

# Newsletter

DUNSTABLE & DISTRICT  
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

N°15

March 2001



## *From the Chairman*

Being Chairman of a society such as ours is both rewarding and challenging. I would like to thank all our members for their faithful support and for the kind remarks they make about our activities. It is very gratifying to see such a good turn out for our meetings, month after month, sometimes in rather unpleasant weather. I would like to thank all the members of the committee, who work so hard on our behalf to ensure the smooth running of the meetings. Thanks are also due to the chair gang, who turn up at 4 pm before each session and arrange the seating. I would like to thank, too, those who serve on the rota to provide the refreshments at the end of our meetings. There are currently vacancies on these lists, providing opportunities for gentlemen as well as ladies to sign up.

Fiona Morton, on the Staff at Grove House, has been visiting many of you with her tape recorder. She has collected much in the way of reminiscences about Dunstable in past days, and I am very grateful to all of you who have agreed to let Fiona interview you. The collected material will be of great use in building up a picture of our town's history. If you know of anyone whose recollections should be added to our archive, please let me know. Fiona was involved in the production of the Town Council's calendar, which continues to sell well.

At our first meeting of the winter programme, Richard Hogg gave a very interesting talk about 'Mineral Water Manufacture: the industry locally and nationally,

In October, Eddie Papps talked about the very early days of Luton Airport, showing up pictures and his prized collection of model aircraft. This was his first talk to such a large group of people. His talk stopped at the advent of the package holiday industry. It would be interesting to get someone to present this theme to us at a future date.

Our old friend, and long-time member, Barry Horne, gave us a fascinating session on the work which the Manshead Archaeological Society has undertaken since his last talk to us some seven years ago. I trust it will not be as long as that before his next booking with us.

The Christmas social event was a great success. The Pulloxhill Singers were up to their usual standard and gave us a very entertaining evening. My thanks go to Joan Curran for organising the quiz and to everyone who brought food

and helped with the refreshments.

In January David Lindsey, an old friend and long standing member of our society, gave a most interesting illustrated talk about 'Mills, Milling and Ford End Mill'. He showed us a wealth of material concerning the different types of mills, the various methods of milling and the restoration of Ford End Mill during recent decades.

Your committee is busy organising summer outings for June, July and August. Details of these will follow later. We had a semi-serious suggestion from one or two lady members that we should revisit Peterborough because they 'liked the shopping'. Despite the risk of disappointing them, we shall not be going back to Flag Fen this summer.

Reference was made in the last Newsletter to the arrangements for moving our venue to the Salvation Army Hall. I can confirm that, after the outings, we will be meeting at the new venue, on the first Monday of each month, from September 2001.

Our session on 13th March began with the Society's AGM. The minutes of last year's AGM, which had been circulated previously, were approved and signed. My Chairman's report gave a review of the year's activities. It reiterated the fact that your Committee has not been operating at full strength and that, in particular, we need some one to be vice-chairman. We are still open to offers. I hope we do not go another year with this important post unfilled. Cynthia Turvey delivered the Treasurer's Report, which was approved by the meeting. I would like to thank Cynthia for keeping our books in such good order, and to thank all the members of the Committee, on your behalf, for the hard work they do for our Society. All the existing Officers were re-elected to their present posts. After a few kinds words from Colin Bourne, our President, we moved into the rest of of the meeting and welcomed our speaker, Mr. Ray Leafe. Your will read a summary of his talk on pages 90 - 91 of this issue.

*Hugh Garrod*

Friends of John Lunn will be sorry to learn that he has suffered two further strokes in recent months and is now residing in a nursing home. Though, at present, unable to talk he still appreciates having visitors to talk to him and receiving mail. His address is Room 19, Capwell Grange Nursing Home (BUPA), Addlington Way, Luton, LU4 9GR. (it's a turning of Oakley Rd).

# MEMORIES OF A BEVIN BOY

based on a talk by Mr Ray Leafe

In December 1943 Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour and National Service, made a statement in the House of Commons that was to change the life of thousands of men about to be called up. They were to be selected by ballot and conscripted into coal mining. There was to be no question of choice or suitability ; the Emergency Powers Act was in force and the Bevin Boy era was born.

The method of selection was simple. As each man registered for service he was allocated a registration number. Each month Bevin's secretary prepared ten pieces of paper bearing a number from zero to nine. These were, apparently, placed in Bevin's ashtray. He then selected one at random and every man whose registration number ended with that digit that month was sent to the mines.

I registered for military service at seventeen and a half and had the customary medical. Having been in the Army Cadet Force for nearly two years I opted for the Army, was interviewed and recommended for a posting to REME. Soon after my eighteenth birthday my call up papers arrived and I was amazed to see that I was to report to Cresswell Colliery in Derbyshire for training as a coal miner.

On a cold winter's day I made my way to Cresswell, where I was issued with a miner's helmet and a pair of heavy pit boots, for which, incidentally, the appropriate number of clothing coupons was deducted from my civilian allowance.

Our day started with an hour's P.T. , followed by a lecture on some largely irrelevant aspect of mining. Next came a period of practical training. We were taught how to harness a pit pony, how to give the correct signals to the engineman, how to test for gas, how to operate the various haulage systems, etc., after which there was a spell on the assault course or a route march. The rest of the day was spent in what was loosely described as work experience, which was really just an excuse to toughen us up, as it consisted of emptying railway wagons of sand and then filling them up again, or moving stacks of pit props from A to B and back from B to A.

Of course, we were taken down the pit itself. The cage in which you descend really is just a cage, constructed from sheets of metal bolted together, with three bars at the front and three at the back to stop you falling out. To drop vertically in this at around 40 mph in semi-darkness is quite an experience, equal to anything at Alton Towers or Blackpool.

After four weeks we were considered trained and I was allocated to Woodside pit on the Nottinghamshire/Derbyshire borders. We were billeted in a purpose-built hostel at nearby

Eastwood, which consisted of Nissen huts linked together in rows by a covered corridor which also housed showers and toilet accommodation. Another block provided kitchen, a dining hall and administration offices.

After two more weeks, working under direct supervision, I was transferred to another pit, on the Derby side of Heanor. (I recently went back to see if any trace of it remained, but found that it had been landscaped into the Shipley Country Park and ecology centre.) Here I was on the morning shift which started at 6 a.m. We had to get up at about four o'clock, had breakfast – usually of porridge, re-constituted scrambled egg, tea and toast – caught the trolley bus to Heanor, and walked across the Market Square to a special bus which took us to the pit.

If we were on schedule there was probably time for a mug of hot, sweet tea in the canteen and a slice of 'dip', a slice of bread dipped in hot bacon fat. If it was a cold, winter's day there might be time to warm ourselves round the enormous brazier at the pit head.

Then it was time to go below. You first collected your lamp, were quickly frisked for contraband such as cigarettes or matches, handed over your number tally, were loaded 12 men on each deck, and down you went, rattling and clanking to the pit bottom. The tally system was the way of knowing who was below, both for payment purposes and, of course, in case of an accident or explosion, and you collected it again at the end of the shift when you handed in your lamp.

My first job was in the pit bottom, which was not actually such a daunting place, as it had a good working height, was properly bricked, like a railway tunnel, and had the odd electric lamp. Working here also meant you were always first up at the end of a shift. My job was called 'dogging on' and consisted of coupling together the empty tubs as they came from the cage into units of twelve or so, clamping them on to the endless rope haulage system and sending them into the pit to be filled. When in full flow there were about 250 an hour coming through, and these were delivered down an inclined plane, so it was quite easy to lose a finger or crack a rib if you were caught between two of them and an empty tub crashed in to the rear of the chain.

But we survived and after about twelve months I was transferred further into the pit. From the pit bottom there is what is called a main road, which is a tunnel wide enough for two sets of rails, one carrying empty tubs in and the other full tubs out again. At right angles to this main road are what are known as 'gates', smaller tunnels, about 5 ft. wide, leading to the faces. The 'gates' are often a mile or more long and house the belt conveyor which transports the coal from the face to the main road, where it is transferred

to the empty tubs. It was my job to patrol the gate, keeping the conveyor belt clear of spillages or roof falls, etc., as the friction caused by the rubber belt rubbing against anything for too long was likely to cause a fire or explosion.

It was a lonely existence, apart from the mice. The undermanager and the deputy would make their rounds but you could usually see them coming by their lamps and make sure you were working hard as they passed by. The undermanager used to try and catch you out by switching off his lamp and riding down the belt in the dark!

Towards the end of my time I was moved on to the face itself. This was about 160 yards long, 3 ft. high, and advanced some 5 ft. each shift. It was divided into stalls, or sections, eight yards long, one for each miner. The coal was loosened by explosives and it was the miner's job to clear the loosened coal from the stall, about 15 to 20 tons per shift. He achieved this by shovelling the coal on to a small face conveyor, which in turn fed the main, larger gate belt. My job was to keep this smaller conveyor clear of the fine black powder which the slack was eventually ground down to in order to prevent spontaneous combustion I also had to assist generally, bringing in additional pit props and supports as required.

In 1947, nearly two years after the end of the war, the mines were nationalised; the pit top was tidied up, flower beds were created, a ceremony was held on the Sunday to celebrate, bands played, speeches were made, banners unfurled, and a plaque unveiled at the pit top proclaiming that "This colliery is now managed by the National Coal Board on behalf of the people". So imagine, after all this rejoicing, the dismay of the miners to find on Monday morning that things were unchanged. Management and conditions were as before.

But things did begin to improve, money became available for pit props, proper steel archways were made for roads and gates, first aid facilities were introduced, and even a five day week. That is, you were still paid for six days provided that you worked the preceding five!

When the Bevin Boy scheme was introduced no thought was given to our release. With the war over and men being released from the services we were very concerned that no arrangements were being made for our discharge. It took many representations to our M.P.s to secure a debate in the House of Commons. The Government admitted that they could not see the possibility of release for quite a time as there was still a desperate need for coal and many ex-miners returning home from the services were refusing to go back into the industry. Many Labour M.P.s argued it was an honour to work

in such an industry and earn one's living by the sweat of one's brow.

Others, of course, agreed that the country could not rely on forced labour in peace time and finally the government conceded that Bevin Boys should be released in the same groupings as if they had served in the army, but without any of the recognition given to members of the armed forces. There were no gratuities, demob suits or medals, no free travel warrants to return home, no re-training facilities, no automatic re-instatement to pre-war employment, and no claims for disability pensions were to be considered.

I was allocated a demob number and should have been released towards the end of 1947, but the government was frightened of a re-occurrence of the chaos that had reigned during the terrible weather the previous winter and suspended all releases until the following spring.

I said good-bye to my mining workmates and I think they were genuinely sorry to see us go as we gradually departed from their midst. After some initial hostility they had soon realised that we did not want to be there and were making the best of a difficult situation, and in fact came to appreciate the views of an outside world in what was a fairly tight, closed community. We learnt a lot from them and I like to think they learnt something from us too, if only that not everyone south of Rugby was a Cockney spiv.

I finished work on the Friday, handed in my lamp for the last time, and on Monday collected my cards and final wages from the pit office, checked out of the hostel and caught the train home. A week later I started work at my old job.

What did we achieve? Although we hated every minute of it we made many friends and experienced a way of life quite alien to our own background. By taking over the more mundane jobs we released more skilled men to concentrate on winning the coal so desperately needed.

In some ways we were lucky. We weren't shot at, torpedoed, or made to suffer in a prison camp. But what was hard was the humiliation we sometimes suffered because we had no uniform or badge to prove that we were not avoiding the armed services and were not conscientious objectors as people sometimes thought, and some still believe. So it is a source of great pride to us all that in the last couple of years the British Legion has allowed us to be represented at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday and that we were officially recognised in the addresses made by the Queen and others to mark the 50th anniversary of VE-Day.

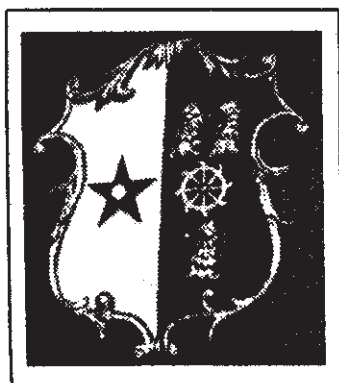
My time as a Bevin Boy was an experience I would not wish to repeat, but for all that it was a most interesting and enlightening four years of my life.





# Do you have a piece of history at school ?

**H**ave you ever thought about what is buried underneath your school or what it has been used for in the past ? There are many ways of finding out about the history of your school. One way is to look at the coat of arms or the picture used on your school logo.



*That was a big title in The Guardian of Saturday February 13 2001, in the Education Supplement. Manshead School has certainly got a badge which can tell us a lot about its origins, not only Manshead but also Ashton Middle School and Ashton St. Peter. The three schools all originating from the Ashton Foundation.*

In 1888 the Dunstable Grammar School was founded and here is how Mr Bancroft told the story in a booklet published for the 75th anniversary of the school in 1963, Mr. Bancroft, M.A. was Senior English Master in the School from 1934 to 1963.

“(This foundation) was possible at all due to the charitable bequests of Mrs. Frances Ashton, who died in 1727. By her will dated March 30th of that year she appointed five trustees, who, upon her death, became her executors. Frances Ashton was the daughter of a wealthy London merchant, Thomas Chew, a name very familiar to natives of Dunstable. She bequeathed money for many charitable purposes, such as the relief of poor clergymen ‘of sober life and conversation’, the maintenance of six almswomen who ‘attend the worship of God in the Church of England on the Sabbath Day at Dunstable’, and to provide them with a ‘gown and petticoat all of the same colour’, the provision of bread ‘to be by the Minister and Church Wardens of the Parish of Dunstable, weekly, every Sunday after morning service, distributed to the poor’, and the aid of discharged prisoners. The only references in her will to money for educational purposes are ‘a sum of four pounds yearly to the Charity School of St. Giles, Cripplegate’, and ‘thirty shillings a year or more for repairing and cleaning a clock which she had given or set, upon the School House at Dunstable’. Her will also records that her only daughter, Elizabeth, the reputed wife of John Rayner, had by her undutifulness and marriage without her consent disobliged her, and consequently was, under certain circumstances, disinherited. In fact

## MANSHEAD SCHOOL has certainly got one

Elizabeth Rayner died without issue, no new circumstances were created, and the original provisions of the will were carried out.

Much of Frances Ashton’s estate was composed of land and farms, so that, naturally enough, its value increased considerably and to such an extent that in July 1848 the High Court approved a new scheme for the administration of the estate, whereby two separate charities were formed, one to administer the fund for the benefit of poor clergy and the other the Ashton Almshouse Charity. Money continued to accumulate and further schemes were approved by the High Court in 1884 and 1885 under which the charity became known as the ‘Ashton Schools and Almshouses Foundation’.

By 1861 it had been found possible to establish the Ashton Elementary Schools (for boys and for girls) near the Priory Church (now Ashton St. Peter). The sale of property in Luton had provided for the maintenance of the Almshouses and left a balance which, by a judgement of the Court of Chancery, was applied to educational purposes. In 1868 a further sale of property to the Midland Railway Company provided the trustees with a capital sum of £14,500. This very substantial sum was surplus to the anticipated needs of the charity, and it was felt that it should be applied to some one ‘special object’. Very strong views were expressed in Dunstable and the neighbourhood “that this sum of £14,500 should be appropriated to the Foundation of a Grammar School for the Education of the Sons of Professional men, tradesmen and others (in fact the Middle Classes) at a moderate expense. No such school exists nearer than Bedford and we are assured and believe it would be a great Boon to the Towns of Dunstable, Luton, and Leighton - Buzzard,

together with the large adjacent Villages containing a population of 40,000 souls. And we think that if £4,500 could be appropriated for the School Buildings and Masters' Houses, and £10,000 for the endowment, such a school might be founded and efficiently maintained, but we fear any much smaller sum would be inadequate". In 1871 a deputation from the Corporation of Dunstable presented a Memorial to the Trustees along the same lines. The Trustees were, in fact, not unwilling to act in accordance with the Corporation's wishes, but their hands were legally tied by the Endowed Schools Act. The Endowed Schools Commissioners were, however, succeeded by the Charity Commissioners and the Trustees were able at the beginning of 1875 to tell the Corporation that they were in communication with the Commissioners with a view to using the surplus funds for the establishment of a Grammar School. A draft scheme submitted by the Trustees was rejected, but in 1877 a public local enquiry presided over by Mr. D. R. Fearon, an Assistant Commissioner, was held at the Town Hall, Dunstable, in consequence of which Mr. Fearon represented to the Trustees that if they chose to consider the charity as a Mixed Educational Charity, under Section 24 of the Act (32 and 33 Vic. Cap 56) there would be an overwhelming proportion of the funds available for educational purposes. There were still problems to be solved concerning the administration of the charities, but eventually a suitable formula was agreed, and in 1885 received Her Majesty's (Queen Victoria) signature at a meeting of the Privy Council, held at Osborne House. Certain sums were allocated for the continuance of the Almshouse Charity, provision was made for the Elementary Schools, and, subject to the approval of the Charity Commissioners, a Grammar School suitable for one hundred pupils and a Headmaster's house to include room for twenty boarders was to be built as soon as possible."

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY :

- F.M. BANCROFT M.A. : *A Short History of Dunstable School — 1888 - 1963.*  
 John LUNN : *Mrs Jane Cart (née Chew) (1997)* [On sale at the back of Priory Church]

### *Any Comments ?*

For some years I have been a member of a 'customer feedback' group, known as the User Panel, which meets three times a year to hear about the latest developments at the Record Office and to put the customers's viewpoint. At our last meeting we were joined by Barry George, head of the Library services, who also asked for user's views on the services provided. If you have any comments (good or bad) on either the Record Office or the local library, especially the provision for Local and Family History in the library, please do let me know. I can then pass on the compliments — or brickbats — as appropriate !

*Joan Curran*

### The Badge or Shield.

The present day badge of the three schools founded originally by the Ashton foundations is as can be expected the Coat of Arms of Mrs Frances Ashton. It is divided in two parts, in heraldic terms : it is impaled.

The right side is the coat of arms of the Chews. Frances was the daughter of Elisabeth and Thomas CHEW (1614 - 87) : a Catherine wheel central surrounded by three griffin heads, on a blue (azur) background.

The left side is the ASHTON coat of arms : a five arms blue star on a white (silver) background. When she married she was allowed to put her own family coat besides her husband's.

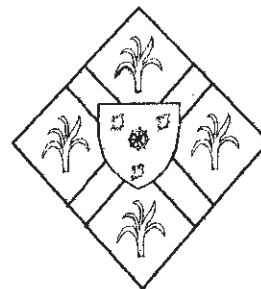
The coat of arms can be observed in their full colours around the memorials of the people quoted above, in the aisles of Dunstable Priory Church. Notice that these are not shields but escutcheons (diamond shaped) because they are women.



Jane Ashton's escutcheon at the top of her monument in the Lady's Chapel of Dunstable Priory

It is interesting to observe that Frances' sister, Jane CART, née CHEW has also the Chew's coat combined with her husband's James CART - a red St Andrew cross and four sugar canes (he was a distiller). But in this case Jane's shield is placed in the middle of her husband's because there was no male inheritor of the family shield.

*Omer Roucoux*



Jane Cart escutcheon redrawn from her monument in the north aisle of Dunstable Priory Church.

# THE DUNSTABLE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

## 1917 - 2000

by David Lindsey

In February 1897, Mrs Adelaide Hunter Hoodless suggested to the Farmers' Institute in Stoney Creek, Ontario, Canada, that they form a women's section. A meeting was organised shortly afterwards during which it was agreed to set up 'The Women's Institute of Stoney Creek', as a sister society to the Farmers' Institute but independent of it.

The objectives of the new Institute were *'to promote that knowledge of household science which shall lead to improvement in household architecture, with special attention to home sanitation; to a better understanding of the economic and hygienic value of foods and fuels; to a more scientific care of children, with a view to raising the general standard of the health of our people.'* It is generally believed that Mrs Hoodless was motivated by the death of a baby on a neighbouring farm, a death which disturbed her because it might well have been prevented by a basic understanding of infant hygiene and feeding.

How was it that the remote farming area of Stoney Creek became the cradle of what was to become a world-wide organisation? One source suggests that *"... it was because the farmers' wives of Stoney Creek became acutely aware of the hardness and narrowness of their lives and that they determined to band together and sow the unlovely soil with the seeds of fellowship."*

From this simple beginning, Women's Institutes (WIs) flourished in Canada and then spread further afield. The first WI to be formed in Britain was in the large Anglesey village of Llanfairpwllgwyngyll-gogerychwyrndrobwllllantsyliogogoch (Llanfair P G for short) in June 1915. The first in England was at Wallisdown in Dorset in November 1915, although Singleton in Sussex also claims this honour.

Shortly afterwards, on the 22nd May 1917, the Dunstable WI was founded the 50th in England and Wales. There were 100 members and meetings were held every Wednesday afternoon except during August, a practice followed until three years ago when they were changed to fortnightly. It was one of the very few WIs to meet weekly. Report has it that Wednesday was chosen so that members could revive themselves with a cup of tea after shopping in Dunstable market! It was the oldest Institute in Bedfordshire and became the largest. It affiliated to the County Federation when this was formed in 1919.



**DUNSTABLE**

Mrs LCR Thring was the first President and she was succeeded in 1921 by Mrs Ellen Benning whose reign lasted until her sudden death in 1933. Successive Presidents were Mrs Emerton (to 1942), her daughter, Miss Emerton for one year, Mrs Winifred Doye, Mrs Hilda Instance, Mrs Edna Woods, Mrs Marjorie Bell and Mrs Joy Stew (1967).

Where meetings were held in the early days is not recorded as sadly the minute books of this period have been 'misaid'.

However, it is known from a newspaper report that the Institute met at Priory House, in rooms behind the National Provincial Bank, at the 'White Hart', in the Roman Catholic Hall, at the Town Hall (presumably until it was demolished in July 1966) and at the Dunstable Young People's Club. Finally they settled on the Parish Hall in Church Street which they continued to use until December 2000.

In its heyday, in the 1960s and early 1970s, the Dunstable Institute was very active. It had 200 members - the maximum they allowed themselves, and there was a waiting list. The cultural activities included a concert party which performed for many years, a drama group which took part in local drama festivals winning many awards and a choir which participated in musical festivals and won several cups.

The Institute was involved in numerous charitable activities, for example, it was responsible for setting up the Dunstable Friends of Imperial Cancer Research and the Dunstable Old People's Welfare Association at Cordova House. In addition, it used to take patients from the Cheshire Home in Amptill on shopping trips to Dunstable as well as entering a float in the annual Dunstable Carnival. Members helped with the mobile library service and with WRVS 'meals on wheels'.

Bazaars, fashion shows and handicraft displays were organised, and for distraction, the ladies played darts (they had their own team), went bowling and enjoyed day outings and foreign holidays.

The Dunstable Institute celebrated its Golden Jubilee in style, marking the occasion with a number of events. On the 27th April there was a jubilee concert in the Methodist Church Hall, the Square at which performances were given by the Institute's own choir, concert party and drama section. To commemorate the jubilee, on the 22nd May (the day in 1917 when it was founded) the Institute presented a shelter with a seat to the town erected in Priory Gardens. On the 24th May, 200 members and guests



attended a jubilee tea party, billed as a 'Grand Anniversary Celebration', in the Centenary Room of the Civic Hall (Queensway Hall). Lastly, a dinner was held on the 10th October at the Halfway House Hotel, attended by the Mayor of Dunstable, Alderman W. Allen. The guests were welcomed by Mrs Joy Stew, the President and in his speech congratulating the Institute, the Mayor said "It is such organisations as yours that have made Dunstable the go-ahead town it is."

Sadly, despite its past successes, the Dunstable Institute ceased to function in December 2000, 17 years short of its centenary. Among the reasons were falling numbers, an ageing membership with no new younger members to ensure succession and a lack of members coming forward to join the committee. As the Chairman of the Society announced at the AGM, the Institute has passed 'on loan' a number of photograph albums and scrapbooks and other memorabilia to the Society for safekeeping for 3 years. This will ensure that this vital part of the town's history is not lost. If, after 3 years, the Dunstable Institute has not been started up again, the items will remain in the custody of the Society.

Help given by ladies of the WI in preparing this article is acknowledged and is much appreciated.

### ***Ford End Watermill : Opening dates 2001***

The watermill will be open between 2.30 and 5.30 pm on the following days with milling demonstrations between 3 and 5 pm approx. on the 4 days indicated by (M).

Easter Monday 16 April

Sunday 6 May

(M) Bank Holiday Monday 7 May

(M) Sunday 13 May – National Mill Day

(M) Bank Holiday Monday 28 May

Sunday 3 June / 1 July / 5 August

(M) Bank Holiday Monday 27 August

Sunday 2 September

Admission : Adults £1.20, Children (50-15) 40p

## ***Help!***

### ***War Time Air Crashes.***

During the recent exhibition in Biggleswade of "Bedfordshire At War" I was approached by someone who is compiling records of air crashes during wartime. If you have any recollections or information about planes coming down around Dunstable during WW II or WW I, please let me know I can then pass your information on and it will be compiled into a county record of these instances.

*Hugh Garrod*

## **John Dunstaple c. 1390 – 1453**

In Newsletter Number 6, Omer wrote a most interesting article about John Dunstaple, the musician and composer. More information is now available about him. The Fraternity of the Friends of Saint Albans Abbey have published a booklet on him, entitled "An Astrologer, a Mathematician, a Musician and What Not." This is available in the Abbey bookshop. A CD of Dunstaple's music is available on the Veritas label. Detailed notes on the music and its composer are included. The CD can be ordered through the Book Castle.

Omer's article, the St Albans booklet and the CD notes, between them, encapsulate all that is known about a musician who was celebrated in his time throughout this country and across the Continent.

*Hugh GARROD*

### **Short Biography and Appreciation**

Nothing is certain about the career of John Dunstaple. Some of his earliest works date from c.1410-1420, which would approximate his birth somewhere in the late 1300's. It is widely held as true that Dunstaple spent the years from 1422 to 1435 in France as a musician to the Duke of Bedford (a brother of King Henry V and Regent to France during those years).

Musically, Dunstaple's significant contribution to the theory and practice of composition in the early Fifteenth Century was the introduction of more melodic music and outlining chords as a part of the melody. This incorporated a more tonal centre in the his works and in the music as a whole. This also introduced leaps of a third or even the sixth as consonant and pleasing sounds to the ear. One such piece by Dunstaple is the secular song "O Rosa Bella" which as Grout says in *A History of Western Music*, it can "illustrate the expressive lyrical melodies and the clear harmonic profile of the English music of his time." (135)

The presence of chant in this time period is still rather common. Dunstaple is well known for his combination of the sequence "Veni sancte spiritus" with the hymn "Veni creator." This four-part motet is one of his most famous pieces. However, the work "Quam pulchra es" - which consists of three free voices, demonstrates Dunstaple's creativity and ability to compose free of a chant melody. The three voices of this piece move in the same basic rhythm and usually enunciate the same syllable to help outline a general form, but still move individually and lyrically.

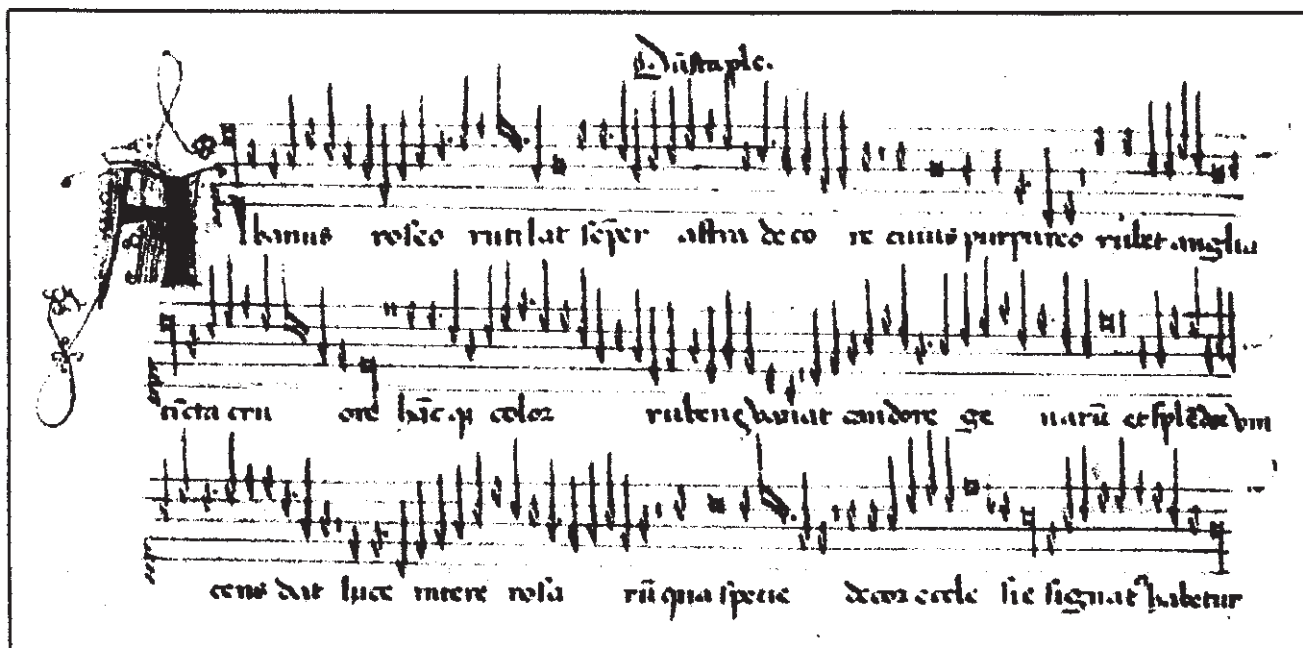
Dunstaple has also received credit for writing a number of carols. Carols are uniquely English compositions, that although not folksongs, have the quality of simple two- or three-part harmonies and melodies that emphasize the text. They also contain a refrain between each stanza. The text is either English or Latin, or both.

As suggested by Martin Le Franc, John Dunstaple was a prominent composer who influenced both the composers of his time, like Leonel Power, and those to follow, like Dufay and Binchois.

J. C. Parker

on [www.vanderbilt.edu/Blair/courses/MUSL242/marwebpg.htm](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/Blair/courses/MUSL242/marwebpg.htm)

*Note : We have used the spelling Dunstaple for the name of the musician as used in contemporary documents, although the article above gives Dunstable.*



The first three lines of the  
*Hymn to St Alban* by  
John Dunstaple, written  
for St. Albans Abbey  
about 1420.

Text and translation

*Albanus roseo rutilat super astra decore cuius purpureo rubet Anglia  
incta cruore hincque colore rubens variat candore genarum et splendor  
nitens dat luce nitere rosarum qua specie decor ecclesie signatus habetur ...*

*Alban glows red above the stars with rosy beauty, by whose crimson blood England,  
tinged, grows red, and from this the reddish colour varies with the brilliant whiteness  
of cheeks, and the snow-white splendour allows it to shine with the whiteness of  
roses, by which aspect the beauty of the church is kept sealed ...*

## **BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR LOCAL HISTORY**

### **REGIONAL CONFERENCE**

The Bedfordshire Local History Association will host the Regional Conference for the B.A.L.H. on 29th September from 11 am. to 4 pm. at the Forest Centre, Marston Vale.

Doors will open at 10.30 for registration and coffee, lunch will be served between the morning and afternoon sessions.

The subject will be

#### **Promoting Local History through Partnerships.**

National and local speakers are expected to participate together with other visitors from the BALH and its regions.

Further details will be available later.

*Latest news.* From a letter of Gary Marshall, archaeologist with the National Trust, dated 26 March.

"We hope to be able to carry out geophysics surveys at Totterhoe Castle in the Summer. The purpose of the survey is to investigate by non-destructive means the buried archaeology at the site. The work will involve resistivity and magnetometry surveys of the bailey surrounding the motte, the outer bailey and the flat area which lies outside the outermost bank and ditch.

## **BEDFORDSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION**

### **Annual General Meeting**

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Sunday 12th May 2001 in the Village Hall, Houghton Conquest commencing at 2.15pm.

After the official business of the AGM there will be a talk about **The History of the Bedfordshire Landscape** by Peter Bigmore, the well known historian and author of '*Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire Landscape*'.

Refreshments will be available after the talk.

Visitors are welcome, entrance is free as is car parking.

### **Annual Conference 2001**

This year's Annual Conference will be held on Saturday 9th June in the Clapham Village Hall from 10 am. to 4 pm.

Doors will open at 9.30 for coffee.

The theme will be the history of the Clapham area and a film of the Thurlough Airbase of the 8th Airforce.

Lunch will be available.

*The Dunstable and District Local History Society welcomes all contributions to the Newsletter. These should be addressed to the Editor : Omer Roucoux*