomed. You may well know somewhere that would be suitable, attractive or which we can investigate further.

For details of the Society's new publication, coming out in November, see overleaf. Our second book 'Shops and Markets', which has gone through the original 600 print order and a reprint of 200, and is now on a second reprint, brought forth many complimentary comments to both authors, Don Kemp and Fred Moore. As with No.1 in the series (also reprinted) many copies went overseas. We thought you would like to read part of a letter received from Randolph T. Faulkner (Three Owls Private Press) of Smyrna, Delaware, U.S.A., received following a telephone call to Bernard Stevens :

"Reading through Bedfordshire Magazine I saw the article on OLD TRADES OF DUNSTABLE: SHOPS AND MARKETS by Fred Moore and Don Kemp and decided to phone in hope there might be a copy still available. Locally I am a member of our historical society (Duck Creek Historical Society) Duck Creek being the early name of Smyrna. However, we have a long time interest in Bedfordshire and most especially Dunstable as my wife Constance K. Ives (Maiden name) grew up in Dunstable and naturally still has fond memories of growing up there and the many friendships. Her brother was John Ives who worked for the Index Printers for many years and was active in football and cricket. His wife is Ciss Ives, formerly Ciss Tompkins and she worked at Waterlow's for a number of years. My wife, Constance, worked for Bales and knew Jack Rice but later went into war work at the AC Delco. She went to the Ashton school when Ms. Mapley was headmistress. ...

Three Owls Press is a small museum of printing artifacts of the pre-computer era and dedicated to helping preserve a part of our printing heritage. Truly enjoyed the book "Old Trades of Dunstable" with its wealth of information and photographs. We certainly commend the officers and members of the History Society for their foresight and commitment to preserving such vital information.

Wishing you much future succes. Sincerely, "

Talking of books, Hugh Garrod (Committee Member and our first Vice-Chairman) has a few copies left of his booklet 'The Pilgrims' Way', published earlier this year, £1.50. Hugh was one of a host of people who went on a national pilgrimage last year which marked the 1400th anniversary of the coming of St. Augustine to Canterbury from Rome, and the death of St. Columba on Iona in the year 597. Hugh traces the journey and the people he meets, with their varying observations, from Canterbury to Iona and down to the Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland, to which all proceeds from the book are being donated. It is well worth reading.

Contact Hugh, tel. 01582 663384.



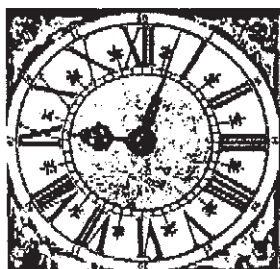
From the Chairman . . . Continued.

Reverting to 'Shops and Markets', Fred Moore, when talking about High Street South, refers to Mr. England's bakery on the corner of Britain Street and that Mr. Frank Kenworthy worked there at a later date. I have it on good authority that at one time residents in Britain Street and nearby, particularly in the summer months, would take their Sunday lunch to the bakery to be heated up in the ovens. Collecting time was half-an-hour and the charge, one penny. Len Harris tells us that Creamer's bakery also did this. No doubt this was common not just to Dunstable, but an interesting service to the community.

Another service, at the other end of the town, in High Street North, involved Bennett's Brewery, on the corner of Chiltern Road. Housewives who wanted to make their own bread would take over a cup for a pennyworth of yeast.

Whilst in High Street North, it is sad to relate the closure of Waterlow Road Methodist chapel on the corner of that street, a landmark in the northern end of the town. Built in 1905, it replaced the old 'Station' or 'Railway Mission' chapel, built in 1859 and which, in turn became the soda water factory and storage depot for soft drinks for the brewery, which was adjacent. The last Sunday service at Waterlow Road took place at the end of June.

C.B.



Clock Makers in Dunstable

A friend recently 'phoned me to say that he had visited a family in Chichester and they had an 1812 Grandfather Clock on which, at the foot of the dial was inscribed :

T.G. COLLINGS DUNSTABLE.

Bernard Stevens also has a Collings clock. Are there any more out there ? Anybody know anything about the gentleman ?

Colin Bourne

Pigot & Co.'s directory for 1830-31 mentions in Dunstable

Watch and Clock Makers

Collings Thomas George, High st

Tims Thomas, High street

Slater 1850 Bedfordshire Directory, mentions :

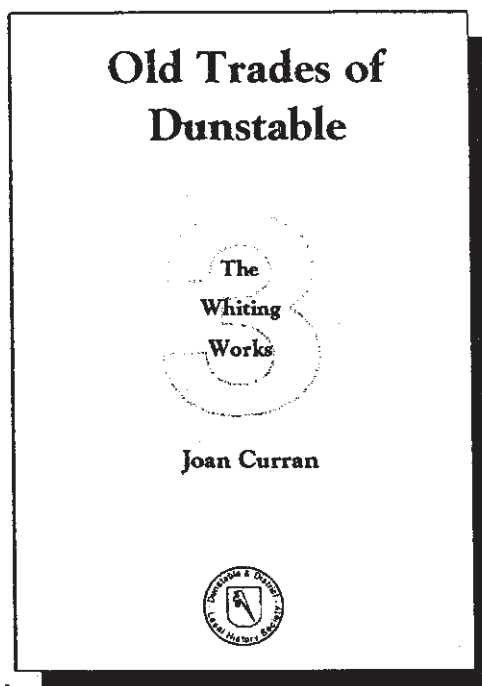
Bowles John, High street

Collings Thomas George, High st

Kimick Joseph, High st.

Bernard has recently seen a Kimick clock when visiting a friend in Flore near Weedon (Northants).

The Next Book



The Society's third book in the series of 'Old Trades of Dunstable' will be published in November. Written by our Secretary, Joan Curran, it traces the history of the important Whiting industry in Dunstable through the last century to its eventual demise in the early 1960s. Like its predecessors, the book is the result of a talk given at one of our popular Trades Evenings (November '95) and Joan has spent much time in considerable further research, which has revealed a lot of interesting information. Fifty six pages, it contains some fascinating illustrations about an industry of which Dunstable was very much a centre. Many of our members will remember the five whiting works dotted around the town, but there is much more to tell ... Price £3.25, but for Society members, if purchased through the Society from the planned launch date of Tuesday 10th November onwards, there will be a reduced price of £2.95.

Colin Bourne

Trades Evening - Cross & Co

It would be very helpful if you would pass to the Chairman any information, details, anecdotes, etc. that you might know concerning this firm, or of anybody who worked there.

From
The Dunstable Borough
Gazette
for 8th February 1882.

110 YEARS
AGO

"Sir Garnet Wolseley raises a note of alarm to the effect that the construction of a tunnel would be suicidal to English interests, that it would be practically throwing away the natural protection of the "silver streak" and delivering England over to the first French political or military adventurer who should be audacious enough to offer the plunder of London as a reward to his followers."

Evidently nobody thought the idea of a Channel Tunnel was practicable anyway, so possibly Sir Garnet Wolseley's alarm was not widely shared!

Joan Curran

Landscaping at Valence End

Concern is still expressed about the extensive earthwork at Valence end below Bison Hill on land owned by Whipsnade Wild Animal Park, and questions continue to be asked as to what is happening.

The area was extensively damaged when used as an exhibition site for earth moving equipment. The Park obtained a licence and appointed a contractor to restore the area to grass downland, the objective being to recreate the topography as it might have been by marrying the new contours with the existing ones on the lower part of Bison Hill. The work is being watched over by the County Council, English Nature, the county council's ecologist, the Environment Agency and the Chiltern Society.

As the new land form is created (working from south to north) by good quality inert land-fill, the new surface is being covered by a metre thick layer of chalk to encourage the growth of chalkland grasses and plants. The chalk comes from within the site, hence the present tip-like appearance.

On the first part to be completed (nearest Dagnall), the newly sown grass is growing well, and already chalkland plants have begun to re-establish themselves.

The landfill operations should be completed this month and the final landscaping by the new year. After which, a 15 year Restoration Management Plan, which is now being drafted, will have to be adhered to by the Park. In time, the area should virtually be indistinguishable from the existing adjacent downland. However, patience is of the essence : Nature needs ample time to complete what man has tried to do in a short time to repair the damage he has done in the past.

The Management Plan envisages, among other measures, controlled animal grazing, and the Park may well continue to use the 'reclaimed' land this way after the expiry of the Plan.

David Lindsey

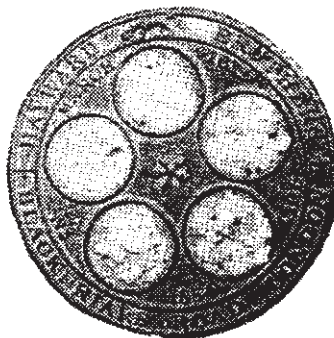
Dunstable's Disappearing Heritage

Members will be saddened to learn of the loss of another piece of Dunstable's heritage albeit only a small one on this occasion. The circular cast iron cover for the coal hole of the old police station in Icknield Street has been stolen ! The coal hole is round the corner in Burr Street. The lady of the house said she heard some banging at the side of the house but thought it was workmen in the road. It was only later when she went to look that she found the cover had gone and a piece of board covered

the hole. At least the thieves were safety conscious !

What made the theft all the more annoying was that her husband, realising the value of the cover, had taken pains to cement it firmly into the pavement.

The cover is illustrated



on page 123 of Nigel Benson's *Dunstable in Detail*. (Reproduced by kind permission of the author). The date 1854 can be seen.

David Lindsey

Changes at County Hall

As some of you already know, the County Record Office, as we used to call it, has had to change its name since the last local government reorganisation. It now has the much longer, and less easily remembered title of Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Services.

Now there has been another change. Chris Pickford, who has been in Bedfordshire for over twenty years, the last twelve of them as County Archivist, has left to take up another post as Director of the Church of England Records Centre, based in South London.

He is already taking a keen interest in Kent, where he will be living, but still hopes to keep his links with Bedfordshire. One of his many contributions to Bedfordshire local history has been his series of volumes on Bedfordshire Churches in the 19th century. The last volume will not actually be published until Chris has left the county although the text has already been completed. We shall miss him at the Record Office but it is good to know that his successor will be Kevin Ward, who has been on the staff there for a number of years, latterly as Deputy County Archivist. We wish both Chris and Kevin well in their new posts.

Joan Curran

DUNSTABLE MEMORIES BY DOUG DARBY

Douglas Darby was born in Dunstable and has lived in the town virtually all his life. He is a founder member of the History Society and has taken part in many town activities, including a major role, behind the scenes, in the big Dunstable Pageant of 1963. He is a keen and talented musician, playing percussion and tenor saxophone, and has taken part in innumerable concerts all over the area until very recently. By profession he was a Chartered Surveyor mainly concerned with Planning and Development, both urban and rural. After six years war service he worked locally, then was appointed Chief Assistant Planning Officer responsible for development control in Hemel Hempstead New Town, a post he held until retiring.

C.B.

Members have heard personal recollections from many local people and the part they played in or contributed to the history of our town. The "Yesteryear" pictures in the Gazette have also prompted other memories so perhaps some of mine will be of interest. I will restrict them to personalities I actually knew, mostly, though not necessarily, from the period between the wars.

One was the News vendor known only as 'Blackie' who had his stand on the corner of West Street. He knew which paper his many customers wanted and would have them ready as they approached, even those in cars. He would weave his way across the street, take the few coppers which most papers cost in those days, and be back again at his box within seconds. Imagine that today, when, even with pedestrian crossings, it is somewhat hazardous to go from one side to the other, let alone sell papers on the way.

This corner was also the place to go in Spring to patronise the Hokey Pokey man with his varieties of home made ice cream. When he eventually disappeared his place was taken by the Walls blue and white chequered tricycle - "stop me and buy one".

Still at the cross roads another outstanding man, in all senses of that word, was P.C. King. Always immaculately turned out and wearing white gloves and armllets he stood in the middle of the road directing the ever increasing traffic. His signals were unmistakable, and if he saw a group of youths on the corner he would stop everything in all directions, walk over and move them on. If he sensed any trouble brewing it was immediately dealt with by a gentle but very firm clip on the ear!

Church Street, much narrower then, provided many interesting characters. Two were landlords of licensed premises. The aptly named 'First and Last' by the old railway station was well hosted by one Arthur Coe, a large jolly man. At the rear of the premises was a large hall which today we would call a Function Room. It was not then dignified with such a name but served as the venue for all kinds of celebrations. It was regularly booked for a dancing school run by a very personable young lady - Hilda Squires. The Royal Oak, opposite Priory Road, was home to a Mr Kibble and his daughter René, another very accomplished and widely acclaimed dancing instructress and performer. Her classes were held at the former

Temperance Hotel run by Hedley Mainwaring. This was at the lower end of West Street, now redeveloped with the video shop and the currently vacant 'Bargain Store'.

Just beyond the Royal Oak was Field's coal yard. Walter was an outstanding Christian character (he was for many years Secretary to the Men's Bible Class at the Square Methodist Church). His fine baritone voice was in demand at the New Year old folks tea, which would not be complete without his rendering of the Negro Spiritual "The Old Umbrella". It was not unknown for him to drop an odd extra bag of coal on the doorstep of an old person who otherwise would be unable to keep the fire going.

A little further along was The Dell — home to George 'Dobbin' Holt. Officially described as a Game Dealer he had diverse activities including that of the local bookmaker. He was outspoken and with his rather powerful delivery he enlivened the proceedings of the Town Council to which he had been easily elected.

Almost opposite was Fred Petit's nursery - his holding extended to St Peter's Road and Priory Road corner where Priory Court flats now stand. With several glasshouses and the large area of open cultivation he could and did provide everything for the garden. He was ably assisted by his hard working wife who managed the shop. Their son was more academically inclined, an outstanding chemist and scientist he left the area to go to London and the business was taken over by Learmonth's.

While we are near the Priory Church two rectors come to mind. The first, Canon Baker, was a long serving incumbent from 1903 to 1924. He acted as unofficial 'Chaplain' to Miss Whitworth's prep school which was then accommodated above the stable block of the vicarage, fronting West Street at the corner of Icknield Street. His flat brimmed sombrero type hat identified his calling.

A later personality, in the early 60s, was Rev. French, often seen without a hat, and his robe flying behind him as he cycled furiously down West Street - he was nearly always behind time for services.

In a quite different vein, one of the many decorators was one George Burnham. Outside his shop in Albion Street hung a large paint kettle with all colours of paint dripping down the sides - not exactly an encouraging indication



that he would do a clean and tidy job !

There are so many others who come to mind but I will conclude with a 'thumb nail sketch' of my father Horace. It is not possible to do more than refer briefly to the many aspects of his life which only one of the family knows in detail, how proud he was living in, and serving his home town.

He was born in a small terraced cottage in Chapel Walk which is now the open area of Ashton Square in front of Martin's shop. As the family grew – six brothers and two sisters, they moved to a larger house in Church Street and all, except Kit and Sid, left to follow their various trades and occupations, some in Leighton Buzzard, others in various parts of London. My father stayed in Dunstable and after leaving the Methodist Day School he started as assistant junior teacher at Ashton School in Church Street. He intended to become a full time schoolmaster but for various reasons this did not materialise. By this time he had married and moved to St Peter's Road, later to Priory Road, where my sister Jean was born.

Being interested in sport, particularly football and athletics, he signed for a season with Luton Town. This connection with Luton and Mr. Fred Creak in Dunstable led him into the staple industry – hat manufacture. Starting in the office and showroom he progressed to become Managing Director of Currant & Creak's factory in Bute Street until he retired. He was a prominent member of various Masonic Lodges rising to Grand Master in Luton and was a founder member of the Old Dunstablians Lodge, being also one of the Governors of the Grammar school.

A keen member of Rotary, he was also associated with a number of different clubs and associations in the area.

Together with my mother he travelled widely to conferences in this country and overseas – I recall one especially to Czechoslovakia. For a short time he served on the Town Council and was on the sub-committee which negotiated the move of A.C. Sphinx (later Delco) to the town and also the purchase of Grove House for offices for the Town Council. He was deeply involved in local politics and, as a member and sometime Chairman of the Conservative Club, he was also no mean player on the billiard and snooker tables. During the war he was major i/c of the local unit of the Home Guard. My parents by now were living in Downs Road.

He had a fine bass / baritone voice, was an accomplished soloist, and took leading parts in several productions of the original Operatic & Dramatic Society. This brings back memories of happy hours with friends in the Society for which my aunt Kit, a school and music teacher at Chiltern Road school (now Chiltern Radio studios) was rehearsal pianist. I suppose with such a background my own hobby of music making is understandable.

One particular event comes to mind when he was chosen as one of the contestants in the Wilfred Pickles radio show recorded on the old Town Hall and broadcast nationwide ("Give him the money Mabel !")

By the way, as the result of a heavy accidental blow heading a football in his early teens, my father went through his busy life, including driving long distances in the family car, with the sight of only one eye.



Horace Darby used to walk from his house to catch the morning train to Luton from Church Street station. It was a known fact that the train never went without him — not until H.J. (as he was known) had completed the walk down and taken his seat would the train leave, such was his personality.

C.B.

The Society's activities in 1998

*For the activities in 1992/93 see issue 1, for 94/95 see issue 5
for 1996/7 see issue 9.*

A Victorian Chemist shop : Isabel Wilson
 Dunstable Trades Evening : The Printing Industry : Bill Bierton CEB
 Ernest M. Pradier : Crystal Engraver : Nicholas Bagshawe CEB
 Toddington : Town Hall & Village Hall : Tony Walker
 Publishing Local History Books and Hockliffe House : Paul Bowes
*Outings : Little Gaddesden Church and Frithsden Vineyard
 Hitchin Town and Museum, Old Chemist Shop and Garden
 Tour of Suffolk : Lavenham, Cavendish, etc.*
 Airships and the R101 : Group Captain P.A. Garth (Ret.)
 Dunstable Street Names : Richard Walden
 Cavaliers and Poets at Toddington, 1590 - 1660 : Simon Houfe

Dunstable Mechanics Institute

In the March Newsletter, under the heading "A Memorable Wedding", was a full account of the wedding in 1859 of Miss Elizabeth Dorcas Darley of Dunstable and Mr James Wheeler of Luton. This account taken from the *Dunstable Chronicle*, relates how, after the wedding ceremony in the Wesleyan Chapel, "the bridal party then adjourned to the Mechanic's Institute (kindly lent by Mr Osborn) . . ."

This set me wondering — where was Dunstable Mechanics Institute? Are there any signs of it today?

First, however, what were the Mechanics Institutes? A dictionary definition of 'mechanics' is "the study of the behaviour of systems under the action of forces".

The Encyclopædia Britannica records that they were a voluntary organisation, common in Britain and the USA between 1820 and 1860. They were formed 'for the education of manual workers' and, ideally, each Institute was to have a library, museum, laboratory, and was to hold public lectures about applied sciences and to run courses in various skills. Very few Institutes had all these facilities. The concept was that mechanics from different trades should meet and learn from each another — a denial of guild exclusiveness — and add to human knowledge.

From 1820 onwards hundreds of Institutes were founded in Britain and the United States, for which the 'Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge', founded in 1825, provided a central organisation.

Many of the Institutes were short lived, but some of the more successful were taken over by persons who were not 'mechanics' but who had money, leisure and a desire to hear lectures. Rules requiring a majority of mechanics on governing bodies were disregarded. After 1860, Mechanics Institutes had largely disappeared. However, some became libraries, schools or lecture halls, but a few did prosper and became well known technical institutions, for example the Franklin Institute of Applied Science in America.

The one in my home town Bradford must have lingered on, for I vaguely remember it during and just after WW2 as a place where National Geographical lectures were given. Inside, it was a sombre building, with oak panelling, gas lighting — a bit like a library. It had a lecture theatre with uncomfortable tiered seating.

So, where was Dunstable's Institute? One suggestion is that it might have been located in the School Hall built in 1856 adjacent to the Congregational Church in Edward Street. This hall was originally known as 'Osborn Hall' in memory of Mr Joseph Osborn the founder member of the Congregational Church, the foundation stone of which he laid on 9th August 1853. The Hall is now

occupied by the United Reformed Church. A plaque above the doors bears the inscription "Memorial Bicentenary School AD 1862" (see N.Benson *Dunstable in Detail* p.172).

The new dwellings in Edward Street next to the United Reformed Church are called 'Osborn House'. There is no mention of a Mechanics Institute in any of the old Dunstable Directories we have been able to consult.

A few worrying thoughts. Firstly, we know from the 'wedding report' that the Institute existed in 1859, but it could only have been housed in the School Hall after it was built in 1856. This is towards the end of the movement's heyday, about 1860, so it may well have had a

home somewhere else before then.

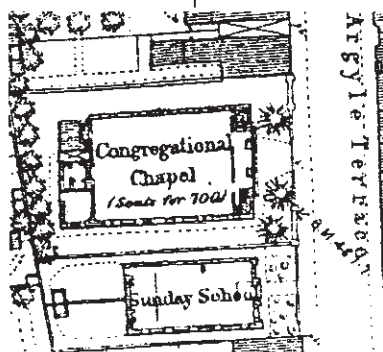
Secondly, if the hall was originally known as Osborn Hall "in memory of Joseph Osborn", how could he have "kindly lent" it in 1859? Was there more than one Mr Osborn?

Thirdly, the 1859 bridal party "adjourned" from the Wesleyan Chapel to the Mechanics institute, which might imply that it was somewhere close to The Square, perhaps in West Street.

Unfortunately I have not been able to undertake more research. Members may have information or ideas, if so, perhaps they might like to contact the Editor or

myself. Watch this space, as they say.

David Lindsey



Map showing the Congregational Chapel and the Sunday School buildings in Edward Street, in 1880.

Hurlock Close

A new housing development has been recently built on part of the land occupied until 1941 by Graham's whiting works, at the top of Canesworde Road. It is called Hurlock Close. What is Hurlock?

The Oxford English Dictionary (vol.6 p.504) says:

Hurlock, *local*, Also hurluk, hard kind of chalk.

quoting, amongst others, John NORDEN. *Speculum Britanniae: a discription of Middlesex, 1593* "About the towne is a kinde of chalke, which they call Hurlocke, a stonie Marle, more fit to make lime than to soyle the grounde. (i.e. to form the base of the ground)"

Worthington Smith in *Dunstable, Its History and Surrounding*. (1904) writes, page 170: "At the top of Dunstable Downs, where Pascombe Pit is, there is a peculiar form of hard, stony, broken-up chalk called Chalk-Rock by geologists, and 'Kerlock,' by local rustics. It varies in thickness from four to eight feet. . . . It was formerly used for mending the roads."

No doubt W.G. Smith is quoting here one of the many local names given to this kind of stone more generally known as 'Hurlock'.

O. Roucoux

The Safety Water Elevator Co

John LUNN

On Saturday, 6th June, Omer and myself attended the *Bedfordshire Local History Society's* Conference at Cockayne Hatley. During the extended lunch break we were invited to tour a number of gardens in the village. Needless to say they were all attractively prepared for our visit. The item of greatest interest to us was a well in the garden of the house appropriately called Well House. This well had originally been for the use of the whole village. The above-ground mechanism was housed



in a metal cover from which a handle protruded at the top and a spout towards the bottom beneath which a bucket could be placed. On the side was fixed a small metal plate on which was raised lettering which read THE SAFETY WATER ELEVATOR CO., DUNSTABLE.

There was little time to get details from the owner of the house, but it was sufficient to confirm that the mechanism was similar to a pump I had seen last year in the courtyard of a former abbey in France.

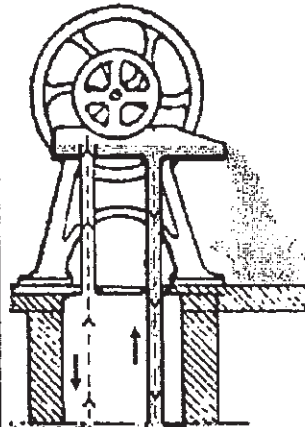


Consequently I made a point of revisiting the abbey this year and taking some photographs. Fortunately the pump was in working order and I was allowed to operate it. By turning the large wheel with the handle, an endless chain passed over the pulley wheel at the top and down into the water at the bottom of the well. It returned to the top through a tube. At intervals along this chain were attached rubber cups which made a water-tight fit as they came up the tube. In this way 'tubes full' of water could be lifted to the top and poured into a container as the cups rounded the top pulley wheel. The intervals between the cups was such that a continuous stream of water soon filled the container set to receive it. Cast on the superstructure of the mechanism was the



French name of the maker. In the same area of France I saw the surface mechanism of two other similar devices, although neither in working condition. The illustration should help to make this clear. In neither case is there any indication of date. I have only been able to discover the site of one similar pump over a well in this area. This was formerly in a farmyard in Edlesborough, but has long since disappeared. No information about the SAFETY WATER ELEVATOR CO., of DUNSTABLE has been discovered to date. Has any one any information or stories from grandparents about this type of pump or the local firm making them?

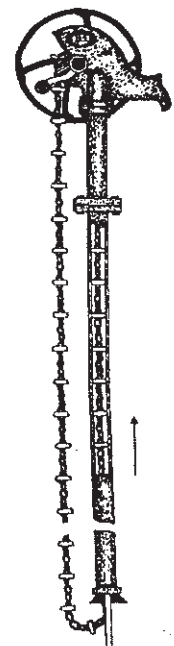
Continuing the research it was found that John Vince in his book *Wells and Pumps* (ed. Sorbus) page 28, shows a pump operating on the same principle as the Cockayne Hatley water elevator. His drawing (to the right, by kind permission of the author) shows very well how it worked. "As the chain moved the space between two washers was filled with water and lifted upwards until it reached the outfall where it was discharged" This is known as a 'chain pump', as a 'Yeddle pump' in the north of England and as a 'pompe à chapelet' (Rosary pump) in France.



Such a chain pump of the open type, dated 1925, is exhibited in the Science Museum in London (Inv. No 1925-924)

The style of pump John Lunn saw in the Abbey of Beaulieu en Rouerge is shown in the 1924 edition of the *Larousse Universel en 2 volumes*.

Omer Roucoux



The Yeddle Pump by John Vince

Ernest Marius Pradier : Crystal engraver - Dunstable

At the Society meeting last March, Mr Nicholas Bagshawe gave a talk on E.M. Pradier. Although forgotten here, he is renowned in the jewellers world. It was thought worthwhile to report some details of his life and of his techniques. The following notes are taken from the very interesting article Mr Nicholas Bagshawe wrote for the *Bedfordshire Magazine*, vol. 25, p. 329-334 (Spring 1997). I cannot encourage our readers enough to read this illustrated article as we are only able to give a brief review here of the life and work of E.M. Pradier

Omer Roucoux.

The miniatures of Ernest Marius Pradier are fascinating. They are more properly known as 'Painted Reversed Crystal Intaglios', an intaglio being a design or figure carved into a hard material, the opposite of reliefs such as cameos. If made of a transparent material, like rock crystal, the design can be seen from the front in relief. Ernest Marius and his father are considered to be the most skilled exponents of this art form and, though they are well-known in the jewellery trade, Bedfordshire has so far ignored in its histories one of its more talented artists.

Ernest Marius was born in Paris on 1 October 1881, he alone followed his father's profession of crystal engraver joining him in his business in London, which was started about 1896 / 97. At the age of 16 he began crystal engraving. His only training came from his father. He lived at 45 Mayfield Avenue, North Finchley in the '20s, but about 1932 came to live and work at 57 High Street South, Dunstable.

In 1934 he displayed some of his work in Luton Museum, and a newspaper said that he carved and painted 'minute but microscopically accurate representations of animals, flowers, birds and insects in rock crystal ... those on view at the exhibition are extremely beautiful, and well worth noting'. In *Kelly's Directory* of 1936 Ernest Marius is described as a confectioner at his address in Dunstable. There is a family tradition that he set up the business for one of his sons but it was not a success. Until 1937 he continued to reside at 57 High Street South, but in 1938 and 1939 he was at 180 West Street. In 1945 he was "in house after 182 West Street - Ernest Pradier, Downs Bungalow".

From 1947 to 1950 he was at 45 Portland Road, Luton, and by 1951 had made his final move to 82 Willow Way, Luton. He was still at work there in 1959, using a small converted bedroom as his workshop. He died at his Luton home on 21 November 1967 aged 86.

He also painted some very beautiful water-colours, mostly landscapes and dog portraits. The pictures are signed but he did not identify his crystals in any way except through his skill. He was a modest man and, other than being persuaded to give the occasional interview, shunned publicity.

The prepared rock crystals were obtained from France. The best native quartz of crystal quality comes from Brazil but is also found in southern France and Spain. The blanks

were normally supplied in circular form (20 to 25mm in diameter) or oval shaped, rather smaller. The backs are always flat and the fronts usually convex. In 1959 Ernest complained that blanks were costing him over £1 each.



The equipment was simple. On the work bench was a small jeweller's lathe powered by an electric motor, to which Ernest could fit about fifty different shapes and sizes of engraver's tools, nearly all made by himself from soft iron with diamond cutters. A large magnifying glass was fixed above the lathe. With the design in front of him he outlined it in Chinese ink on the back of the crystal, holding it on a waxed 'dop', a tool for retaining gems being cut or polished. He would then begin the engraving operation. The thickness of a curved crystal itself provided a little magnification. No two identical designs have been seen.

The average crystal took a day to cut and another day to paint in oils. To create the correct three dimensional effect from the front, he had to work from the back in the reverse order to normal, applying shading and highlights first. The paint brushes needed to be extremely fine. When these operations were finished he polished the face and normally supplied, loose, a thin piece of mother-of-pearl which could provide a background and some protection to the painted engraving.

Ernest Marius said he could produce three or four crystals per working week but had on occasion made up to twelve in a week, by working day and night.

Not all of his crystals have survived for they are easily chipped and those that still exist are widely dispersed.

We are grateful to Mr N. Bagshawe and the Bedfordshire Magazine for the permission to reproduce extracts from the original article and the photograph of the beautiful brooch with a Dachshund engraved by Ernest Marius Pradier (approx. crystal length 20mm).

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