

Newsletter

*Dunstable & District
Local History Society*

N°24

August 2005



The Chairman's Report

It is now four years since the Society changed its venue from The Methodist Church Hall to the Salvation Army's Hall. Your committee spent much time deliberating on the advantages and disadvantages of this strategy. I was much in favour of the move, so it pains me to say that our experience at the new venue has not been as good as I had hoped it would be. It seems to me that we have had problems with the microphones at virtually every meeting. I often find myself apologising for the poor quality of the sound, even though I am not responsible for it. We are not able to have refreshments. It would cost extra to hire the kitchen and we would not recoup in takings what it cost us in extra rent and we would not be able to take these refreshments into the main Hall. We always have to have our Christmas Social at the Methodists' for this reason. The only regular day available at the Salvation Army is the first Monday of the month. There are usually two Bank Holidays on a first Monday each year, meaning that we cannot be sure of getting speakers or a good attendance of members. The cost of renting the Salvation Army Hall has gone up regularly and I do not always feel we get good value for money.

Your committee discussed all these things at our last meeting. At the end of the discussion we were unanimous in agreeing to revert to the Methodist Church Hall and to have our meetings on the second Tuesday of each month, as we used to, as from this September. This has now been booked.

We are going to up-grade our own amplification system and use the loop system which is in the Hall. There are, inevitably, drawbacks. We will have to put out our own chairs before the meeting. I will be there at 7p.m. and would welcome a few able-bodied members to help me with the chairs. It only takes about ten minutes to put them out. We will also have to put them away at the end of the meeting and help with this will be appreciated. We will try to do this in such a way that you do not feel pressured to leave if you want to stay and talk for a while. Many of our speakers say how much they enjoy the informal conversations at the end of the formal part of the meeting. We will hire the kitchen and will serve refreshments at the end of each meeting. It should not be the same people who make the coffee / tea each time, so, again, I am looking for volunteers. The more there are, the easier it will be. I hasten to add that the gentlemen should help with this and not leave it all up to the ladies.

The Summer outings have been well supported and all costs were covered by the sale of tickets. We tried a new coach firm this year, Pageants.

In two years' time, I shall have been Chairman for as long as Colin Bourne was in charge. This would be an appropriate moment for a change. I will put myself forward for the position of Chairman at the next AGM, but not at the one after that. I think that, ideally, five years is about the right length of time to hold this position. I find it rather worrying that, although I was the youngest member of the Committee in 1991, I am still its youngest member in 2005.

Hugh Garrod

RAF Aircrew Reminiscences

Ulric Craig Carpenter – Former Pupil of Dunstable Grammar School, Dunstable

At the age of 12, I moved with my parents and four siblings from Canada to Britain in the spring of 1938. My father was an 'Old Boy' (former pupil of Dunstable Grammar School) and I was enrolled as a boarder in the same school commencing the Fall term of 1938. I was a very proud member of 'Brown House' and I produced a fair number of points in all of the sports and cadet company endeavours.

1939 saw the outbreak of the Second World War. We had all seen the graphic pictures in such magazines as The London Illustrated News, of the German bombers striking at cities in Spain. I remember sitting in the 'air raid shelters' behind the main school building and wondering when we might make the Illustrated News. Soon we saw the names of 'Old Boys' appearing on the school honour roll, some were known recent graduates. I had six brothers and sisters in the Canadian Forces and by September 1940 my brother Jack, a Hurricane pilot in the Battle of Britain was killed in action. I could hardly wait to joinup.

In the summer of 1943 I travelled to London, a letter from my father to the Canadian High Commissioner in my hand and was sworn in as a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force. I was instructed that I would be notified when and where to report for duty.

I received my posting notice – report to the RAF Aircrew Receiving Centre in London at 0800 hrs the following Monday morning. I also received my first taste of 'military discipline'. The night train from Holyhead to London was held up due to the tracks being bombed. We had to detrain and take a bus to complete the trip. I arrived at 1030 hrs at the RAF Aircrew Receiving Centre in Regent's Park for the three-week selection process and was promptly charged for being late for duty!! At the end of the course a group of teenagers were selected for transfer to Canada for pilot training. Not wishing to return to Canada for fear of missing the entire war, I requested other aircrew training being conducted in England. My posting notice was for Air Gunner training. Off to war I went. However, before leaving London I managed to make a two-day trip to Dunstable Grammar School to attend a dance at the Priory. I was very proud of my new RCAF uniform. It was great seeing and talking with members of the Cadet Corp and the many boarders with whom I shared happy memories.

I was transferred to Bridgenorth for Ground Training then on to Dal Cross for Aircrew Training. So much training in so short a time. At RAF Station Dal Cross, in the heart of Scotland I found myself the only Canadian (Colonial) in a mixed bag of Czechoslovakians, French North Africans and Polish along with a large contingent of young British airmen. I was assigned as an air gunner trainee with a crew of French North Africans with a Czechoslovakian pilot (who incidentally won the Iron Cross when flying for the Germans against Spain). I was the tail gunner and the only one who spoke English.



When my tour was up at RAF Dal Cross I had received my wings and the rank of Sergeant. I had requested a transfer to a Canadian Air Force squadron and was subsequently posted to RAF Wellsbourne. The first day on site I was picked as Tail Gunner in an all-Canadian crew; and a first rate crew we became. We flew day and night, becoming ready for Operations very quickly. However, the Lancaster as the Bomber of choice had now superseded the Wellington aircraft. We, as a crew, were posted to RAF Topcliffe to join number 6 Group Bomber Command.

Flying this huge four-engine bomber was a delight. Our 'corkscrew' to evade German fighters did a first rate evasion manoeuvre. Our first cross-channel dodge run did not end as smoothly as expected as we landed in a farmer's field wheels-up and out of fuel. Various scrapes and bumps had us off flying for sometime. I ended up as the Fire Chief for the Base, the town of Thirsk and RAF Dolton. We came together again as a crew at the end of the war to empty the 'Bomb Dumps'. This day and night flying saw us dropping bombs in the North Sea until the dumps were empty.

I returned to Canada, obtained my release and returned to college to finish off my education, specializing in Public Relations. Subsequently returned to the RCAF Air Defence Command during the 'Cold War'. Transferred from the Air Force to Public Service and ended my career on the staff of the Prime Minister of Canada, The Right Honourable Pierre Elliot Trudeau.

My last memory of Dunstable was in 1991. The Headmaster / mistress took me on a tour. When we entered one classroom, I was introduced as a former student. I was quite a hit during their break as they surrounded me and fired questions about life in ancient times during 1938.

THE IRON CHURCH

Very little is known or written about the Iron Church or Temporary Church in Dunstable although at the time it was a prominent, unpopular building. The following information has been gathered from copies of the old Dunstable Gazette.

When the Priory Church was being restored, the architect George Somers Clarke advised the Rev. Frederick Hose and churchwardens that the roof and walls of the church were unsafe and church services should no longer be continued there. From 1869 services were held in a building known as the Iron Church, formerly used as a drill shed by a company of volunteers in London. With a low ceiling, a little higher than the head of the officiating minister, and iron walls the building was too hot in summer and too cold in winter. On winter evenings, with the gas full on, the atmosphere was stifling and the premises were not popular with either clergymen or congregation.

In fact a few churchgoers threatened to abstain from entering it. The tempestuous weather had sadly tried the old drill-shed and previously a few pounds of mortar had fallen from the roof. Water and thawing snow had penetrated every crevice dampening cushions and making the place more uncomfortable. Many of the congregation complained of serious ailments caused by sitting in draughts, on damp cushions and being too hot or cold. Some members were proposing to hear the lesson but to leave before the sermon, which could be quite lengthy.

FOR SALE

After the Priory Church was reopened officially on 21 March 1873 for church services, it was decided to sell the old temporary church. The local youths took their own revenge by throwing stones at the building. Several were brought up before the mayor and let off with a caution but threatened with the birch should they do it again.

Two unsuccessful attempts were made to sell the building by private contract. So finally instructions were given to Mr. W. H. Derbyshire, Auctioneer to sell first the fittings comprising of Pulpit, Pews, Altar Rails, Marble Slabs, Paving Squares, Stoves and Pipes and other effects in suitable lots, then the building itself.

Finally an advertisement appeared announcing that on 24 September 1873 the large and substantial Iron Building standing on the Church Green at the back of the Infant School and recently used as the Temporary Church would be offered for sale.

The building is 100 feet long and 33 feet wide. Seating for 600 people. The walls and roof are close boarded inside and it is well adapted for a church, chapel, school, drill shed or for any purpose where extensive warehouse room is required. The pulpit and pews have been already sold and removed.

The temporary structure was dismantled and re-erected in Union Street as the forerunner of Christ Church.

Rita SWIFT

"The Poor Always Ye Have With You" *Dunstable's Workhouses*

We are sometimes inclined to look at Elizabethan England through rose-coloured spectacles and see it as a glorious chapter in our history, but there was another side to the picture. It was also a time of widespread poverty, when the only help the poor could look for was charity from the better-off. Until the end of the 16th century, that was. A few years before the death of Elizabeth I an act of Parliament was passed by which Overseers of the Poor were to be elected in each parish and they, together with the Churchwardens, were made responsible for the distribution of relief to the poor of the parish. The money for this relief was to be raised by levying a tax, known as the Poor Rate, on the local householders. It was the beginning of our social services.

Eventually legislation was passed requiring all parishes, individually or jointly with their neighbours, to provide workhouses for those who were unemployable or unable to find work. Workhouse masters would be appointed to run them, under the supervision of the Wardens and Overseers.

We do not know exactly when Dunstable first provided such a workhouse, only that one existed in the 18th century in the area that is now Ashton Square. It may have been built for the purpose or, more likely, an existing building was taken over. The records which would have been kept at the time, the minutes of the Vestry meetings, have disappeared, but those from 1774 onwards have survived. In that year Nathaniel Taylor was appointed as Master of the workhouse and instructed to take in anybody sent by the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor as being lawfully entitled to receive relief and maintenance from the parish. He was allowed 2s.6d. (15p.) per head per week to give them 'sufficient lodging meat drink clothing employment and other things necessary' and was to arrange for the burial of any who died while in his care.

A kind of means testing was applied and only those in real need were to be admitted. If, after a time, their circumstances changed and they were deemed to be able to afford their own accommodation, they were moved out. The Overseers ordered the removal of Stephen Sapwell and his family in 1777 when he was thought to be 'able to provide for himself at his own expense'.

But by 1780 the workhouse was overcrowded and the members of the Vestry agreed that bigger premises were needed. They were fortunate to be offered premises to rent in High Street South, probably next to the White Swan, by one, John Miller. Mr Miller owned a number of properties in the town and among them was the Star inn, formerly the farmhouse belonging to Maltings Farm. (The original Star had been further along the road and was a private house by this time.) It was this building that John Miller was offering to the town on a 20 year lease at a rent of 6 guineas a year. His offer was accepted, the paupers moved in and the old workhouse was divided into three and let to tenants.

Workhouse masters were appointed on yearly contracts and rarely stayed longer than two or three years. The weekly allowance for feeding the inmates fluctuated according to the price of food, from 2s.6d. per head at its lowest to 4s.0d. at its peak, though this was only paid for a very short time when the price of corn was at its height. Sometimes the allowance was the same throughout the year, but at others there was a difference, usually of sixpence a week, between the summer and winter rates.

In a 1790 a doctor, Mr Farr, was appointed to look after the health of the inmates and, like the workhouse Master, he was appointed each year on an annual contract. His remuneration when first appointed was 10 guineas a year, but he was still there in 1821 and by then he was receiving 30 guineas a year. This was to cover 'surgery and physick' but not inoculating for smallpox. There was still much controversy about inoculation and whether inmates of the workhouse should have to be inoculated. In 1806 the Vestry agreed that those inhabitants of the workhouse who wished to be inoculated by Mr Farr could apply and the parish would pay his fee of 2s.6d. Three years later, when a resident contracted smallpox, the Vestry ordered that all the inmates must be inoculated at the expense of the parish.

In 1799 the Vestry had decided to buy the workhouse. The price agreed was 100 guineas and this they planned to raise by selling annuities to the people of the town. How successful they were the minutes do not say, but the purchase certainly went ahead. A few years later an inventory of the contents of the workhouse lists a long table and form and various cooking implements in the kitchen, and 7 bedsteads, 4 beds, one straw bed and various blankets, bolsters and sheets in the bedrooms. There were also 4 brass candlesticks in one bedroom. There seem at this time to have been two bedrooms and one living room / bedroom in which was, rather surprisingly, a copper coffee pot, with three cups and '2 sawcers'. There was also a brewhouse with 2 grates.

How many inmates there were then we do not know. There must have been some overcrowding at times as at one point the Master was ordered to clear the corn, onions and other things out of one of the rooms and make it habitable for one or other of the man and woman who were actually sharing a room and were presumably not married.

By 1808 there were signs that the Vestry was having financial problems with the provision of poor relief. The previous year Dunstable had been heavily fined for not providing sufficient men for the Militia and had paid a fine of 5 guineas out of the Poor Rate. Possibly because of overcrowding they now had a scheme for 4 tenements to be built in the yard of the workhouse and 4 carpenters, John Darlow, John Puddephatt, Henry White and William Chesher, were ordered to tender for the work. As there were said to be an average of 42 paupers in residence by the time the workhouse closed, these tenements could have been intended to provide extra accommodation.

Perhaps to pay for these tenements the old workhouse, then occupied by William Eames, William Holt and William Fowler, was put up for sale in the same year. John Puddephatt,

Parsons Head 24th April
1813.

At a Vestry held this Day
by Adjournment, the following
were appointed and accepted the
Office of a Committee to manage
the poor in the Parhouse of
the Parish of Dunstable.

Viz.

The two Church-Wardens.
The two Overseers.
Mr. George Jorison
J. H. Oliver
John Gilbert Sen
James Willoughby
George Crawley. —
Richard Jorison Sen.

Beautifully written record of the appointment of the
Workhouse management committee
in the Vestry minute book.

one of the carpenters mentioned above, immediately offered £40 for it, an offer which was at once accepted. There seems to have been a general tightening up of the administration of the workhouse over the next few years. The Master was instructed to keep a detailed account of all work done by the paupers and the amount of payment they received. Strict rules were laid down for their hours of work and for the times at which candles and fires were to be extinguished at night. In 1813 a Management Committee consisting of the two Churchwardens, the Overseers of the Poor and 6 members of the Vestry was appointed. They advertised for a new manager who was familiar with the 'straw manufactory' trade and George Oliver was installed with his wife and two children, on condition that all their time and any money earned by them was to be for the benefit of the workhouse. A second inventory was made, though some of the items listed in 1804 had disappeared by then. In 1819 they were again advertising for a new manager, and this time an active, middle-aged man with a wife but no children was preferred.

After this the records are less detailed, but the days of the workhouse were numbered. In 1834 the Poor Law was passed which grouped towns and villages together into Unions in which one large, purpose-built workhouse was to be erected to serve the whole area. In spite of an attempt to have its own workhouse Dunstable was included in the Luton Union and the workhouse here was sold in 1836. It was bought by William Elliott, who had the building knocked down and cottages built on the site, probably the numbers 83 or 85 to 89 High Street South today.

Judging by Charles Lamborn's description of the building in his book, *Dunstaplelogia*, it was by then only fit for demolition. 'It looked a cold and desolate place, unadorned by flower or shrub. The casement windows were seldom in a sound condition, broken panes patched up as best they might be until the glazier's next visit, all looked comfortless and forlorn, and told a sad tale of poverty and disorderly habits.'

In 1855 a group of the more influential residents of the town got together to try to persuade the powers that be that a new union should be formed, with Dunstable at the centre and taking in the villages of Houghton Regis, Kensworth, Totternhoe, Whipsnade, Studham and Humbershoe. But the government was not persuaded and the poor continued to be sent to Luton, only being brought back here when they died to be buried in the place where they had once lived.

The information in this article is taken mainly from the Vestry minute book of the Priory Church.

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>For your diary, the winter programme for this year.</i></p> <p>The meetings will take place at 7.45 at the Dunstable Methodist Church Hall on the following dates :</p> <p style="text-align: center;">September 13 October 11 November 8 December 13</p> <p>The detailed programme will be available soon</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">THE OLD TRADES OF DUNSTABLE</p> <p>History Society publications still in print and available at Society meetings</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Dales' Dubbin and Flemons' Herbs</i> £2.95 2. <i>Shops and Markets</i> £3.99 3. <i>The whiting works</i> £3.25 4. <i>Cross paperware and Bagshawe's Engineering Works</i> £3.50 5. <i>Hats and Bonnets: the Dunstable hat manufacturers</i> £4.99 <p>Also available</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Totternhoe 1881</i> (includes the whole of the 1881 census of the village) £3.50</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Coming shortly - <i>The story of Totternhoe quarries</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Past issues of the Newsletter are available, on demand, from Omer Roucoux</i></p>
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

THE TOLL GATES

PUDDLE HILL TURNPIKE TRUST - Rita Swift

In April 1873 it was announced that the "Pike", between Dunstable and Hockliffe known as the Puddlehill Gate, was to be abolished along with some others but not the one on the south side of Dunstable. Fortunately as with many large properties, it was placed in the hands of Mr W H Derbyshire the auctioneer who advertised the sale in the local paper. Interesting details are therefore preserved

29 October 1873 Near Hockliffe, Beds

MR. W. H. DERBYSHIRE has been favoured with instructions from
the Trustees of the Puddle-Hill Turnpike Trust
TO SELL BY AUCTION
At the "White Horse" Inn, Hockliffe, on THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 6TH, 1873

At 3 o'clock precisely, the whole of the
BUILDING MATERIALS

Comprising the PUDDLE-HILL TOLL-GATE HOUSE and COTTAGE
adjoining with the Gates, Posts, Notice Board, Fencing, Pump,
and all internal fittings.

In one or more Lots.

The above Buildings are Brick-built and Slated, fitted with copper, oven and boiler, and other grates, sinks, and other conveniences, and having been erected only a few years can be easily removed and converted into three excellent cottages.

Conditions will be produced at the time of sale, and further particulars may be obtained of C. S. BENNING, Esq., Clerk of the above Trustees, or of the AUCTIONEER, both of Dunstable.

DUNSTABLE TOLL GATE

At a Council meeting in 1871 the subject of the Toll Gate near Dunstable on the road to Kensworth was again under discussion. It was proving detrimental to the town with farmers and gardeners etc preferring to go to Luton or elsewhere rather than pay the 6d toll which was considered expensive.

However in 1877 the matter was finally resolved, thanks to the persistent efforts of Mr Alderman Lockhart and some other gentlemen. The decision was made to close the Toll Gate on the 31 October 1877 and the gate and the house to be demolished soon after.

William Shuttleworth, the keeper of the tollhouse, opened the gates just before midnight on 31 October to allow all travellers free access. Soon afterwards a number of people came from the direction of Dunstable led by a band and as the clock struck 12, although the gate was open, they began to attack and destroy it. Mr Shuttleworth tried to calm them down even offering them wine, but they swore and threatened to physically abuse him. He retreated, frightened and shaking to his house but not before he had recognised, and could name 4 of the ringleaders. Later in court he explained that others participating he only knew by sight but not by name. Stones were thrown at the lamps, which together with the palings were torn down and smashed. The notice board with the list of tolls and the gate were torn down and set on fire with the disturbance continuing until 2 o'clock in the morning.

The following week at Hemel Hempstead Petty Sessions, Henry Burgess, Frederick Latham, Frederick Pitkin and Henry Limbrey all of Dunstable, were charged by Mr. William Shuttleworth of Kensworth with damaging a gate, pales, lamp and other articles, the property of the trustees of the Dunstable and Pondyards Turnpike Trust, to the value of £2. Mr. Edward W. Beal prosecuted. A verdict of guilty was pronounced and the defendants were ordered to pay £2 damages and £4. 8. 6 costs.



Reproduction from a painting, looking South, by the father of the late Mr. E.J. ("Mayor") Holt from Houghton Regis. This old toll house and gate was situated at the Kenworth side of Half Moon Hill, on Watling street. It was demolished around 1880. It was certainly very similar to the Puddle-Hill Toll-Gate House and Cottage of the article.

Doctor Morcom, Father and Son

Morcom Road is named after Dr. Augustus Morcom. He was born on the Isle of Man, probably in Peel, in 1848. He trained in Edinburgh and became a Licentiate of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1870. Augustus worked in several hospitals before becoming a GP in Coniston in 1877/8. In 1879 he moved to Dunstable and was town Mayor for 1890-91. His last entry in the Medical Directory is in 1914 when he is living at Montpelier House and is listed as being Medical Officer of Health for Luton Rural District Council and for the Borough of Dunstable. This includes being responsible for matters of health in all the local schools. He is also Medical Officer and Public Vaccination Officer for Houghton Regis District and the Luton Union. Besides this, he is Medical Referee to the Railway Passengers' Assurance Company. He is a Fellow of the Royal Institute of Public Health and had been a Clinical Assistant at the Royal Ear Hospital in Soho. Augustus married Alice Farr who was seven years his junior and a native of Dunstable. Their eldest daughter, Susanna, was born in Coniston in 1878. Alfred Farr Morcom was born in Dunstable on 16th February 1885 and Olive was born in Dunstable in 1887.

Alfred attended Dunstable Grammar School and then went to Repton Public School. He subsequently went to Cambridge University and did his medical training at St. Thomas' Hospital. He became a Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians in 1909 and graduated in 1911. He started as a GP in Dunstable, living at Montpelier House from 1910 to 1916. From 1917 to 1919 his address is 29 Clarges Street, Mayfair and from 1920 to 1951 it is 6 Chester Street, Belgrave Square. He died on February 12th 1952 and he was survived by his wife and two sons. His obituary in the Dunstable Gazette is somewhat truncated as it coincided with the death of George VI.

In the 1952 Medical Directory, Alfred is listed as Senior Anaesthetist at Belgrave Children's Hospital; Medical Officer to ICI; Medical Referee to the Cricketers' Friendly Society and President of the Harvey Society. He had previously been Medical Officer at St Thomas' Hospital; a house surgeon at the Septic and Infections wards and a clinical assistant on Ear, Nose and Throat wards. During the Second World War, he was a captain in the Royal Army Medical Corps. He also wrote two textbooks, both on Anaesthetics.

Alfred had a long and distinguished career as a cricketer. He is described as 'a lower order right-hand batsman and fast-medium bowler.' He played for Bedfordshire before and after the First World War. He played in 23 First Class matches between 1905 and 1911. 20 of these matches were for Cambridge University and he won his Blue in three consecutive years. He played once for Gentlemen v Players and once for Gentlemen of the South v Players of the South. His last match was for MCC v Cambridge University. Alfred took 97 wickets at 23.93. He biggest haul of wickets in a match was against Northamptonshire at Fenner's in 1906, taking 6 for 25 in the first innings and 6 for 73 in the second. His biggest haul of wickets in an innings was his 7 for 76 for the Gentlemen of the South at Hastings in 1907. With the bat, he scored 257 runs at 11.68. His highest score of 29 was made against Sussex at Hove. Although he is described as a medium-fast bowler, there are apocryphal stories of the distances travelled by bails when struck by Morcom's fastest deliveries.

Hugh Garrod