

NEWSLETTER

Dunstable & District Local History Society
No. 31 February 2009



Chairman's Notes

There was a record attendance for the society's Christmas gathering when we were entertained by a talk by Philip Buckle and Doug Darby about Dunstable Pageant. We usually try to limit the numbers at our December meeting because seasonal food and drink are served, and the tables take up so much extra space. But many people who had taken part in the pageant wanted to attend, and we just couldn't turn them away! That's why it was so cramped!

Our thanks to the ladies (and gentlemen) who provided the festive fare. I should mention Dorothy and May, of course, but also Cynthia who dealt with the tickets (and warned me that we had sold too many!), Joan who provided that amazing recipe for hot punch, and Rita who performed wonders with an electric carving knife. No thanks to the local baker who burned the bread rolls and didn't seem to care about the problems he caused.

- An anonymous correspondent to the Dunstable Gazette annoyed me somewhat by dragging the history society into criticism of the recent Dunstable history DVD and implying that the society was some kind of elitist organisation. But, on reflection, I've always fancied becoming a member of an elite organisation. I hope all our members were similarly flattered!

- We were lucky to be able to welcome Simon Greenish for his talk on Bletchley Park at our September meeting. On the very same day, news had broken about a substantial grant being given to Bletchley Park and Simon had been required to give numerous interviews on TV and radio. He was absolutely exhausted by the time he arrived at Dunstable.

- History society members are often called upon give talks to other societies. Joan Curran, for instance, has spoken at Caddington and Markyate about Totternhoe quarries, and Hugh Garrod has lectured on Sir Nigel Loring, of Chalgrave, whose exploits were the inspiration for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novel *The White Company*. I have been giving talks about my time writing the Yesteryear feature for the Dunstable Gazette. This often stirs some remarkable memories for the audience - recently one gentleman was delighted to recognise himself and his wife in a photo of the congregation taken during a television broadcast from the Priory Church. It was a very special occasion for them, not because of the TV cameras, but because it was a Sunday when their wedding banns were read.

- The society has been given a copy of the 1868 brochure for the sale, at the Red Lion Hotel, of the five-storey corn windmill in West Street which is now the home of Dunstable Sea Cadets. The brochure belonged to the Harpenden railway museum, which has now closed. The society has made a copy for display by the sea cadets.

- Dorothy Levitt, a motoring pioneer in Edwardian times, was a name unknown to me until an e-mail arrived from a TV production team preparing a documentary for BBC 4.

They had a magazine cutting which included a photo (right) of Miss Levitt, taken near Dunstable in 1905. The picture showed her adjusting the foot brake on her De Dion car during what had been an

epic journey for the time from London to Liverpool and back. The TV company's idea is to make a film of actress Penelope Keith retracing the journey, with interviews in various towns along the way.

Did the Dunstable history society have any photographs or information? The answer, alas, was no - but it seemed likely that the files of the Dunstable Borough Gazette would be more productive.

Alas, the antiquated microfilm machine at Dunstable library was out of order, so a trip to the newspaper office in Luton had to be made. It was a wasted journey - the Gazette apparently had not noticed the lady driving through.

But then it emerged that the TV company had the wrong date - we should have been looking at March 1905 rather than August. Back to the library...but by this time it was Thursday morning and the place was shut. Thank goodness for the Gazette office in Luton - but a search through the files for March and April 1905 was equally fruitless.

However, some slightly relevant facts emerged which will probably not be included in the TV programme but which might interest history society members.

Women drivers, for instance, were not THAT uncommon in 1905. In fact, one lady, Nancy Hawnt of Fulham, was killed on the Watling Street just north of Dunstable when she tried to overtake a heavy motor lorry and the wheel hubs touched. The occupants of the open-topped car were thrown out and Mrs Hawnt, said the Gazette, "expired about 20 minutes after the accident".

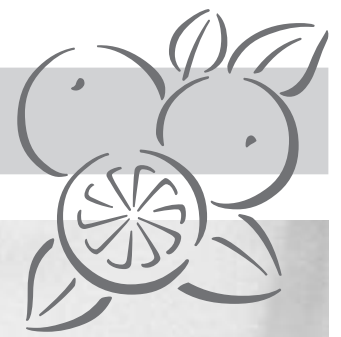
Mrs Hawnt's husband was injured and was taken to the Sugar Loaf Hotel, where he received "every attention". His wife's body was taken to the Bird In Hand public house (now the Mulberry Tree). The Gazette subsequently printed an indignant letter from the landlord of the Green Man (now the Chalk Hill pub) denying that he had refused to admit the corpse.

In the same week a motor engineer was fined £5 for travelling "at a terrific speed" (between 35 and 40 mph) near Dunstable. He had been part of a team taking part in experiments for the motor industry to study which vehicles threw up the least amount of dust.

John Buckledee



ORANGE ROLLING



Orange rolling on Good Friday at Dunstable Downs attracted huge crowds, as you can see in the photo. In fact there was a real worry that someone might be injured in the scramble for fruit on the steep slopes of Pascombe Pit, and that influenced the decision to abandon the event. Rita Swift's article about this old Dunstable tradition was published in the February 2006 edition of this newsletter and has now been reproduced on our website. You can easily log on to this by searching on Google for "Dunstable History Society". The photos here, reproduced by courtesy of the Dunstable Gazette, were taken in 1963. In charge of throwing the oranges were the Mayor, Alderman Haydn Parrott (pictured centre), and Norman Bates and Ken Ims of Dunstable Chamber of Trade. Norman (in the sheepskin jacket) ran S. A. Bates and Son, funeral directors, of West Street, and Ken (on the Mayor's left) ran the Elite Decorations shop in Albion Street. Norman's wife Maisie, a member of our history society, celebrates her 90th birthday on February 26 this year. She is pictured here standing between her husband and the Mayor.

A Design For Dunstable, 1944

On 26th January 1943, the Town Council instructed Mr. AD Harvey, the Town Clerk, and Mr. G Ashton, the Borough Surveyor, to prepare a report on 'the future development and re-development of the town.' Their report contained 48 pages and was published, by Waterlow & Sons, in June 1944.

The authors are clear that they are planning for the long term and encourage the Town Council to look to the needs of Dunstable over the next 50 years. They comment that there has been much ad hoc development in the town and that an over-arching scheme was needed. The population of Dunstable in 1943 is given as 16,450. They state that this total should not ever be allowed to exceed 50,000. The town should be big enough that the residents can be offered a variety of employment, yet small enough so that they can walk to the centre of the town and still be near the open country-side. There should be a green belt all around Dunstable and ribbon development should be stopped. Dunstable should not merge with 'the neighbouring urban mass of Luton' which would result in 'a consequent loss of identity.'

The town should be zoned into residential, commercial and industrial areas. Residential areas, based on the electoral wards, should have their own areas for shopping and recreation. The main shopping area should be in the town centre.

The report hopes that, after the war, the railway line to Luton will be upgraded to a double track and that more and faster trains will operate on it.

On the subject of the roads, it states, 'The first and foremost traffic requirement would be the elimination from the town centre of all non-stop through traffic.' The recommendation is that a by-pass is built to the west of the town. The report also says that a roundabout should be constructed at the cross roads. This 'is quite practicable, provided the property known as 'Middle Row' can be removed.' The roundabout would have pedestrian subways and toilets. The then Rector, Revd GW Clarkson, suggested that a replica of the Eleanor Cross should be placed in the centre of the roundabout. Chiltern Road and Great Northern Road should be used as 'circumferential roads' that by-pass the town centre. Other should be built; from opposite the Union Cinema to Houghton Park and thence to Poynters Road; from Skimpot Lane to Liscombe Road and on to Half Moon Lane; from Southfields Road to Mead Way and then from the other end of Mead Way to French's Avenue.

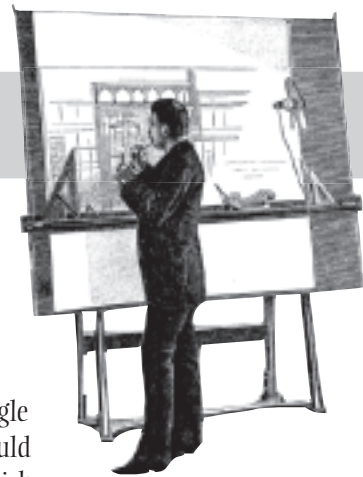
The report says that new housing areas should be on the 'garden city' model and that a variety of houses should be built, including 'residential hostels for single people.' The Council should compulsorily purchase land which it wanted to have developed. It should build the road system, put in the main services and then sell 99 year leases to approved developers. They should be required to include open spaces for recreation and to stop children playing in the streets.

The report states the need for more schools, 6 Primaries and 3 Secondary including a Girls' Grammar School. 'Sites will also be required for Young Peoples' Colleges and Youth Centres.' 'Smaller children should have no more than a half a mile walk to school'

There should be a Civic Centre in the Kingscroft Avenue area. It should include public entertainment and recreation, including an indoor swimming pool. There should be a Library and all the agencies of local, regional and national government. The whole should be of one design and aesthetically pleasing.

The report concluded by stating that none of this will work if the residents of Dunstable do not know what is proposed and when they do, they do not approve of it.

Hugh Garrod.



The Queensway Hall under construction in 1962 and opened in 1964

Sad Farewell



We are very sorry to announce the sad loss of
Mr D Collier

A valued member of the society.

Greeting New Members

We would like to take this opportunity to welcome the following new members:

Mrs P Beedle Mrs E Coombe Dr & Mrs A Donald
Mrs S Heley Mr & Mrs N Lee Mr H McMenamin
Mr D Marriage Mr D Saunders

Dunstable Cathedral



Now just an eye-catching title, but if King Henry VIII had got his way there would have been a city and a bishop of Dunstable and the priory buildings would have survived.

The drama of King Henry VIII's suppression of the monasteries reached Dunstable in 1539 when his commissioners received the submission of the Augustinian priory. It was then a well-established community with a prior and 12 canons. Its income was then just under £350 a year, which came from manors and small holdings, most of them in Bedfordshire and nearby counties, and from the income, largely tithes, of 12 churches belonging to it. This put Dunstable about a quarter of the way down the list of English religious houses.

The suppression of the monasteries was an attack on a system and not on individuals, and the dispossessed religious were given pensions by the Crown.

Dunstable was a typical example. As the head of the house the prior, Gervase Markham, was given £60 (and 20 loads of wood) a year. This was generous, to say the least, compared with the £5-£8 which the rank and file got, which though very far from lavish, was never thought to mean abject poverty.

Markham's pension was a sign of the times. The head of a substantial house was a great man, almost thought of as its proprietor, to be compensated according to its size, rather like the golden handshake to a company director today. At the wealthy abbey of St Albans the abbot got £266 13s 4d. Nearly all the community of Dunstable found their way into substantial livings to augment their pensions. Some got help from Markham's family, which was of some standing. No-one seems to have fallen on hard times.

Such was the fate of the great majority of religious houses. However, Henry had different ideas about what should happen to some. He was, according to his lights, a devout churchman to the

end, and he was anxious that some of the vast dioceses (Dunstable was in Lincoln diocese) should be broken down and new ones created. What could be more appropriate than to convert a suppressed and redundant religious house into cathedral?

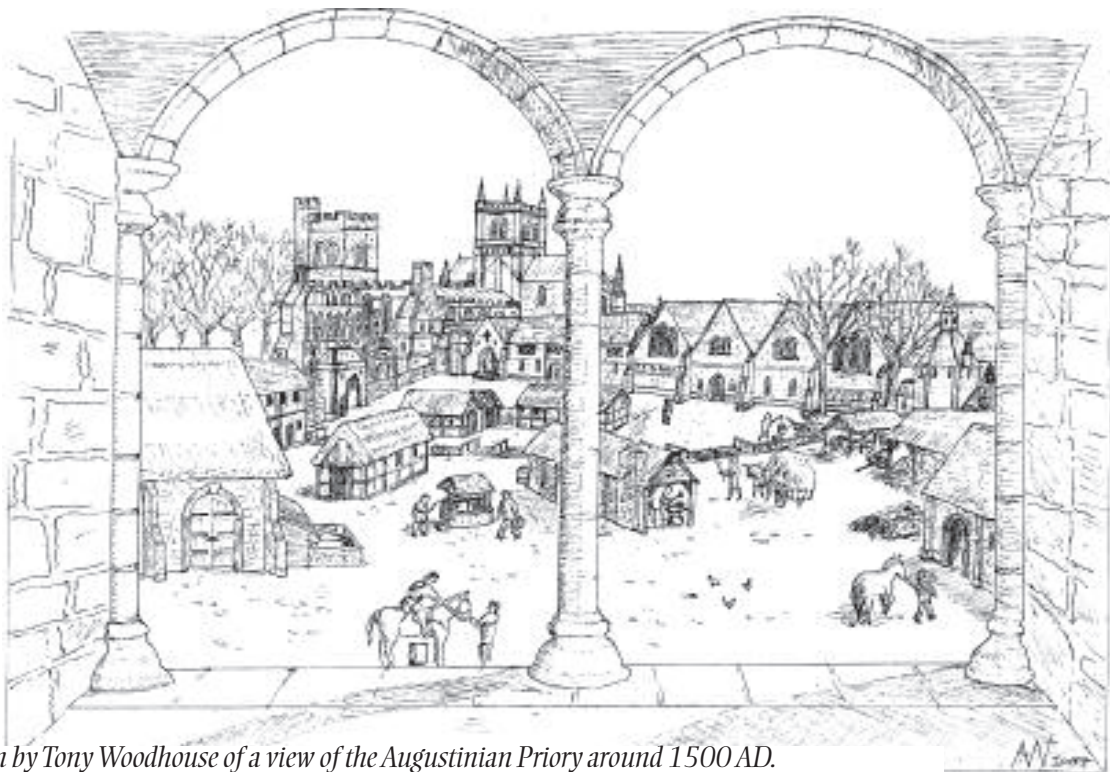
A manuscript book in his own hand lists 13 that he had in mind and sets out in great detail the constitutions of the proposed cathedral establishments. Dunstable's was to range from support of a dean at £100 p.a. through a whole range of lesser officials down to the undercook at £3 6s 8d. Provision was to be made for a choral establishment and for good works. It would have cost £800 p.a. This was more than twice the revenues of the priory, which was to be augmented with the income from two other suppressed houses in Bedfordshire, the priory of Newnham and the nunnery of Elstow.

Henry's plans for all but six of his cathedrals came to nothing, perhaps because he and his ministers became uneasy about good money, that might have found its way into the crown's coffers, being lost to ecclesiastical works.

Dunstable, of course, was one of those that fell by the wayside.

From what happened elsewhere we can make a guess about which might have happened here: very probably many of the community would have been absorbed into a cathedral establishment similarly to all the existing ones, and all in all there would probably have been few outward differences from the unreformed priory. We can be sure of a cathedral whose Lady chapel reached as far as what are now the gardens of Priory Road. We can imagine a cathedral close reaching out towards Britain Street on lands that had been the priory's and, if we like, build elegant Georgian houses on it. At the time of the Dissolution, Dunstable was already on the way to becoming a flourishing town, so let us go still further and populate it with Trollopian characters according to taste.

John Fendley



An illustration by Tony Woodhouse of a view of the Augustinian Priory around 1500 AD.

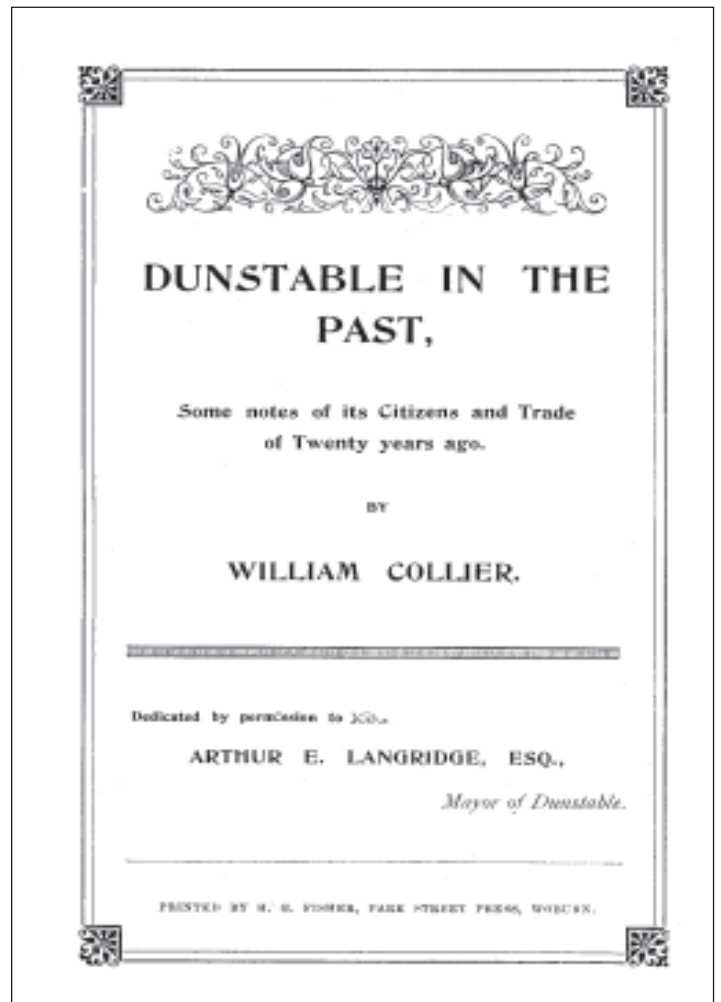
Dunstable In The Past

Dunstable In The Past is the title of a little 12-page booklet containing some verses, reproduced below, by **William Collier**. These are mainly about the hat trade in **Dunstable** and contain references to many people employed in one of the town's hat factories.

The booklet, printed by H.G. Fisher of Park Street Press, Woburn, is undated but is dedicated to the Mayor of Dunstable, Arthur E. Langridge, whose terms of office were 1894 -1896 and 1900-1902. William Collier describes his poems as being about the town's citizens and trade of "twenty years ago" and includes references to what was clearly a tough time for the hat industry – hoping that "the dull time will now disappear, when prosperity will be seen and felt everywhere, and busy times come and plenty of work here".

A surviving copy of the booklet belonged to the late Fred Moore, and was found in his effects by his daughter Pauline Keen, who donated it to the history society.

The story of Dunstable's hat factories and their decline towards the end of the 19th century is well told in Joan Curran's book, *Straw Hats & Bonnets*, published by this society.



Dunstable in the Past.

COME, Ladies and Gentlemen, pay attention if you can
And I will inform you of a certain man,
Including a little of his history,
Which may cause some to think that it means me.

As I was walking on the path in Dunstable one night,
I saw at a distance Mr. UNDERWOOD in sight;
I made haste and o'ertook him and asked for employ,
And to suit Mr. UNDERWOOD I now meant to try.

Mr. TAYLOR was in the bleach-house bleaching the plaits,
He washes the Leghorns, Bonnets, and Hats,
Prepares them for the stiffener to stiffen so nice,
That they may not get limp to be stiffened out twice.

Mr. DUNCOMB stiffened the hats and bonnets on this firm,
And worked very hard, and did all in their turn;
He stiffened them well, so that no one should
Find fault, for he stiffened as fast as he could.

You all are aware Mr. WATSON was in the band,
He went in the town, played his music in his hand;
He came and worked at Messrs. COOPER'S machine
That was in the Blocking Room plain to be seen.

I knew a certain man who for many years
Then worked for Messrs. COOPER as it appears
He machined the Leghorns, and is living still,
And his name, I may tell you, is Mr. DOCKERHILL.

2

There were three machines stood all in a row,
And the men that worked them with their work made a show,
When the Leghorns are machined they give them in time
For us to finish them off and make them to shine.

We had some young men from Markyate Street,—
To come to Dunstable they thought it a treat,—
Who used to block the Leghorns from morn till night,
As they were industrious they worked with their might.

But, ladies and gentlemen, don't think these are all
We had some blockers that would come at our call.
In the Little Blocking Room they blocked all sorts of hats,
And if you wanted one they would block you one perhaps.

Mr. JONATHAN HUNT was kind, we know,
As kind as Jonathan three thousand years ago;
He waited on the ladies and kept every where clean,
So that it was fit any time to be seen.

The ladies were at work up stairs you all know,
They there have their needles and thread and sew;
That is how we make our hats and bonnets so good,
By working hard and getting money for food.

But there were some ladies who didn't work upstairs—
Mrs. SCARBOROUGH, Mrs. PORTER, and also Miss AYRES,
Mrs. DUNCOMB, Mrs. SMITH,—all sat near together,
And busy time lasted through nice fine warm weather.

There was a young lady, Miss YOUNG was her name,
She was cheerful and pleasant, and always the same;
She had many hats and linings to do all the day,
And worked the machine, and so stitched away.

Another young lady we are pleased to tell
 And we wish you to know,—it was Miss BUSWILL,
 She was in the warehouse, we had not the least doubt,
 For the finishers went to her, and she gave the work out.

Miss HOOS had her warehouse quite up above,
 Like the birds that soar—like the lark and the dove,
 She attended to the fancy work day after day,
 Packed it in boxes and so sent it away.

As you ascend up the stairs and get on the landing,
 And look around yourself while you are standing,
 Then turn to the left to the wiring room,
 Where the finishers make hats and bonnets handsome.

If you go to the Fancy Room, and knock at the door,
 The ladies will come and speak kind, we are sure.
 With the fancy bonnets you can find no fault at all,
 Except with their size, as they are made small.

The ladies who sit and work in the top room,
 Seem to have much joy and but very little gloom;
 In the large room you'll find they are very kind,
 And as for industry, are not the least behind.

Seeing so many verses you may think it very funny,
 But, being Christmas time, we are begging for money;
 At this season of the year we work though it's cold,
 So I hope you will give us both silver and gold.

I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!
 And hope the dull time will now disappear,
 When prosperity will be seen and felt everywhere,
 And busy times come and plenty of work here.

When the shapes were found out we had the blocks made,
 As the orders came in we worked at our trade;
 The plait was first bought, and given to be strung,
 And then to be bleached on the rods it was hung.

When dry it was bunched, to the warehouse they take,
 And give out to the ladies for hats and bonnets to make;
 Then stiffened, and ironed, and trimmed very fine.
 They are packed in the boxes, and sent out in good time.

The work must be done when we have it to do,
 So we were in earnest and industrious too,
 Put our shoulder to the wheel and work with all might,
 And work hard all the day, and sometimes all the night.

You all do know the busy season just past,
 And are very sorry that it does'nt longer last.
 We should love constant work, and always have employ,
 This would make all happy and fill us all with joy.

We do have to complain of busy season soon gone,
 And shall while the ladies do wear the chignon,
 For they get the false hair instead of bonnets so neat,
 Which are the chief means of our getting food to eat.

Now, ladies, we are prepared at the present to show
 How the majority of men's living depends upon you—
 The butchers and bakers, and all sorts of trade,
 Is according to how the hats and bonnets are made.

Most ladies and gentlemen encourage their business,
 In eating and drinking, and wearing more or less—
 The butcher will kill and eat his own meat,
 The shoemaker will wear his own shoes on his feet.

We have spoken of industry, kindness, and love,
 Of the gentlemen below, and the ladies above;
 And now we speak of something which just suits me,
 And that is sitting down to the table to tea.

We always do love such gatherings as these,
 When all can enjoy themselves as much as they please.
 We have had teas before, and shall have them again,
 As they afford us much pleasure and are not in vain.

And then we met to enjoy our tea,
 And are hoping above our JESUS to see;
 And then we will praise Him in our home,
 And sing hallelujah to Christ on the throne!

PART 2nd. STRAW TRADE.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish now to call
 Your attention to some verses, for I want to suit all.
 I was asked to make some poetry for this day,
 But now it is bad, I imagine you will say.

We have not forgotten our last social tea,
 And I believe you enjoyed it as well as me.
 It was summer season and the evening was light,
 We enjoyed ourselves well till ten o'clock at night.

We waited until the busy season arrive,
 And to get the work done we together did strive;
 With much peace and quietness we all were employed,
 And to do our very best I believe we all tried.

The example they set is easy and plain,
 Then imitate it and do just the same;
 Take off the chignons, wear large bonnets for your sake,
 And then at this season we should have them to make.

But here we must pause, or you will think us too plain,
 And say we speak ignorant and very likely insane;
 But we must say what's our duty if the ladies we offend,
 For we say it with thought and will do so to the end.

If we have offended you we hope you will forgive,
 For that is the way to be happy while we live;
 If your spirits are wounded we now wish to heal,
 And so to your mercy we for pardon appeal.

But we didn't mean to work or to do business that day,
 But sit down to tea and afterwards play,—
 To enjoy ourselves well, be happy as the lark,
 While that soars in the air we shall be in the park.

How kind are the ladies and gentlemen who provide
 A tea for so many who are scattered so wide—
 From Leighton and Stanbridge, Toddington, Markyate
 Street,—
 For all to take tea in Dunstable Park do we meet.

PART 3rd. TEA BUSINESS.

As tea dealers we travel with good tea to sell,
 It has a nice flavour if you will only smell,
 If we can get you to buy a cheap bargain you'll make,
 For we love to sell cheap for our customers' sake.

We have had pure coffee that is good for the head,
For breakfast in the morning, and for supper before bed,
Help you to work in the daytime with all your might,
And help you to sleep when you're in bed in the night.

They say Dandelion Coffee has a good name,
Doing good to had digestion, liver complaint the same,
Preventing palpitation and diseases of the heart,
Causing faintness and giddiness both to depart.

And also Cocoa—Epps, Cadbury, and Fry's,
That would suit men and women, also girls and boys;
It's fattening in its nature, and it will satisfy,
For it is such sort of cocoa that you all can enjoy.

We sold Berry's blacking—that is very good,
And any one that buys I believe it would
Suit those who use it in polishing their shoes,
And making them shine—it matters not whose.

We had penny packets of Nixey's Black Lead,
The very best for polishing, so people have said;
Stoves, fire irons, hearth tidies, also the fire place,
You can polish them all till you see your own face.

Our round knob of Blue, each one is half-penny,
If you buy you will find them as good as any;
When white clothes are washed well rinse them about,
They will come nice and clean, inside and out.

O let us recommend our Starch unto you,
In penny boxes, very good, white or blue,
It stiffens clothes well, so it's not all in vain,
And when you have done it leaves not a stain.

Our Lucifer Matches are the best ones to light,
If they are kept dry both by day and by night;
So never buy bad ones to throw them away
When you may have good ones in your house every day.

This Soap is the "sunlight," and sold three-pence a bar,
As sunlight is brighter than any one star,
So this is most famous for washing the clothes,
As those who buy it certainly knows.

You may wash yourself clean and scour the floor,
From one end of the house right down to the door,
Sheets, towels, and blankets, and all such as these,—
If you can be a customer, do, if you please.

Some may say I am foolish for taking the pain
Of making these verses and not mention my name:
So the composer is a strange man named Bill,
Who moved from the bottom of Sewell Hill.



RED INDIAN ENTERTAINMENT



For 2 evenings in February 1888, in the Primitive Methodist School-room, the congregation in Dunstable was entertained to a most interesting and unusual talk given by two gifted North American Indians.

Mr Joseph Duncombe opened the proceedings and introduced the Christian Red Indians (as they were called in those days but Native Americans now) as Akenawaka and Tomapamelaut.

Attired in their native costume with bead ornaments and feathers they commenced the evening by singing together a plaintive melody "We are a band of Indians". The elder singer had a fine full bass voice and the younger was a tenor with great flexibility whose enunciation was described as very pleasing. Akenawaka followed this with a solo performance of "Drifting with the tide," with Tomapamelaut assisting in the chorus. They followed this with a hymn in the Delaware language, No. 9 in Sankey's collection "In the sweet bye and bye", but sung in the Indian language as follows:

*Uh tawh uh kih ail wee kih jih w'lihk,
Kih jee tah hye yain gwagh om k'nam nan,
K'sau kee koon nuh kooh nuh a yuh yainqk,
Kee sheewh tau keen nan nin ij aib yaindk,
Weeng eej jaiwh aish kil loup,
K'naiwh tih noj weeng auwh zoowh wau kun ing.*

The audience enthusiastically joined in the chorus but in their own language, and the singers were heartily cheered for their effort. A most amusing medley was given amid loud laughter and applause.

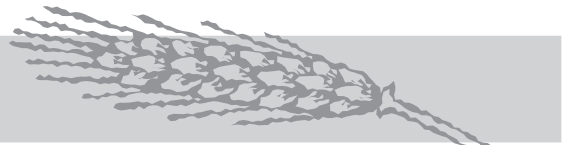
Akenawaka then talked about Indian war customs, heathen life, courtship, marriage, modes of worship, funerals etc. which was listened to with wrapt attention throughout. Tomapamelaut, amidst merry laughter, spoke about their names and how various persons had pronounced them. One chairman introduced Akenawaka, as "A can of water"; while he himself was introduced as "Tommy Perambulator." The meaning of their names was also explained, as Akenawaka meant On the Trail and Tomapamelaut was Flying Wolf.

For nearly two hours the audience were enthralled by their overseas visitors who finished their visit in true Red Indian fashion with a highly realistic representation of a war dance. Some very graceful movements were combined together with war whoops, and the swinging of a dangerous-looking tomahawk and war club.

These colourful and very different visitors were described in the Dunstable Gazette, dated 8th February 1888, as "most respectable persons, bearing undeniable testimonials, and being practical and tangible proofs of what Christianity and sobriety can do and deserve to be well patronised."

Rita Swift

Members' memories



History society members have a host of memories of **Bygone Dunstable** which ought to be written down before they are forgotten.

So here is the latest in a series of anecdotes told to John Buckledee by the Dunstable folk mentioned below.

If you have similar tales to tell, John will be happy to come to see you. Just leave a message on his answerphone on 01582 703107.

David Bourne (*son of our president*) has written a novel set in the Polzeath-Padstow area of Cornwall.

*This has been my family's holiday haunt for generations, so I was particularly interested in David's story – a fantasy, time-travel adventure entitled **The Three Camels**. I wrote to him about a reference in the book to a town producing hats and motor vehicles (Dunstable, Luton?), which prompted an eloquent reply giving David's memories of Dunstable.*

Here are some of them:

"I could speak of a Tower House with a view of railway lines, a gun emplacement in its garden, a German intrigue in the 1st World War; of zoo animals and their keepers walking along the High Street from the old North station in 1936; of a colleague – now dead, alas – who worked at Bletchley Park in the 2nd World War and who overnights (as did others in equal anonymity) at the Sugar Loaf Hotel; of the Skimpot Flyer; of walking past whitening works and through greengage orchards to infant school in Icknield Street; of crates of milk – one third pint bottles, often with their tops frozen solid in winter – stacked ready to be given freely to the pupils; of a white-haired schoolmistress, born in the 1880s, ruling a class of 44 with the slightest whisper; of reciting tables up to 12x12 – a silver sixpence if correct, a ruler if mistaken; of worn, bench desks for four, enamel inkwells and copper-plate; of a hotel with five chimneys (the Red Lion) demolished for easier progress of the motor car; of jumble sales in the town hall; of children's parties in The Maltings, now a Quadrant; of autumn statute fairs; of trips to Wild's for two-penny fireworks stored in a tin; of Monk's haberdashery; of snow two-men deep in 1963 and tobogganing from the top of Blow's Downs, if you could reach it, through the hedge on to the railway track; of buttercup meadows beyond First Avenue that became clothed with houses; of the pageant and the Puritan ruff that I wore still itching in my memory, the Roman staff still nailed, I believe, in the loft of 18 Friars Walk; of abandoned lime-workings and cow-slipped slopes; of sky-larks and orange-tips; of gliders and Greenline buses; of country chapels held together more by love than substance; of a setting sun illuminating Bunyan's view; of D-Day landings given their final forecast, their go-ahead, from near that same spot."

I wonder, says David, if anyone can remember the massed chorus from the pageant? "I can't get it right now," he writes, "but somewhere it had the refrain, Dunstable, O Dunstable..."

David's novel, *The Three Camels*, published by Trevennick Books, costs £9 and can be ordered from the Book Castle.

Society member Alan Sinfield was born in Dunstable at 120 High Street South, Dunstable, just opposite the White Swan, in a house was built by his grandfather.

He has some vivid memories of the local shops of his childhood.

The first shop, going south from Wood Street, belonged to Mr Watts. He had a newspaper shop in front and a barber's shop behind.

"I was taken there for hair cuts as a small boy," says Alan. "He was a frightening character and he walked around snipping and talking at the same time and I always felt a little concerned. He later sold the newspapers and cigarettes business to someone named Lewis. Their son Peter came to the Dunstable Grammar School. Mr Watts then continued with his salon behind the shop.

"Next to him was Boxfords, baker and confectioner. Their son Geoff also came to the grammar school. Geoff was called up during the war into the RAF and was in Rhodesia when peace was declared. He was sent back to this country almost immediately and sent down the mines as a Bevin boy.

"Next to that was a greengrocery shop in the early 1930s which later for a short time became a herbalist's shop. You could get a glass of sarsaparilla there, a small glass for 1d. Next to them was a shop which became Alexander Podd's, the antique dealer.

"Then there was the Grey House, where Miss Bagshawe lived, then Dr Pargeter's, then the almshouses.

"After Chew's house and the library (now the Little Theatre) there was a double-fronted shop owned by Ted Allport. His wife ran the left-hand shop as a ladies' hairdresser (my mother used to go there) and he ran the cigarette and sweet shop on the right hand side. He was quite a tall man, slim, and he ran quite a high-class shop. In those days sweets came in glass jars and were weighed out for you. Once a year (probably when he was stock taking) all the sweets remaining in the jars were collected into penny bags containing a marvellous mixture of sweets and chocolate.

"Next to him was a second-hand furniture shop run by Dick Brown which was later taken over by his daughter and her husband, who was an Italian. It then traded under the name of Manucci.

"Then Mr Walklate took over the shop and continued it as a second-hand shop. I used to keep an eye on the shop when Dick Brown had it in the 1930s because he used to deal in second-hand Hornby trains... a lot of my pocket money was invested in Mr Brown.

"Next to the White Swan pub was a butcher's shop run, in the early 1930s, by a chap named Welch. He gave up in about 1938 and it was taken over by Fred Beaney whose stepson, Cyril Pratt, ran a car hire service from the same address. When Mr Beaney retired Cyril took over the butcher's shop for a short time.

"In the early 30s the shop next to that was a grocery shop (Boskett's I believe) and in the late 30s that became a café called the Anglo Café. It was still there when I left Dunstable in 1951. Now it's the personalised number-plate business.

"On the corner was a private house belonging to the Boxfords and behind the house was the bakehouse which made the bread for the shop lower down. I can remember the appetising smell coming from there. On the opposite corner of Britain Street were the businesses owned by Alf Cook. Mrs Cook ran a sweet shop on the corner, while her husband's furniture warehouses went behind this up Britain Street. Alongside the sweet shop were Mr Cook's furniture showrooms.

"Next to Mr Cook's shop was another double-fronted shop, Foyles radio and electrical. In those days radios had a high-tension battery and an accumulator which had to be recharged there once a week. In 1938 television was just coming in. He had a television which stood inside the shop and one evening my father and I and about a dozen others were invited over to sit and have a look at the first television.

"Latchford and Stairs had a secondhand furniture shop which was the only shop on the west side of the high street, almost opposite Dick Brown's."