

NEWSLETTER

Dunstable & District Local History Society
No. 32 August 2009



Chairman's Notes

It's taken a long time, but our move into a new research room at Priory House is now complete.

We were asked if we would transfer to another room in the building, and we readily agreed. Not only was it a bigger room but it adjoins the display area and would make the society's facilities a more-visible part of the heritage centre.

The society purchased the necessary shelving and made a list of the volunteers we would need to move all those books and cabinets and undertake the drilling and painting which would be required.

After that we waited, and waited. Months passed while various unexpected problems with the building were tackled and overcome.

And then, when at last the call came for the Big Move, I was ill and couldn't take much of an active part. But the Priory House manager, Helen Walker-Sygrove, persuaded her future son-in-law Jeb to give up a Sunday to help her with the painting and my wife and my son Peter volunteered too. Joan Curran and Rita Swift boxed the books and planned the shelving. Hugh Garrod and Dipesh Umradia loaded and unloaded. David Turner sorted out the computers, drilled holes for a noticeboard and clock and actually found a way of overcoming the problem of a missing password for a touch-screen display of photos which we have inherited from the library.

A very unexpected problem was that the men who were due to lay the new carpets missed the appointment because they were caught up in the aftermath of a shooting at Stockingstone Road, Luton. So it hasn't been dull!

I hope you will think that all this work has been worthwhile. Call in at Priory House and judge for yourself.

Perhaps you visited us during Victorian Day, for which Joan and Rita did a phenomenal amount of work.

• I was particularly sad to learn of the death of Richard Palmer, better known as Duke D'Mond of the Barron Knights. Few people with Dunstable connections have gone on to be household names – apart from Duke you could mention Sam Kydd, Una Stubbs, Faye Tozer and (of course) Gary Cooper ... and then you stop.

Duke worked at Waterlow's, lived in Bull Pond Lane and was married at the Priory Church. The Palmer family in Dunstable included Louis Palmer, former Mayor of the borough.

Duke and the Knights were a supremely professional group who could parody other pop stars with amusing accuracy. It gave them a comedy career which has lasted for decades, right from that first big hit, *Call Up The Groups*, in 1964. I saw them perform many times, the highlight (curiously enough) being an open-air concert at Whipsnade Zoo, of all places.

• I love receiving letters bearing attractive postage stamps (a relic of my younger days as an enthusiastic philatelist) and it's really disappointing that so few of today's many commemorative stamps are actually used to decorate our envelopes. The reason is that the Post Office mainly issues them for first-class postage – and who can afford first-class mail?

I very much wanted the history society to put by a stock of the recent commemorative stamps showing King Henry VIII which, with his famous connection with Dunstable Priory, would have been ideal for our correspondence. But that would have cost 39p per envelope. We are watching the pennies, and have had to settle for the more mundane second-class stamps, at 30p each. That's expensive enough.



• The Royal Opera House at Covent Garden is truly vast, and our tour around its backstage areas was an impressive experience. But some of the more trivial details were just as fascinating. Did you know that the view of the stage from the Royal Box is so restricted that Queen Victoria ordered a mirror to be installed so that the ladies sitting behind her could see what was going on, albeit in reverse? It's still there.

• David Ainsbury, who took over the production of the Yesteryear pages in the *Dunstable Gazette* and *Luton News* when I retired in 2005, has also now retired. The paper has had a real problem in finding a replacement, so rather than see Yesteryear vanish David and I have agreed to continue to write the feature in our spare time. It's an honorary appointment! David researches the Luton photographs and I am finding the pictures for Dunstable. Any contributions from history society members would be much appreciated!

John Buckledee

The new pipeline through Totternhoe



The Cemex company owns and operates a 254mm (10") steel pipeline through which chalk slurry is transported all the way from Kensworth to Rugby, a distance of 92.2km. (see map). This pipeline is buried directly in the ground, passing close to Totternhoe, and is an efficient and sustainable delivery option that removes the need for the use of road transport. In 2008 major work was in progress in our area involving the renewal of part of the pipeline.



Chalk from South Bedfordshire has been used for centuries for building materials, from stone to cement, and in recent times it has provided raw materials for industry. Our word 'calcium' comes from the Latin calx, meaning lime, a measure of its importance.

'Burning' good quality calcium carbonate - chalk or limestone - by heating it to 888-1000°C drives off carbon dioxide and some oxygen to leave calcium oxide, known as quicklime. When this is added to water (a process known as slaking) lime is the product of the resulting violent reaction. Relatively little water yields powdery hydrated lime; more water creates lime putty (the basis for lime mortar) and eventually limewash. These lime products harden by drying, or by reacting very slowly with atmospheric CO₂.

Lime has been burned for millennia: the earliest known kiln was used c. 2450 BC in Mesopotamia. Roman lime kilns are known from several sites in Bedfordshire, including one near Caddington Mill. In the Middle Ages lime mortar (lime putty plus sand and other materials) was used to lay brick and stonework, lime plaster smoothed internal walls and protected external surfaces, and lime wash whitened walls inside and out. The practice of liming agricultural land to improve yields began in the 16th century and continues today.

There were once several lime companies working quarries in the Dunstable area, but the last of these, Totternhoe Lime & Stone Co., closed at the beginning of 2009. Prior to 1964 crushed chalk was



The trench has just been filled on Totternhoe Knolls. Photo Omer Roucoux October 2008



Aerial photo showing overhead pipeline taken in 1969



Chalk Hill slurry bridge, 1969



Chalk Hill Cutting slurry bridge, 1969



Kensworth Chalk Quarry, September 2008

transported by rail from Totternhoe to the Midlands for processing. In the 1960s diminishing reserves at the Totternhoe quarry, together with a need for the company to increase production and a national re-organisation of the rail network, made a radical overhaul of the business essential. Quarrying rights were obtained at Kensworth with reserves up to 80 years (see photo). But the location was on the top of the Dunstable Downs in an area of environmental importance with only minor road access. The only practical way of transporting the chalk was found to be by pipeline. It was the first enterprise of this kind in the country and has shown itself to be very successful.

It was built under the Authorisation of the Pipeline Act of 1962 and work was begun in 1965. At Kensworth three high-pressure pumps (one standby) start the pumping of the slurry. The movement is quite slow at first and gradually accelerates, and 1.7 million tonnes are transported by these means to Rugby each year.

Between July and October 2008 Fabricon Limited, of Leighton Buzzard, re-laid the section between the London Gliding Club and Wingfield, burying the pipe approximately 1.3m. below the ground. To avoid traffic congestion and surface disruption the contractors bored under the Tring Road and drilled under the Dunstable Road in Totternhoe and the Dunstable Cricket Club's ground. For the other part of the work an open trench was dug, and this was continued north of Totternhoe. At the completion of the contract no visible signs of the work were to be seen on the surface.

Interestingly, there also appears to have been an overhead pipeline at one time crossing over the A5 north of Dunstable, near the Sewell turn, from Sewell to Houghton Regis. It belonged to the Blue Circle Company and is visible in an aerial photograph of 1969, but very little information about this has been found.

I am grateful to the people who gave me information for this article. In particular Joan Curran ("The Story of Totternhoe Quarries", Church End Publishing, 2005), David John Clowes from CEMEX and Peter Tasker, chairman of Totternhoe Parish Council.

Omer Roucoux

DO YOU RECOGNISE THIS BUILDING?



This was Dunstable's first and only gas showroom as it was when it opened in High Street North in 1936. Although gas had been brought to the town in 1837 this was the first time customers could go and see the latest cookers and fires displayed.

The first gas works, known then as the gas house, were where Ashton Middle School stands today. It got off to an inauspicious start when there was an explosion and it was 'blown to fragments' almost immediately after the gas holder had been filled. Fortunately the large crowd who had come to watch the process of the holder being filled had just left to go home. It was believed that the explosion was caused by a workman getting too close to the gas with a lighted candle.

Twenty years later it was decided that the works site was too small and an acre of land on the opposite side of the High Street was purchased. The first new gas holder was erected in 1867, the old works were decommissioned in the 1870s and the site was sold back to the original owner, who later sold it to the Ashton Charity for the new Grammar School.

For many years, from 1901 to 1935, the Dunstable Gas & Water Company had its office within the office of Mr Gutteridge, the solicitor, and there was a small area at the works where people could view some of the latest gas inventions, including irons, table lamps and refrigerators. The Company celebrated the centenary of its formation with the opening of its smart new showroom, where 'the Company's representatives ... will be pleased to give their advice at any time'.

The works finished making gas in 1971 and the showroom, of course, has long ceased to display the latest in gas technology.

Joan Curran

WHAT WAS IT?

Considerable excitement was manifest in Dunstable this morning, caused by a rumour, circumstantially narrated, that an animal, much resembling an ape, or some member of the monkey family, of gigantic proportion, having a head of shaggy red hair, adorned with tremendous ears had been in the 'cap room' of the Ashton Schools, in Church Street, the hideous appearance of which had greatly frightened a boy named Lewis White. What is more remarkable this extraordinary story gained such credence that scores of persons, of all ages, hied them to the Dog Kennel path and into the Park (where the strange visitor was said to have proceeded after his appearance at the school)

to have a look, if that were possible, at the 'man monkey'. On making enquiries, however of Mr Knight the schoolmaster, it was pretty clearly proved that nothing more mischievous than the boys themselves, or more calculated to 'frighten' them than a cane, had been seen in the neighbourhood. Doubtless many of those who hurried off, about midday, to see a marvel were highly delighted when, after a couple of hours diligently searching they discovered – nothing!

Dunstable Gazette 18 May 1887



All articles printed in this newsletter are recorded in detail at Priory House.

If anyone has any additional information on any of the articles reproduced here, we would appreciate it if you contact us.

Any contributions for future editions of the newsletter are always gratefully received.

Please contact David Turner on 01582 600475 or david@turners.co.uk

Treasure Quest 12 July 2009



History Society member JOHN PRATT recently put his local knowledge to a severe test by taking part in the local radio show *Treasure Quest*, which is broadcast live on a Sunday morning. He was one of the studio-based panellists trying to solve cryptic clues and guide Gemma Benson, in a radio car, to various destinations where further clues were obtained. The puzzles are included in his article below – could you have solved them?

Finding out local history can be fun. One of the more direct public ways is on the BBC Three Counties local radio *Treasure Quest* show. If you haven't heard it before it is a bit like the once popular TV show *Treasure Hunt*, with a radio car in place of a helicopter. Gemma 'Bonsai' Benson provides the part Anneka Rice once filled. It is broadcast live on Sunday morning from 9 to midday. A major part of the show is the listeners' helpful contributions via e-mails and phone calls. This is usually in relation to places and events happening in the three counties of Beds, Herts and Bucks. I was a treasure quester on Sunday 12 July, along with Glen and Andrew, a father and son from Milton Keynes. Ideally when applying for the show it is usual to do so in pairs but single applications are matched up weeks in advance. I was glad to have partners with knowledge of the Milton Keynes area, especially as it was likely the conclusion of the show would be in Bletchley Park where the BBC 'Antiques Road Show' was being filmed that afternoon.

Here was the first clue of the day:

Go vertical and horizontal through the green forest of 185,000. Home to farm animals.

In the studio it was quickly agreed that the grid of H and V roads in Milton Keynes was a big part of the answer. A helpful e-mail arrived, informing us that the latest population count of the new town was about 185,000. We hardly thought of the concrete cows and were under way.

Clue two was opened:

Can you rub won of these? Russell something that lurks wild and discover 1922.

Having seen the anagram 'rub won' turn into Woburn we directed the radio car towards Woburn Abbey, home of the Russell family for generations. On the way an e-mail came on screen in the studio with information that the Woburn Sands bowls club in Russell Lane was founded in 1922. This stopped us in our tracks and needed checking out. Time ticked by as Bonsai Benson looked around the bowls club without success. Meanwhile another communication told us the Jaguar Owners Club meets in Woburn Abbey, and as Jaguar cars have been built since 1922 this was a better answer that agreed in all departments.

Clue solved and on to the next one:

You're no Tarzan but find your balance. Don't look down as it's 1.5 miles round.

The studio facilities for guests are basic, a chair and table with a pair of headphones each. Two microphones on swinging arms are shared whilst the show's host, Andy Gelder, sits behind a board of faders, buttons and screens controlling the show as a watchful producer

observes from behind glass. As a live show there are bloopers: the sports and travel link confused that afternoon's German grand prix at Nurburgring with the Nuremberg trials. I chuckled inwardly as the eleven o'clock news approached and Bonsai Benson was left forty foot high up a zip wire slide on Milton Keynes balancing lake, Willen Lake. We were rightly informed it also had a 1.5 mile circumference. This e-information nailed the clue.

After the news, cue Bonsai Benson's screeching descent of the zip wire and on to clue 4:

Stoke up the boiler; keep on track and don't look back to William Battams.

In the studio the contestants are denied internet research access. That again emphasises the important part the listening contributors play. As I sit at home writing this article on my computer I google William Battams to see straight away that he was the first tenant of Stacey Hills Farm. Much of his land was swallowed up by the Wolverton Rail Works, with a museum there today as well. At least we found out where we were going as several listeners had e-mailed that information to us in the studio. The radio car, still at Willen Lake, had acquired a fan base following: STQers or Special Treasure Questers. These are car owners in the area listening to the show who will offer to drive ahead and show the radio car the way across Milton Keynes to an area just south of Wolverton. A whole lot better than 'take the second exit at the next roundabout' directions we could have offered from our microphones in the Luton underground studio.

A waiting clue holder at the museum hastily moved the show forward to:

Are you a great age? Tales of the road from the Manchester flier. Something destructive can rage amongst the china.

At first sight it bewilders, but in hindsight all the clues are easy. For example this one is about the telling of the Cock and Bull stories associated with the coaching inns of Stony Stratford where the Manchester Flier stagecoach would have once pulled in. Many callers confirmed this and both the Cock Inn and Bull Hotel had to be visited before receiving the final clue.

With team intuition we knew where the treasure was going to be before we heard the last clue:

You wont find a swing but you'll find a past time relic.

Straight down to Bletchley Park we screamed down the microphone to the radio car. With six minutes to go would they be able to get there? Sadly time ran out on us as the show ended with a link to another BBC correspondent waiting at the Antiques Road Show, commiserating that she would not be welcoming a successful arrival that side of the midday news. Oh well, we were close, and if we hadn't spent time here, there and so on, who knows?

After the red 'on air' light had finally gone out, I was shown out by the producer. He shook my hand and said well done, that was a good one, kept them listening to an exciting finish. See you again maybe? Here begins my next treasure quest, finding another partner who is willing enough to take on the challenge and maybe next time win...

John Pratt

George William Welch

In the oldest part of Dunstable Cemetery in West Street many of the names would have been familiar in their time to the local inhabitants but are now largely forgotten except by those interested in family or local history.

Occasionally, additional information was included on the stonework, such as occupation or position in the community and even their house name. Some deceased have a memorial to their memory but are actually interred elsewhere, others made their home in our town although were not native to the county. Unfortunately much of the stonework appears neglected, broken and covered with ivy as there is no longer anyone to tend it. But one grave marker stands out and is particularly intriguing.

In Loving Memory of
George William Welch

Lost in the wreck of the S S Stella March 30 1899

A Tribute

It is a dream we cannot think him dead, he who so late did drive industries wheel and in the busy haunts of active men did push each daily duty to completion. In diligence his in hope, in God his trust. Each weighty task a pleasure to him came, wherein he might provide for future need and as he toiled he sang and thought of his home and wife and all that makes men strive. Strong in his generous impulse as in limb, fearless as truth yet gentle as its dawn, so walked he with us.

And in his end heroic taught the nobleness of sacrifice for others good. Tis only human we should wish him laid where to his memory we might homage pay by flowers forever fresh upon his grave and yet what boots it where in death we sleep, affection knows no limit and in lap of ocean or in church yard mould the heavenly summons will come clear to all when Christ the travail of his soul shall see and saints in one united phalanx stand to voice the glory of their deity.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

And he with them.

A Marshall

(■ This is a line of small studs with no sign of any wording)

So who was George William Welch? Not a familiar name and his grave marker, apart from a special tribute, offers no personal information. According to the first account in the Dunstable Gazette both Mr & Mrs Welch of Edward Street survived the wreck but the next week this was amended when his name appeared on the list of those lost at sea. Hearing of the disaster Mr Welch senior set off for London and then Guernsey. Mrs George Welch was one of those rescued and on her arrival at Waterloo Station numerous relatives met her, "but the joy of the occasion overwhelmed her, and being in a prostrate condition she swooned upon the platform. Many spectators were moved to tears on seeing her." Although there are some possible references to George Welch, without proof, for the present he must remain an enigma.

On a fine morning Captain Reeks took the S S Stella out of Southampton for a Channel crossing to Guernsey. A special Easter holiday excursion had been organised which would be the first daylight crossing of the season. The passengers were mainly going on holiday or returning home, little realizing that many would never reach their destination. Several times the steamer ran into small banks of fog and had to reduce speed but soon picked up again. Gradually the fog grew thicker but the Captain maintained top speed in spite of being in the vicinity of the notorious Casquets reef, thus giving rise to the rumour he was racing the Great Western steamer out of Weymouth to the Channel Islands. Too late the lighthouse loomed ahead and although evasive action was taken, the Stella's hull was ripped open on both sides and she sank within eight minutes.

The Board of Trade reported that 174 passengers and 43 crew were aboard and of these 105 lost their lives. With the capacity to carry 712 passengers only lifeboats for 149 were available. The crew were commended for their speedy action in lowering 6 boats, in adverse conditions, in a short space of time. Women and children boarded first while the men waited quietly; possibly this is why Mrs Welch survived. Mary Ann Rogers, the oldest stewardess in service, is the undisputed heroine, assisting the ladies to the lifeboats and giving up her own lifejacket. In spite of it being her only chance to survive she refused to get into an already overloaded boat for fear of causing it to capsize and put others at risk. Wishing them well and murmuring a prayer she vanished beneath the waves. The survivors spent many frightening hours adrift, often being swept close to the treacherous rocks. Some died of exposure before eventually being picked up by passing steamers and taken into port. Captain Reeks was last seen going down with his ship.

S S Stella is described as the "Titanic of the Channel Islands" and in 1973 her hull was discovered, but the exact position has not been revealed for fear of looters. In June 1997 the Board of Administration unveiled a metal plaque on the outer harbour wall of St Peter Port in memory of all who perished on S S Stella. Commemorative stamps were issued in 1999 on the 100th anniversary of the disaster.



George William Welch's grave in Dunstable Cemetery, West Street

Rita Swift

DUNSTABLE IN 1865

Dunstable was dominated by its position on Watling Street. It was more compact than now. Houses stretched north as far as Brewer's Hill, south as far as Half Moon Hill, west to the *Rifle Volunteer Inn* or *Rifle Volunteers*, as it was often then called, at the foot of the Dunstable Downs or West Street Downs, and east to Church Street Station. Parts of the town were actually still in Upper Houghton Regis. Two farms, Park Farm and Kingsbury Farm, filled most of the segment between High Street North and Church Street. There were a few large and medium-sized houses, seven or eight in each of the two High Streets, including the Manor House in High Street North, four or five in West Street and only one (Kingsbury House) in Church Street. Some villas had been newly built in Priory Road and were mostly occupied by hat manufacturers with factories in Luton. These, with their employees, Grammar School day-boarders from Luton, and occasional commercial travellers with their hampers, were the principal customers of the railway. Streets and houses were lit by gas. Dunstable had possessed a gas-works since 1837, then known as the 'Gas-House', and let to gas contractors.

Along the High Streets, West Street and Church Street there was so little traffic that it was safe enough for a child to play marbles in the gutters, 'fag cards' and hopscotch on the flag-stone pavements, walk on stilts, or bowl a hoop. Even a year or two later it took a long time for a boy to fill a page in a note-book with car numbers.

From an article by Thomas Bagshawe in the Bedfordshire Magazine. Vol.10, no.75, Winter 1965.

WHAT AN EXHIBITION!



There's been a splendid display in Priory House illustrating aspects of a Victorian childhood. It included one of those cutout boards which were once so irresistible for family photos at the seaside. History society members, hard at work in our new research room preparing for the town's Victorian Day, were persuaded to take time off for this more unusual pose. Recognise Hugh Garrod, John Buckledee, Rita Swift and Joan Curran? The photo was taken by Dipesh Umradia, one of the stalwart staff at Priory House.

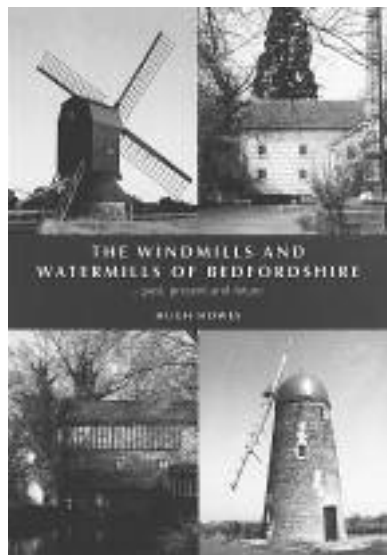
It depends what you mean by local

When I first came to Dunstable, I was teaching at Tithe Farm Junior School. My colleagues came from places such as Leicester, Newcastle, Southampton, Cardiff, Norwich and Birmingham. Most of the children's families came from the East End and often spent the week ends in London 'seeing Nan.' At this time I was living in West

Parade, next door to two maiden sisters. One Saturday morning I met them in the street and stopped to talk. During our conversation, I said that I had not met many local people. 'Oh, we're not local,' they said, 'we're from Whipsnade.'

Hugh Garrod

Book Review



Hugh Howes has written the definitive study of the windmills and watermills of Bedfordshire. Published by the Book Castle, 'The Windmills and Watermills of Bedfordshire' will prove useful to both students of the subject and the occasional tourist. The book provides an interesting read, full of facts and snippets of information about the history of the mills and the people associated with them. Shortly before reading the book, I visited Stotfold Watermill, which is covered in some detail by Mr Howes and this certainly increased my knowledge of what I had seen there. I'm sure that, had I read the book first, it would have enabled me to bring even more away from my visit. A prior

read-up of the information relating to any of the numerous mills will certainly help to make a visit more enjoyable and fulfilling. I found the author's style of including many rather long quotations slightly irritating, although the quotations were often interesting in themselves. Full marks though to Mr Howes for the amount of research he has undertaken and the excellent array of photographs included in the book. All the existing mills in Bedfordshire are covered as well as many that are no longer to be found. I can thoroughly recommend this book to anyone wanting to know more about the mills of Bedfordshire.

David Turner

Our Winter Programme

Chairman John Buckledee casts his eye over the Society's forthcoming series of lectures.

Many members particularly enjoyed the talk and entertainment provided at our Christmas meeting in 2007 by John Smith, who played seasonal music on mechanical instruments he has made at Flitwick.

This was such a success, and so appropriate for the time of year, that we decided to repeat the formula this year.

John Smith has put us in touch with another maker of mechanical musical instruments, **Terry Pankhurst** of Wheathampstead, who has created some replicas of mediaeval organs which he will be bringing along to our meeting on December 8.

It's his birthday, so we'll try to provide a cake as well as our usual seasonal food and drink! John Smith is so interested in the talk that he's asked if he can be present, and although our December meeting is supposed to be for members only, we'll stretch the point in this case.

Terry has said that there will be an opportunity for keyboard-playing members of the society to perform, so be prepared!

Our new season of talks begins with the **Story of Luton Hoo**, told by **Zena Dickinson**. Zena worked at the Hoo when it was a stately home and she continued to look after the mansion when it was empty and its future in doubt.

She was the lady who helped organise arrangements for stars like Richard Burton and Hugh Grant during the numerous location film shoots inside the house and its grounds, and she has seen at first hand the transformation into the present luxury hotel. So her talk will be much more than an account of the treasures of the Wernher collection.

Stephen Hoole, a Fellow of the Royal Numismatic Society, is an extremely busy speaker whose account of the origins of British coinage includes tales of secret societies, slavery and piracy. And I have asked him to try to include in his October talk to us the more mundane **history of the old Dunstable tokens** issued by such local businessmen as Mr Fossey, whose coins have been on display at Priory House.

Pat Lovering is THE authority on the **history of Houghton Regis** (which once included that part of High Street North then known as Upper Houghton) and she has amassed a vast collection of photographs which she is currently cataloguing.

Pat does not normally give talks but she has yielded to much persuasion and with the help of Sue King (who made such a major contribution to the book *Dunstable At War*) she is creating a Powerpoint picture show just for us. It will be the attraction for us in February.

One other community on our border is the subject for **Howard Chandler** in January. He is creating for **Luton a history of the town's street names**, just as Richard Walden did for Dunstable in his book *Streets Ahead*. I've had a preview and it's fascinating.

For instance, the reason a lot of roads in Luton have Scottish themes derives from the fact that they were built on land owned by the Earl of Bute, who bought the Luton Hoo estate in 1763. And the new road Hogarth Close is named after Harry and Margaret Hogarth, who lived in a house at Hitchin Road for many years before it was demolished to create the close. Isn't that a lovely touch!

Jean Yates and **Neil Rees** uncovered many stories for *Dunstable At War* about the war-time activities in this region of French, Czech and Polish people who had continued the fight against the Nazis even after their homelands had been overrun. This has led to research into the war-time exile in the Chilterns of **King Zog and members of the Albanian Royal Family**, which will be the subject of another book. This is not yet ready for publication, but our history society will hear about work-in-progress at our May meeting next year.

The well-known Bedfordshire historian **James Collett-White** will be talking in November about **Bedfordshire breweries** and the families whose names became synonymous with the drink they produced. And **Harry Edwards** will be recalling, in April, his years in the **printing business**. He spent some time at Waterlow's, in Dunstable, which will give his talk a particularly local flavour.

Last, and probably least, is my talk about the **Yesteryear feature** in the *Dunstable Gazette*. That series has been running for decades, and has featured hundreds of old photos of the town. I'll be screening just some of them in March. It's a talk I've been holding in reserve, just in case the ultimate disaster happens and one of our booked speakers failed to turn up. So now a Plan C will have to be devised...



Sad Farewell



We are very sorry to announce the sad loss of

Mrs J Nye

Mr A Sinfield

Both valued members of the society.

Greeting New Members

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

Mr & Mrs E Burgess

Mr & Mrs C Dilnot

Mr & Mrs D Legg

Mrs J Packer

Mr & Mrs C Smith

Miss J Cawdell

Mrs B Howard

Mr M Nye

Mr D Shipp

Mr J Turvey

Members' memories

History society members and their friends 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 gathered by John Buckledee.

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.

It was so sad to hear that society member Alan Sinfield had died, shortly before the memories of his early years in Dunstable were published in this section of the newsletter. He had at least seen a transcript of my notes before they went to print.



Bagshawe's

His mention of the lady living in the Grey House, in High Street South, has prompted a letter from another society member, Miss Vivien Gutteridge, now living in Warminster. Miss Gutteridge's grandmother was Mrs Eliza Bagshawe, who was married to Arthur Bagshawe, founder of the Bagshawe engineering works which

many of us remember in Church Street, next to the railway line.

Mr and Mrs Bagshawe lived in Grove House, Dunstable, which is now the offices of Dunstable Town Council. When her husband died, Mrs Bagshawe moved to live in the Grey House – and she was the lady remembered by the young Alan Sinfield.



The Grey House 1965

The Grey House, for which records of families living there have been traced back to the 1850s, has had an interesting history in the last few decades. It was a hotel in the 1960s, then converted into a restaurant called Spencers which specialised in fish dishes under the watchful eye of Jimmy McNamara, formerly the licensee of the Winston Churchill in Church Street and the old White Hart in High Street North.

It then became a very successful music venue under the name Blue

Rock Café. It was so popular that Faye Tozer, the Dunstable girl who was a member of the pop group Steps, was famously refused entry because it was too crowded on the night she arrived.

There was a hiatus after the business was sold to another entrepreneur but last year it reopened under the name the Four Kings, a bar-restaurant which is making a name for itself as a live-music venue.

● Ruby Brough was about five years old when her daddy died. That's traumatic enough for any child but for this little family, struggling to survive in the recession of the 1930s, the consequences were truly heart-wrenching.

But this is a story of how Dunstable and its people came to the rescue...

Ruby's father, Tom, was a coal miner in County Durham and he and his family lived in a tied cottage owned by the colliery. His death, from cancer while he was still only 37, meant that his wife Jane couldn't afford the rent. After months of nursing him and paying for pain-killing medicine (there was no National Health Service in those days) she and her children

had to leave their home. A neighbour found them a place to sleep in a barn on some waste ground. Mother, eking out a living by washing, scrubbing and paper-hanging, comforted the children by saying: "If it was good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for us".

She heard that there was work in Dunstable and, desperate, she sold the family furniture to pay for train fares here. There was not enough money to pay the cost of transporting a box of her personal possessions, which she left in the barn.

They found a place to stay in Luton Road, Dunstable. They had no bedding so they slept together in one room on the floor. The rent, in 1934, took nearly all the widow's pension and mother asked a butcher nearby for bones which she could boil for broth. He took pity on the family and gave them some meat, but despite his help they were starving...

Salvation came, literally, in the form of the Salvation Army. Relations in Yorkshire had asked the Army to call on the family to see if they were all right. Mother was out looking for work when they called and it was only with great reluctance that little Ruby and her brother were persuaded to let them in.

The army looked around, said they would be straight back, and returned with food which they put in the pantry. And they left a letter telling mother to go the town hall and see the Mayor, Mr Kenworthy.

When the Mayor heard their story he found mother a job at AC-Delco. Someone arranged for the trunk of belongings to be sent from Yorkshire and the family was given a council house at 56 Loring Road.

Ruby married a soldier, Joe Gent, who was billeted in Dunstable during the war. She died about seven years ago and Joe has now gone back to live in Yorkshire.

Ruby made a tape of her memories which, she said, was her way of thanking everyone in Dunstable who had helped them when they needed it most.

It was played to a recent meeting of the Dunstable and District Association of Senior Citizens when members spoke of their memories of the 1930s depression. The history society was invited to attend and I thought that this tale was particularly worth recording.



Ruby and Jane in the 1950s.



Ruby and Jane, her mother, when they were living in Albert Street, Dunstable. The photo was taken by Kenneth Collins, a well-known local photographer who had a studio at 73 High Street North.



Ruby Brough and her eldest brother Jack outside their cottage in Yorkshire at about the time they were evicted. Jack later married Joyce Cook, whose family was in the Salvation Army in Dunstable.

John Buckledee