

NEWSLETTER

Dunstable & District Local History Society
No. 37 February 2012



Chairman's Notes

The BIG news to greet the New Year was the announcement that our most eminent local historian, Vivienne Evans, has been awarded the MBE.

VIVIENNE EVANS

Vivienne has devoted years of her life to researching and writing about the history of this area. A lot of the knowledge which we now take for granted has been gained by her during her own investigations and she has had the energy and enterprise to assemble the results into published form.

On my bookshelf there is "History All Around" in 1982; "The Book Of Dunstable And Houghton Regis", written with her husband Lewis, in 1985; "John Bunyan his Life and Times in 1988; the ambitious "Dunstable With The Priory" and "Dunstable In Transition" in 1994 and 1998; "Proud Heritage – a brief history of Dunstable" in 1999; "Exploring History All Around" in 2002; and numerous articles and pamphlets. And I certainly haven't acquired all that have been available!

Vivienne is the first port of call for journalists from the Dunstable Gazette and BBC Three Counties Radio whenever a subject of historical interest becomes a news item and she has always been most generous in sharing her knowledge with fellow researchers as well as visitors enjoying the guided walks around Dunstable or attending tea-time tales at Priory House. Her classes at the Workers Education Association have been running for decades and who can forget her broadcast walks around the area with radio's John Pilgrim.

I am so pleased that Vivienne's work has been royally rewarded.

TEA BREAK

• We can't agree on the best way to provide tea and coffee at our monthly meetings so we will have a vote on the subject at our AGM in March. We'll ask you to tick a box on a form rather than rely on a show of hands.

There is a continuing problem in organising a rota of people who will make the teas their particular responsibility and some say: Why do we bother? Most of us can survive for a few hours without having a hot drink.

Well, the answer is that the refreshment break gives members a chance to mingle, as a society should, and not just rush away as soon as the lecture is over.



Photo courtesy of The Dunstable Gazette

Vivienne Evans MBE being presented with an award by the Past High Sheriff of Bedfordshire, Cynthia Gresham, in recognition of her great and valuable services to the community

We used to have refreshments at the end of each meeting but there was a bit of a scramble then to do the washing-up and clear away the chairs and tables.

Recently, we have had a half-hour break in the middle of the meeting, but this is quite awkward for the speaker and chairman, as well for as the volunteers making the tea who do miss a bit of the talk. It also makes it difficult for those people who need to get away early.

Last month, because of a computer problem, we had unscheduled refreshments at the start of the meeting and some people quite liked that arrangement.

So there are four options and we'll ask for your vote on these in March. But then, if you vote to continue with tea and coffee, we really will need more helpers!

MEDIAeval PROJECT

• Work on the medieval project, which will culminate in the Priory's anniversary next year, is becoming more and more exciting. I have been privileged to read the first draft of the translation of the Annals of the Priory, the year-by-year diary of events written in medieval Latin by the Dunstable canons, which will be published in full for the first time. If you think that this is a dull but worthy project, of interest only to scholars, think again. It's fascinating stuff, and I believe it will create a lot of attention. Dunstable, astride an important crossroads so close to London, was a witness to many great events in the history of the nation.

HISTORY DAY

• Before this, however, the town will once again hold a History Day in Priory Gardens and your society will, of course, be taking part. Sue Turner is organising our display but this time we will not be able to draw on our expertise in local history as the council now wants the theme to be the Olympics.

I have a vivid childhood memory from 1947 of an athlete bearing the Olympic torch running down Common Road, Kensworth, cheered on by what seemed to be the entire village. If anyone has a photograph of that, it would be useful. Otherwise, our local Olympic connections are a little thin on the ground...

Dunstable's History Day this year is on Saturday, May 19.

John Buckledee

Proceedings of the Old Bailey 1674-1913



One of the most interesting historical websites on the internet is the Proceedings of the Old Bailey 1674-1913, which give a fascinating insight into the criminal world of the day. Listed below is the trial of John Dimock which I found interesting because of the Dunstable connection. It can be found at <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org>

JOHN DIMOCK, THEFT - GRAND LARCENY, 8TH APRIL 1807

JOHN DIMOCK was indicted for feloniously stealing on the 14th of August, a silver watch, value £3, a half guinea, two bank notes, value £1 each, and a seven shilling piece, the property of Thomas Medes.

THOMAS MEDES

Q. When did you lose your watch?

A. On the 14th of August last; it was a very stormy day; me and my fellow servant had been to Uxbridge with a chaise and four horses; it was about one o'clock when we returned; being late we could not get into our lodgings, and we being very wet went to the watering house in Cockspur-street; from there went into the stable, Nag's Head yard, Whitcomb-street. I said to my fellow servant I will put my watch and money out of my pocket for fear of losing it.

Q. What money had you?

A. Two one pound notes, a half guinea, and a seven shilling piece. I wound my silver watch up, and put it and the money in a silk handkerchief together. I left it under the bin of a four-stall stable in Nag's Head yard.

Q. Did you cover it over under this bin?

A. No further than pushing it under the bin; there were three horses in this stable that I had put in when I came home.

Q. Did you lock this stable door?

A. No, there was no lock to the door; I left the watch and money there a little before two o'clock; I returned to the stable about five o'clock, it was gone; I asked Cave if he had been in the stable, he said no.

291. JOHN DIMOCK was indicted for feloniously stealing on the 14th of August, a silver watch, value 3l. a half guinea, two bank notes, value 1l. each, and a seven shilling piece, the property of Thomas Medes.

THOMAS MEDES. Q. When did you lose your watch.

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Q. What money had you. **A.** Two one pound notes, a half guinea, and a seven shilling piece. I wound my silver watch up, and put it and the money in a silk handkerchief together. I left it under the bin of a four-stall stable in Nag's-head yard.

Q. How long was it before you heard any thing of it?

A. Nearly two months; I saw it first at Dunstable in Bedfordshire; Cave was down there. He wrote to me he had suspicion my watch was there in the prisoner's custody.

Q. Had you known the prisoner before?

A. Yes; he had been accustomed to sleep in the stables, or in the lofts in the yard.

Q. On this information of Cave's you went down to Dunstable?

A. Yes; I heard the watch had been to a watchmaker at Dunstable, and by the description the watchmaker gave me, I got a constable and took up the prisoner.

Q. The prisoner was at Dunstable?

A. Yes. I sent Cave first to the prisoner; he came; I told him I had lost my watch and money, I told him I thought he had got it; he said he had not, but he knew who had got it, it was not far off, he would shew me where it was; he took me to the landlady of the Saracen's Head, Dunstable; it was in her possession; he asked the landlady for his watch, she gave it into his hand, and he delivered it to me; he told me it was mine, I might take it, he had bought it of a girl for fifteen shillings.

Q. Upon looking at it did you find it to be your property?

A. Yes. (The watch produced and identified.)

JOSEPH CAVE

Q. You drove with this lad on the 14th of August?

A. Yes, we returned about one o'clock.

Q. Do you recollect his putting by his money and watch in the way he has stated?

A. Yes, he wrapped it up in a handkerchief, and put it under the bin; the next morning he came into my stable and asked me if I had been in his stable; I said no. The next morning he made it known to his master; and he laid it to my charge; my master had us all searched, and nothing was found on any body.

Q. How long did you stay with your master after that?

A. Very near two months; then I went to Dunstable. I heard the prisoner was there; I asked a friend of his if he had ever seen him with a watch; I learned the watch had been to a watchmaker's there.

Q. How came you to ask that question?

A. Because a person had said he came into the country with a good watch; it struck me it might be this watch, as he had worked in the yard, and after that he had liberty from the master to sleep in the yard. I wrote to Medes, and he came down and claimed the watch. Prisoner's Defence. That place where he laid his watch was public; I have lost several things there myself. I bought this watch of a girl that lived in Pye-street, Westminster.

GUILTY, aged 21.

Confined Six Months in the House of Correction, and fined One Shilling.

First Middlesex jury, before Lord Ellenborough.

David Turner

Scan of the original court proceedings of the trial of John Dimock for stealing a watch

Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee



As we celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II this year, we thought we would investigate how the people of Dunstable commemorated Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897.

'Queen's weather was the comment on everybody's lips' – so begins the report in the Dunstable Gazette of the celebrations of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

Apparently the weather had recently been inclement but the day itself 'put on its best appearance' for the citizens of Dunstable. 'Never before', the writer said, 'had the ancient borough looked so gay. Flags, banners and streamers were here, there and everywhere'.

On Sunday, 20th June, there had been special services 'of chant and praise and high thanksgiving' in the Priory Church and the Rector, Canon Macaulay, had given a fervent and patriotic address. But it was the following day, Monday 21st, that had been proclaimed a national holiday, the time for what the Rector called 'innocent mirth and jocund merriment'.

EXCELLENT DINNER

The morning began with the ringing of the church bells, but the Dinner Committee were soon hard at work, preparing the feast for the 'old folk', to be held in the Town Hall. With almost Dickensian extravagance the Gazette reporter wrote:

'It is unnecessary to say that a most excellent dinner was provided, and among the abundance of good things set forth, the roast beef of Old England was of course largely in evidence.... washed down with unlimited quantities of ale and mineral waters, provided free by Mr Benjamin Bennett. The large joints were baked by Mr Tearle, and the remainder of the dinner was cooked and served in first-class style by Sergt.-Cook Swain. When all were seated, the interior of the newly renovated hall, gay with flags and banners, and the table tastefully adorned with a lavish use of ornaments, plants and flowers, the gentlemen of the town in their shirt sleeves hard at work reducing the huge joints to eatable slices, the many ladies of the town hurrying here and there attending the wants of the large company, and above all the bright and happy faces of the old folk, made up a picture not soon to be forgotten. After the first courses of meat and vegetables came unlimited supplies of tempting plum pudding, then the old ladies were regaled with snuff, and the old gentlemen were provided with tobacco, and when the band outside led off with the National Anthem the whole company rose and joined fervidly in that grand old air'.

PROCESSION

Outside the Town Hall the schoolchildren were gathering, along with some of the adult organisations, and they all processed

along the High Street to the Square where a platform had been erected for the Mayor and other dignitaries of the town. At two o'clock the Rector gave another (much shorter) address, after which everybody formed up in a 'remarkably long and pretty' procession to march to England's Meadow.

By this time the heat was 'fairly tropical' and many of the adults were tired, but there were 'amusements' for the children until it was time for the first sitting for tea at 3.30 – there being over 700 children two sittings were required, the younger children sitting down first and the older ones later. After tea there were still more games and competitions.

ILLUMINATIONS

It was towards 9 o'clock, when it was getting dark – British Summer Time hadn't been thought of in those days – that the illuminations began to appear. The town began to 'take on a pretty appearance' (the writer was very fond of the word 'pretty') with 'myriads of fairy lights and Chinese lanterns' and the emblem VR everywhere. The pièce de résistance was a huge arch of 'three rows of ornamental gas pipes pierced at close intervals and embellished with various circular and star devices' which spanned the High Street. The pipes 'were fixed to the Gas Company's mains on either side of the road and thus a good pressure was obtained'. (No Health and Safety regulations!) The Company supplied the gas free of charge. The Sugar Loaf, the Red Lion and the Victoria Bun House came in for special mention for their displays and the town's verdict was that the illuminations 'were worthy of the historic occasion'.

BONFIRE

But this was not the end of the celebrations. Crowds gathered in the Square again and the Cycle Brigade, torches and Chinese lanterns

fixed to their cycles, with the town bands, led the procession up to the Downs for the lighting of the bonfire. At 9 o'clock a rocket was the signal for all the neighbouring villages and at 10 all the bonfires were lit and 'away in the distance, at every point of the compass, beacon fires flared up'. The bands struck up the national anthem 'and from all the hills and knolls ... the hymn was taken up and out into the night and back again ... floated the strains of that deep, swelling chorus where thousands were joined in singing God Save our Queen.'

FIREWORK DISPLAY

The last event of all was the firework display, back in the Square, which went on until after midnight. And when the bands played the national anthem for the last time 'in the wee small hours' no one thought of going home and the town was crowded until 2 or 3 a.m. The day had passed without the slightest hitch, a 'never-to-be-forgotten day'.

Joan Curran

FLAGS
FOR THE
DIAMOND JUBILEE
DECORATIONS
CAN STILL BE HAD
FROM
A. H. Cowell,
1 and 2, High Street.

QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE
ILLUMINATION DEVICES
In Copper and Iron, for Gas
Wire Frames for Coloured Lamps
For Oil or Candles.
DESIGNS AND PRICES OF
HENRY LIMBREY,
Ironmonger and Fitter,
DUNSTABLE.
ORDERS SHOULD BE PLACED AT ONCE

Advertisements for Diamond Jubilee flags and illumination devices in the Dunstable Gazette, dated 15th June 1897

DUNSTABLE ON PATHÉ FILM



Earlier last year British Pathé Films were made available to view on line. They can be found at: <http://www.britishPathe.com>

FIRST WORLD WAR

From 1896 to 1976, when the cinema played a larger role in people's lives, there were twice-weekly cinema newsreels made. In this 80-year period there was a wide selection of film stories made in or about Dunstable.

The earliest is a silent film from 1917 involving Dunstable children working on the land during the First World War. The first Dunstable film report with sound is on the day some animals walked from Dunstable train station to Whipsnade zoo.

Dunstable Downs are very popular for outdoor reports, whether grass skiing, gliding or orange rolling. The Air Ministry's Meteorological Weather Station also gets several mentions, particularly when Lionel Marson reports on the arrival of a new computer in 1946.

The voice of newscaster Bob Danvers-Walker gives several reports from 1958 updating the ongoing building of the M1 motorway.

Several local personalities were mentioned, including Dunstable Mayor Alderman Louis Palmer seeing off a motor scooter marathon trip in 1959, Father John Milne doing a loop the loop in a glider in 1969 and an upside-down painter Edwin Aldous showing his artistry in 1941.

Industries get a look in, with the Cross paperworks shown to be at the forefront of disposable cutlery, crockery and tableware in 1959. The Thermo Plastics Company in 1960 was shown making aircraft canopies as well as fridge linings and bathtubs.

WHIPSNADE ZOO

The best film to see the buildings and people of Dunstable is from January 1932 when Whipsnade Zoo received some of its first arrivals. The film clip is archived as 'Noahs Ark on Wheels'. The two-minute film starts at Dunstable North railway station. Since its demolition in 1967 this land is now the site of Central Bedfordshire Council offices. At the platform eight carriages of animals from the Bostocks and Wombwell menagerie are seen arriving. The travelling menagerie had been on the road since 1805. In its heyday it displayed animals for public pleasure and education in towns and cities. In Victorian times a travelling menagerie would be the only chance people would have to see monkeys, hyenas, bears and exotic birds. After 127 years on the road its day had passed and it was

sold to London Zoo. Here the collection of over 100 animals could live out their retirement. There were pelicans, cranes, kangaroos, parrots, leopards and lions, but the most memorable were the elephants. The only animals seen on the short film are polar bears, elephants and dromedary camels.

ANIMALS ARRIVE AT THE STATION

As the animals arrive at the station there are a lot of railwaymen present, no doubt all keen to get a look. No restraints or harnesses can be seen on the elephants, just a keeper with a stick to keep them in line. After a long period of ringside shows and domestic travelling the large pachyderms were probably treating this journey like many before. The two dromedaries are led in head harnesses. The two elephants are then walked up High Street North, about where Bennetts Brewery was. In the background is the tall building known as 'Tower House' near Park Street. It was known to the locals as the observatory, the glass observation room at the top is visible. This building was home to the Dale family of 'Dales Dubbin' fame. Sadly it was demolished in 1965. The other houses in shot are unmistakably numbers 148 to 140 High Street North, which still have the same frontage today. As the elephants and dromedaries stroll along, light traffic passes by up the high street. At the crossroads there is a crowd of observers, one man having come out of his shop and still wearing his striped apron. He may have been a butcher as there were several such shops in the town centre at that time. A shop name on the Church Street side of the road is 'W R Gibbard'. At the turn of the century this was a corn and flour dealing business. On the town centre signpost is a very prominent sign 'To The Zoo'. It would have been a new sign as the Zoo had not opened to the public until May 1931. The short film concludes with a steam engine pulling the wagons containing the lions down West Street.

British Pathé filmed frequently at Whipsnade Zoo thereafter, visiting almost every year from 1938 up to the end of Pathé Cinema Newsreels in 1970. A lot of reports from the zoo were about their baby boomers, whether the new arrival was a giraffe, hippo, husky, wallaby or, in 1967, an elephant.

On the website there are 3,500 hours of film containing 90,000 reports on sport, music, entertainment and cultural history.

John Pratt



Elephants Rosie and Dixie in High Street North near Park Street with the 'observatory' of the Tower House just visible in the top left hand corner



Dromedaries and elephants being led at the town crossroads with the prominent new sign for the zoo clearly visible on the left

Queensway Hall



We had a very interesting talk with pictures from Richard Walden last year. The Town Council was not responsible for the hall until much later after it was built.

As I worked for the former Borough of Dunstable, which later formed part of South Bedfordshire District Council, I was responsible for the improvements and maintenance of the hall in its earlier days.

EVENTS OF THE EARLY DAYS

Richard said in his address that I might add to his knowledge of the hall and thought members might be interested in events of the earlier days. As you know, the hall was opened by the Lord Mayor of London on 16th April 1964. The night before it opened the mosaic on the south side had still not been erected, so the contractor put it up in the evening by the light of our cars!

There was to be a gift to the Lord Mayor of a crystal decanter and glasses. This too was not ready so a member of our staff went to London and picked it up on the morning of the opening. After he arrived, myself and a few others washed and polished the glass which was duly presented to the Lord Mayor at the correct time.

Another delay before the opening, was the delivery of the chairs to the main hall. The then Borough Engineer, Ron Carrington, with myself and members of the staff unpacked the chairs and laid them out as planned with the magistrates.

Soon after the hall opened the Chief Fire Officer of Beds County Council said that the fire system over the stage had not been tested. This consisted of a pipe over the proscenium arch pitted with holes, set off by a lever on the stage. This was done, but on completion water dripped onto the stage for ages.

On 20th June 1964 the hall was used for an official dinner after The Third East Anglian Regiments (16th/44th Foots) was conferred the 'Freedom of Entry to the Borough'.

At an early concert, which my wife and I attended, the manager came to tell me that the roof was leaking. I went up to the outer area of the domed roof and found that discarded pieces of the aluminium roofing were blocking the gutter, so I set about clearing the outlet. On returning to my seat, I have to say, my wife was not best pleased by my bedraggled appearance!

The opera singer, Joan Hammond, gave a concert on 8th October 1964, but the entrance to the stage was only 4 ft high and she hit her head on her way to the rehearsal but she still managed to appear in the evening. The Council committee soon ordered me to raise the entrance to 6'6".

The London Mozart Players gave a concert on 1st May 1975, and Moira Lympany gave a piano concert on 22nd October 1981, and happily there were no problems at either concert.

But at another concert I attended, a pianist, with a Polish surname (and which I have forgotten), found that two notes on the grand piano were not working. I was very annoyed as the piano had only been tuned the day before. Speaking to him at the interval he seemed quite calm and said he thought he would be able to cope.

The architect had made no provision for the chandelier over the main staircase to be lowered for maintenance. Before we had our present safety laws, I arranged for a small van to come into the hall and move up a few steps, so the lamps could be reached and new bulbs inserted.

Vauxhall wanted to show off one of their new lorries in the hall foyer. The new lorry was too high so I had to get higher panels made near the entrance and also drip trays for the oil to avoid damage to the floor, all in time for the show.

NUCLEAR SHELTER

Another problem was that during the 'Cold War' we were asked by the government to provide an office for the Borough senior officers to co-ordinate services in the event of a nuclear attack. It was decided to provide this in the basement. This was achieved as well as possible by strengthening the caretaker's store and installing a special anti-atomic filter. Fortunately we never had to make use of it.

After the hall was built, the Dunstable Rep. Company thought of using the hall instead of the 'Old Town Hall'. With such a large auditorium, even after screens were placed halfway across the hall, they found the hall unsatisfactory, and fortunately Chews Trustees were able to lease the former library to the 'Rep'.

Dunstable Amateur Operatic was able to produce some excellent shows in the hall from 1964 until it closed.

Eric Bullock

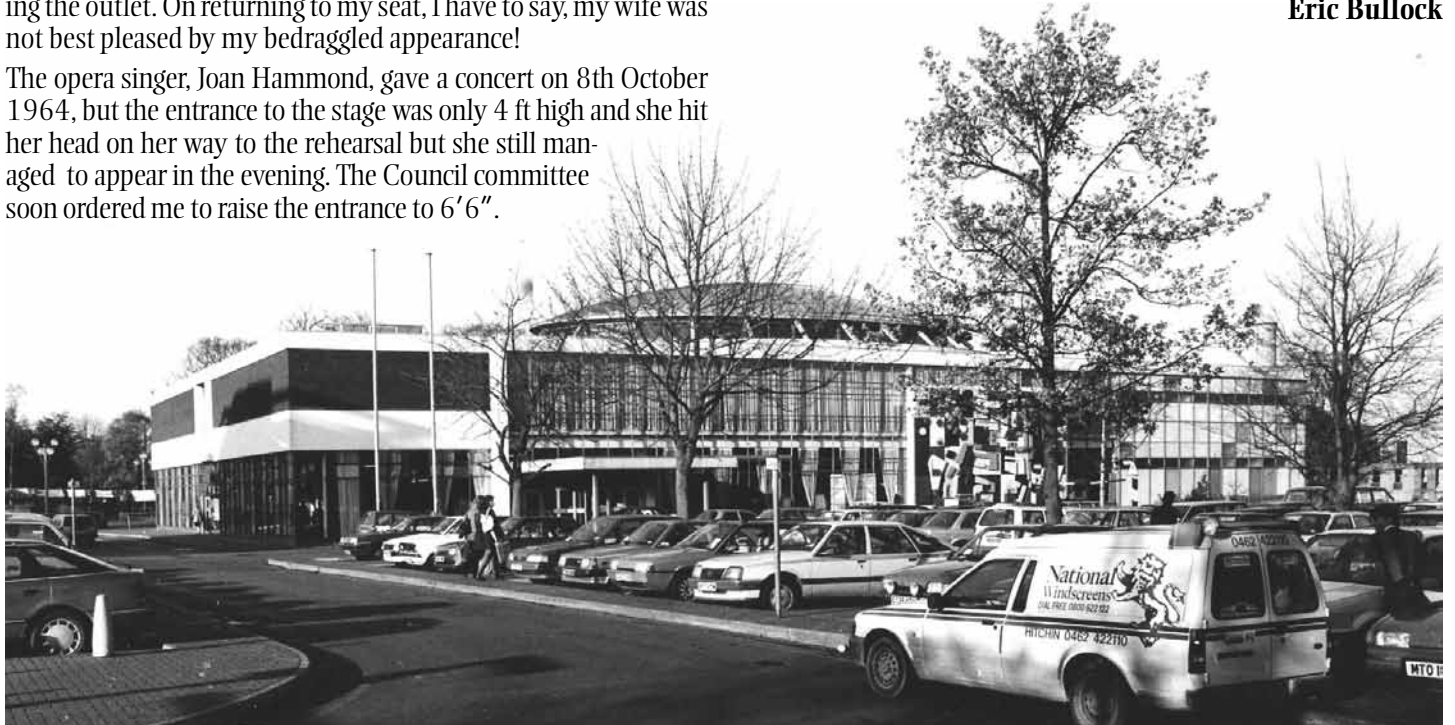




Photo courtesy of The British Museum

A watercolor painting of Dunstable Downs by George Sidney Shepherd, dated 1813

There is an ever increasing amount of information available to local historians on the internet and I intend to share some of my findings with you in future issues of the newsletter.

A couple of useful sites worth visiting are:

British History Online: www.british-history.ac.uk

Connected Histories: www.connectedhistories.org

GEORGE SIDNEY SHEPHERD

While searching on the internet for information for the newsletter relating to the history of Dunstable, I came across this watercolour of Dunstable Downs painted in 1813 by George Sidney Shepherd, on the British Museum website. The description reads: 'A view from Dunstable Downs; view from the top of a hill, on which two figures stand, overlooking rolling hills and flat country beyond'. The hill in question is clearly the view from the top of Pascombe Pit looking towards the Vale of Aylesbury.

George Sidney Shepherd was a draughtsman and watercolour artist born in 1784 in London. By 1800 he had exhibited the first of many topographical views at the Royal Academy. During his late teens he also won silver palettes at the Society of Arts in 1803 and 1804 and may have mixed with other artists at Dr Cox Macro's sketching academy where there is a reference to a Mr Shepherd in 1806. By 1807, however, he began to travel further afield, going to Cambridge and Northampton to produce sketches for John Britton's *Architectural Antiquities of Great Britain* in 1807. His work for various publishers sent him to many areas of England and in 1812 he married Anna Sarah Lannon, recorded as being from Bedfordshire, but without specifying

where. He was obviously familiar with the towns and villages of Bedfordshire, probably as a result of his marriage, and produced a number of watercolours of the area.

His affinity with rural landscapes and his draughtsmanship enabled detailed architectural elevations and complicated perspectives to be combined with deceptively simple pen and wash to very good effect.

In 1832 Shepherd began exhibiting at the Society of British Artists and was a founder subscriber to the New Society of Painters in Water Colours in 1834, formed as a result of the Royal Academy, at that time, refusing to accept watercolours.

Because he worked less frequently for publishers after the 1840s the minutes of that society give an indication of Shepherd's activities during this time. Despite being fined for non-attendance at their meetings in 1840 he was evidently still active as he also owed them money for selling paintings at their exhibitions. In 1850 there was a movement to expel him for non-payment of dues, but he was found to be in an impoverished state and was instead made an Honorary Member. After suffering a stroke in March 1858, Shepherd ceased working and became increasingly ill, bedridden and destitute and by 1859 his name no longer appears on the list of members. A begging letter was received from his son, dated 5th November 1860 and he continued to be supported by the society. They made their final donation to him on 3rd February 1861 and he died sometime in 1862.

In 2010, Luton Museum held a joint exhibition of George Sidney Shepherd's work together with that of Thomas Fisher.

David Turner

Greeting New Members

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

Mrs B Lacy

Mrs S Colbeck



Sad Farewell



We are very sorry to announce the sad loss of

Basil Alsop

Ivor Cole

Geoffrey Morris

Memories of old Dunstable

John Buckledee is collecting anecdotes about old Dunstable and district and always welcomes contributions. Phone him on 01582 703107.

ST LUKE'S SCHOOL

What's the connection between Dunstable and the famous old charity school, St Luke's, in London?

History society member **David Clark** has provided us with the answer and presented a book (History of St Luke's School by Margaret Routledge) to our research room at Priory House.

St Luke's was in Old Street, near the Barbican, and its children were evacuated to Dunstable during the war-time blitz.

David was enrolled at the school in the early 1930s and, like so many other London children, had his life turned upside down when war started. He was sent to stay with a family at Wareham but in those early days there was more enemy action in the skies around the south coast than in London, so he was brought back to the city and rejoined St Luke's. And it was on the very day that he returned that the bombing began.

Meanwhile, other pupils at St Luke's had been transferred to Dunstable where classes were held in the parish hall, next to the Priory Church. Most of the evacuees had drifted back to London when all seemed quiet, but they were all returned to Bedfordshire during the blitz – and this time David was with them.

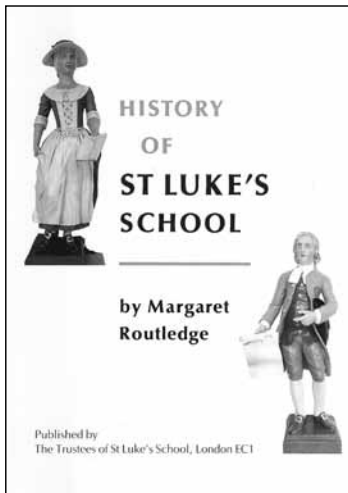
David remembers that the classes in the parish hall were separated only by curtains so "you can tell what a babble it was".

David's father was an engineer so he was required to do war work rather than join the forces. He became employed at Grice and Young on the corner of Albion Street and Matthew Street in Dunstable, where he made the hydraulics for Spitfire landing wheels.

Perhaps because the family were all together they were happier here than most evacuees, and David stayed in Dunstable after the war. He had transferred to Ashton School and then went to Britain Street School.

An Old Boy of St Luke's, Sir William Jordan, came to Dunstable in August 1942 to present prizes to the pupils here. His speech was reported at length in the Dunstable Borough Gazette.

There's one other quite significant local connection with St Luke's. It was originally a charity school for boys only, but in 1761 Mrs Harriet Whitbread of the Bedfordshire brewing family appealed to the school to take in girls as well. She started the subscription for this herself with a donation of 10 guineas.



*History of St Luke's School
by Margaret Routledge*



Costin's miniature coach during a procession in Castle Hill Road, Totternhoe

COSTIN'S MINIATURE COACH

Alf King, of Dunstable Road, Totternhoe, took this photo of Costin's miniature coach which might stir a few memories. The little vehicle became a familiar sight in local carnival processions, where Mr Costin, who sadly died recently, used it to advertise his coach and haulage business.

This picture, with two excited little girls in the passenger seats, was taken during a procession in Castle Hill Road, Totternhoe.

Alf, who was site manager for the well-known Dunstable builders, Robinson and White, has a host of anecdotes about his work on numerous buildings in the area.

For instance, during the war there was an air raid shelter in the cellars of the old drill hall in Church Street. The building is today best remembered as the former home of the Book Castle.

The shelter was lined for added protection with heavy timber. When the war ended, Robinson and White took the timber to Tilsforth where it was sawn into joists and used for roofing on the houses being erected in Beacon Avenue. Lovely to know that these attractive buildings contain an extra piece of Dunstable's history.

FOWL PEST PRECAUTIONS AT WHIPSNADE ZOO

Veronica Squires, of Church Road, Totternhoe, worked at Whipsnade Zoo in the 1950s and has discovered among her memorabilia of the time a German magazine which, extraordinarily, included a photo-feature in February 1955 of precautions against fowl pest disease at the zoo.

There's a picture of Phil Bates, the zoo's overseer, using a watering can to sprinkle disinfectant over large mats at the zoo entrance. Visitors were required to carefully wipe their shoes on a mat to kill any germs and drivers had to make sure their vehicle tyres ran over it.

Veronica and her colleagues, including Anne Gray, Janet Neal and Margaret Tully, are pictured washing their hands in disinfectant after alighting from the little green bus which transported zoo workers from Dunstable every morning.



German magazine featuring precautions against fowl pest at Whipsnade

continued overleaf

GARY COOPER

Judy Davies, who gave a talk to the history society about her convict ancestors in Australia, is the daughter of Kate (Kit) Mead who was a childhood playmate of film star Gary Cooper when he was a pupil at Dunstable Grammar School.

Kit emigrated to Australia and, alas, refused to talk to the Press about Gary when she paid a nostalgic return visit to Dunstable in later years. However, Judy has managed to glean a few anecdotes from her family.

Kit's Mum and Dad, Susan and Harry Mead, lived at the first house in Waterlow Road (number two) so their garden backed on to the garden of the house in High Street North where Gary and his brother Arthur were staying. That is how three of the Mead children, Jack, George and Kit, came to be friends with the Cooper brothers.

Jack and Gary were similar ages and they had to take turns to look after Kit when they were playing. But the little girl could be troublesome – one day an irritated Gary shoved her into Houghton Regis pond!

At one time she was forbidden by her mother from playing with the Cooper brothers after they gave her a test run in a go-kart on Dunstable Downs. It crashed and Kit had substantial bruising. Mother was furious.

Mrs Mead didn't approve of the movies and in later years she would refuse to baby-sit if her married daughter wanted to go to the cinema – except if Kit was going to see a Gary Cooper film. Cooper films were the exception.

DUNSTABLE WANDERERS FOOTBALL CLUB

Judy Davies, incidentally, is seeking information about the Dunstable Wanderers Football Club and the "Sportsman" Slate Club. Can anyone help?

SCOTT AND ZANDER

Paul Evans has forwarded to the society a photo taken in 1938 of the staff of Scott and Zander, who built gliders in workshops in Matthew Street, Dunstable.

Paul writes that the site is now occupied by the modern structure called Blacksmith Court, but the buildings opposite, seen in the background of the photograph, are still there and readily identified (although the 'shed' building has gained a storey).

The photograph was sent to Paul by the son of John Morland, who was a long-time resident in Dunstable, and is one of the lads in the photograph.



The staff of glider builders Scott and Zander, at their workshops in Matthew Street, Dunstable

In 1938 the famous pilot Amy Johnson purchased an H-17 glider and came to the Scott and Zander works to have the cockpit personally 'fitted', and the young John Morland was given the job of assisting the process. John is now in his late eighties and living near Carmarthen with his son Alan.

The history of glider and light aircraft manufacture in Dunstable is quite involved. Paul reminds us that another firm associated with Eric(h) Zander built a light aircraft called the "Dunstable Dart". Among others, there was a light aircraft called the "Dart Kitten" and a glider called the "Dart Totternhoe". However, Scott and Zander appear to have principally built gliders of German design such as the Dagling Primary, Baby Grunau, and Hütter-17.

LOST PUBS OF DUNSTABLE

Adam Croft, the former Dunstable man who is now a very successful author (his crime novels 'Too Close For Comfort' and 'Guilty As Sin' have sold in their thousands) is also honorary editor of the local magazine for the South Bedfordshire CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale). He is preparing a series of articles about past pubs in Dunstable and the surrounding area, and contacted the society's website asking for photos.

He writes:

"Many thanks for your response and your permission to use the images. I will, of course, credit DDLHS and the fantastic work you do. 'As someone who was born and raised in Dunstable, I've long been fascinated by the changing landscape of the town. Although I'm too young to have been there, my father has told me numerous times about the long-forgotten streets of Chapel Walk and the surrounding area (plus the two pubs) and I used to take great delight in getting him to repeat the stories ad nauseum. I sometimes like to imagine I could jump into a time machine and wander the streets in those days. It really does fascinate me beyond words.

'Due to my CAMRA involvement, lost pubs of Dunstable are of particular interest to me. Pub culture has always been a fascination of mine – the different reasons people visit pubs, their backgrounds, the vast differences in pubs from area to area. A good friend and I are currently planning a railway and pub tour of Britain this year, whereby we hope to explore the variety in pub culture across Britain with the intention of putting it all into a book. Perhaps beginning this series on the lost pubs of Dunstable and Bedfordshire will be something which I can also put into a specialist book. Hopefully it could benefit CAMRA and DDLHS, too.

'If you have any information, or know of anyone who might have, on past pubs of Dunstable – even if it's just a few personal tales of having been in there, what it was like, how different the pub culture was and how that pub differed from others in the town – it would be hugely appreciated.'

Can any society members help?

DUNSTABLE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH CHOIR

Simon Garrett has acquired a rather impressive silver plate trophy which is inscribed: "Presented to Miss SE Westlake by the members of the Dunstable Congregational Church Choir 1930". Does anyone know Miss Westlake or her family or any other details?

John Buckledee