

Newsletter

DUNSTABLE & DISTRICT
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

N°4

September 1995



Chairman's Remarks

Welcome to the new session of the Society. You will have all received your programme and I hope that you will find it an interesting one and that you will look forward to coming to the meetings. Please do bring your friends on any occasion, we shall be very pleased to see them, and of course there is always the prospect that they may like to join in turn.

This will have been a summer to remember, with many weather records approached or broken. Hot sun, clear blue skies and dry and arid gardens! I am sure that we shall look back with pleasure at those long, hot days when the wind howls round and the rain tumbles down and the day is murky and dismal and the central heating has to be put on longer or turned up.

Looking back we have had three enjoyable outings and my thanks to all who helped organise them or played some part. The visit to the two mills at Ivinghoe and Pitstone was on a decidedly chilly June evening, but was very interesting and informative nevertheless. On the next page there is an article by David Lindsey, whose enthusiasm and talk on the evening of our visit was much appreciated. The tour of North Bedfordshire villages on a delectable summer evening opened many of our eyes to the rural charm and the delightful scenes of this part of our county. Our Saturday afternoon trip to Ashwell and its environs was another pleasant few hours, this time in rural Hertfordshire. The local shop, close to the attractive museum and the village hall (where we were served an excellent tea by the ladies of the church) did a roaring trade in ice creams and the society members sat under the spreading village tree and sucked away contentedly.

Thanks, too, to all those who came or helped with our coffee morning toward the end of June, when our plans went haywire because it *rained* (two days before that date was the last time I cut my grass), and intentions of sitting and relaxing in the garden were rudely interrupted! But it was a good morning of friendship and social discussion and we raised £141 for Society's funds.

Some of you, I know, this year have had illnesses and setbacks, and we have thought of you. But I hope that most of you have enjoyed good health and your committee looks forward to seeing you shortly.

CEB

WHITING WORKS

In November we have a second Dunstable «Trades» evening. Part of it will cover the whiting industry.

Your secretary, in particular and other members are busy researching this trade, of which Dunstable was very much the centre of the county.

Some of you may have photographs, or know people who worked in the industry.

If so we would welcome hearing from you. Please contact either Joan Curran (01525-221963) or myself (01582-661027). Thank you.

CB



Forester's Cottages in Ashwell. They began as a single dwelling of which the earliest part may date from the 14th century; it was added to over the next two centuries. At some later point it was divided into cottages and acquired by the ancient Order of Foresters. They became derelict but were restored as private dwellings in 1961.

Ford End Watermill Ivinghoe

Members of the Society, especially those who visited the watermill on the evening of 13th June, may be interested in its history.

Unfortunately, little is known of the early history, and even the more recent has been difficult to research because of the lack of documentary evidence, even in this century.

Although the mill was not recorded in the Domesday Survey (1086), there has probably been a watermill on the site for several centuries. It may have been the one recorded in 1232 as being «handed by Ralph de Bonville to one William, son of Herbert», together with Pitstone watermill (a quarter of a mile upstream, also known as Brookmead or Beesley's mill, but now converted into a house).

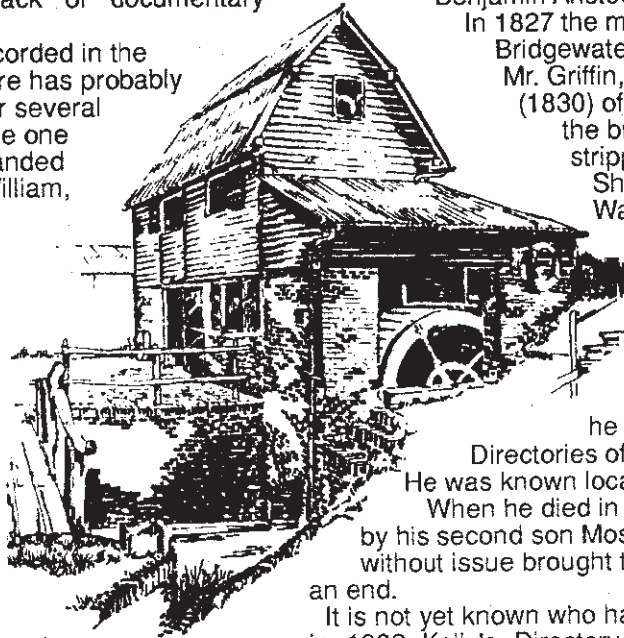
There is also a suggestion that the mill belonged to Neyrnut Manor in 1346. The *Victoria County History of Buckinghamshire* records that «the watermill in Ivinghoe was held in the 14th century by the Sigurnal and Alberd families».

There are further references in 16th and 17th century documents but these provide insufficient evidence to identify the site as that of the mill at Ford End.

It is thought however that the present mill did replace an earlier one but when is not known. A reasonable guess would be during the early years of the 18th century; the style of construction and the increase in the demand for a miller's services, all point to this era. The mill seems to have been well established by 1773.

Useful documentary evidence from this period has been found in the Land Tax Returns dating from 1781. Then Ford End farm and mill were owned by Mrs Judy Redell and tenanted by Bernard Wilkes. In 1784 he was succeeded by William Heley who worked the farm and mill until 1798.

In that year, the mill is mentioned in the *Posse Comitatus*, a return prepared as part of the precautionary preparations against the expected French invasion during the Napoleonic Wars. It lists all persons between the ages of 15 and 60 capable of acting in a military capacity but excluding Quakers, clergymen and those already in military service, as well as all available wagons, carts and horses and all wind and watermills together with an estimate of the quantity of grain ground in a week. The returns for Ivinghoe include a reference to a watermill occupied by William Heley «grinding 16 sacks a week» who also had 5 horses, one wagon and 3



carts. This reference seems to confirm the initials and date «W H 1795» painted on board on the wall of the first floor. The Land Tax Returns indicate that from 1798 to 1831 the mill was owned by George Griffin of Tring, but was tenanted by various millers, including Edward Hill (from 1799 to 1808) and Benjamin Anstee (from 1809 to 1832).

In 1827 the mill was purchased by the Bridgewater (Ashridge) Estate from Mr. Griffin, and there is an account (1830) of £10-4s-5d being paid to the bricklayers at Ashridge for stripping and retiling Mill and Shed and repairing walls of Washbrook». (see panel).

The washbrook would be the sheepwash.

The Census Returns from 1851 to 1881 list William Tompkins as being the farmer and miller at Ford End, and

he was recorded as such in

Directories of 1863, 1864 and 1865.

He was known locally as «Miller Tompkins».

When he died in 1886, he was succeeded by his second son Moses, whose death in 1890 without issue brought the long family tenancy to an end.

It is not yet known who had the mill afterwards, but in 1903 Kelly's Directory gives Charles Jellis as being «farmer and miller (water)». He bought the farm and mill from the Brownlow (formerly the Bridgewater) Estate in 1924.

Since then, the mill, as part of Ford End Farm has been occupied by four generations of the Jellis family, many of whom had nick-names as was common in the area. Charles «Nippy» Jellis was followed by his son Jesse «Dick» in about 1920,

Extract from the Countess of Bridgewater's Estate Account Book 1830

| | | |
|------------|--|--------|
| Ivinghoe | Benjamin Anstee. Washbrook repaired and Mill stripped and retiled. | |
| 1830 | | |
| May 3 298 | To George Collyer for taking down old wall of Washbrook and cleaning the bricks | 0-7-0 |
| Dec 31 299 | Bricklayers at Ashridge stripping and retiling mill and shed and repairing walls of Washbrook | 10-4-5 |
| Dec 31 300 | Joiners and carpenters lurring up roof of Mill putting up slab fence at Washbrook, and repairing flood gates | 2-8-0 |

and he farmed until his death in 1962. The mill was worked by Tom Jellis for many years (1917 to 1955), both for his father Charles, and his brother Jesse. Arthur Jellis took over following the death of his father, Jesse, and continued until his own death in 1976 when he was succeeded by his son Richard who farms today.

The watermill was producing animal feed for the farm right up to 1963 when the wheel and sluice gate fell into such a state of disrepair that the mill

could no longer be worked. In 1965, the farmer, Arthur Jellis, approached the Pitstone Local History Society for help, and urgent repair work was carried out to enable the mill to run again. The Society has been involved with the preservation of the mill ever since! It now leases the mill, a listed grade II building, and in 1991 it received an award from the Civic Trust for the quality of the restoration work.

The mill, the only remaining (1995) working watermill in Buckinghamshire, where 67 have been recorded in the past, is normally open on Sunday and bank holiday afternoons from 2.30 to 5.30 between May 1st and September 30th. In addition, milling demonstrations are given on the bank holidays, and on the second Sunday in May (National Mills Day), June, July and September.

David Lindsey

County Events

There were two local history competitions in the county this summer. The first was the Nationwide Building Society Oral History Competition, for which we submitted a set of tapes based on our 'Dunstable Trades' evening from our last session. We were just pipped at the post by an entry from Shillington but were highly commended for our entry.

The other competition was intended to encourage new speakers on local history topics and entrants were required to research a topic and deliver a lecture on it to a small audience. Mr. Frank Sutton, from our neighbouring society at Caddington, won this with a very well-researched talk, based on parish records, about the care of the sick and needy of the parish in the 18th and 19th centuries.

At the AGM of the *Bedfordshire Local History Association* at Bromham in May we heard a talk on place names and had an opportunity to look at the mill, the old bridge, the park and the church in the village.

The next *BLHA* event will be a visit to Odell, which we passed through on our North Bedfordshire tour. We shall have a visit to the manor house, the church and possibly the castle, with the expert guidance of Miss Patricia Bell, former County Archivist. This will be on the afternoon of Sunday 22nd October. All are welcome but names of those wishing to go must be given to the Secretary in advance.

JC.

Local History in the Library

As part of the recent re-organisation of Dunstable Library, the Local History section has been moved to the corner where the music library used to be. Everything is much more accessible. The microfilms of the census returns and the *Dunstable Gazette* are available for you to help yourself. The microfilm reader is adjacent to the cabinet where they are kept. It is certainly a great improvement which is very welcome.

In Pimlico, between Leverstock Green (Hemel Hempstead) and Bedmont, there is a pub, *The Swan*, where there hangs a picture of a wagon. It is an advertisement for a firm and in the middle of it is a semi-relief plaster model of a wagon.

THE DUNSTABLE WAGON C^o



Prop. N. Moss

since 1807

AS SUPPLIED TO THE COLONIES

Omer has a photo available to those interested
Has anyone any information ?

Dunstable Priory Residents

The Bishop of Lincoln or his agent visited the religious houses in his Diocese to carry out an *inspection* and hear complaints from the residents. These visits were not made on a regular basis, but roughly at ten year intervals.

The last such visit to Dunstable Priory before its closure in 1539 was made by the Diocesan Chancellor on Friday, 13 May 1530. At that time the following were in residence and all reported *Omnia bene* - all's well.

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Dominus Gervaise Markham, Prior * | |
| Dominus Robert Cotton, Subprior | |
| Dominus Thomas Welles, in charge of the refectory | |
| Dominus Thomas Claybroke * | |
| Dominus Radulph Marten, in charge of the wine cellar | |
| Dominus Thomas Ringstead, Precentor | |
| Dominus Richard Kent, novice master * | |
| Dominus George Edwardes, Sacristan * | |
| Dominus Henry Myller, Deacon * | |
| Dominus Edmund Grene, Deacon * | |
| Brother Peter Whippe * | (the |
| Brother Thomas (John) Stalworth * | brothers |
| Brother Richard Bowstrete (Bulstred) * | were |
| Brother Radulph Spytwell | probably |
| Brother Augustine Curtes * | novices) |
| Brother Robert Sumner (Somer) * | |

At the previous visit by Bishop William Atwater on 24 April 1518 there were only the Prior (John Wastell) and six canons. The Prior was given an injunction to increase the number of priests (canons).

At the dissolution the above marked * were still there, the brothers had become canons. There were also three new names

Dominus John Nyxe
Dominus Nicholas Claybroke
Dominus John Percyvall

that is the Prior and twelve canons.

JL.

Looking back to 1914

Browsing through the Dunstable section of Kelly's Bedfordshire Directory for 1914 gives a fascinating glimpse of the town centre at that time.

First comes the list of private residents deemed worthy of an entry, many of them living in the High Street in those days. Street numbers were ignored by many of these better-off citizens and their houses were known by names only. These ranged from the hackneyed, such as *The Poplars* and *Chiltern Cottage*, to the more unusual and exotic, like *Spilsteads*, *Parrona* and *Doretta Lodge*. (*Cordova* was also there, occupied then by William Ward.)

But more interesting is the commercial section. What strikes you immediately, in these days of one supermarket, one butcher and two or three bakers, is the wealth of choice Dunstable shoppers had then. There were a dozen bakers, as many butchers and twenty or more grocers, not to mention seven confectioners and all the little general shops whose owners were just listed as shopkeepers.

There was a host of milliners, dressmakers, outfitters and tailors, as well as a number of drapers, some of them "fancy" and some of them not. (Charles Moore had two shops at this time, one in High Street North and one in High Street South.) There were pubs a-plenty, of course, well over twenty of them, and for tee-total visitors there were two temperance hotels. Only two banks, however, Barclays and the Westminster, had arrived in the High Street.

Appropriately Mr. Barber was one of seven hairdressers in the town (this included men's as well as ladies'). Then there was Caleb Bird, an egg wholesaler, and Francis Walker was one of numerous boot and shoe makers and repairers who sounds as though he made good use of his own products. Noah Parrott is listed as a wood dealer - I can't help feeling he ought to have supplied the wood for Noah's ark!

Some tradesmen carried on unusual combinations of trades, like Charles Armiger, who was a stationer and greengrocer in West Street. Edward Franklin was a carpenter and Parish Clerk. It was a surprise, too, to find that there were actually four "makers of artificial teeth", one of whom rejoiced in the name of George Charles Marlowe-Dauncey. And an intriguing entry is that for Robert Ginger, who was a marine store dealer in Ashton Street. However much trade did he get in land-locked Dunstable, I wonder?

There were still two farriers, two wheelwrights, a cooper and a miller listed, but signs of the times were the motor engineers. Scott and Sons, two cycle makers, a thrashing machine owner and a cinematograph theatre proprietor. And, shades of things to come, a house agent. By this

time, too, factories were providing large-scale employment for the town. As well as the hat makers two engineering firms had been established. Bagshawe's and Harrison Carter, and Waterlow's printing works and Cross Paperware had come on the scene.

The health of the town was taken care of by five doctors, three nurses (one a midwife) and one dentist. Two of the doctors, Storey and Morcom, were responsible, between them, for the duties of Medical Officer of Health for Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Luton Rural District. And the William Hill of the day had nothing to do with gambling but was the local vet.

Amongst the public officers it is interesting to see that there were separate registrars for marriages and for births and deaths. The latter was a Mr. Fetch, whose office was in Edward Street. The registrar for marriages was the solicitor, Mr. Albert Gutteridge, and another solicitor, Mr. Benning, was the Town Clerk (who was actually clerk to a whole lot of other bodies besides). Both these solicitors seem to have carried out their public duties from their own offices. The nearest thing to our council offices was the Town Hall, behind which, incidentally, the fire engine was kept. The Police Inspector, William George Purser, was to be found at the police house/station in Icknield Street.

Dunstable in 1914 still had a town crier, George White, who evidently combined bill posting with town crying, and one man who got around a bit and must have been kept very busy was William Fawcett Wilkins. He is listed as the Borough Surveyor, but he was also the inspector of petroleum, explosives, lodging houses and dairy and cowsheds. Now there's a name to conjure with - a man whose expertise ranged from dynamite to dairy sheds and from petrol pumps to providers of lodgings!

Joan Curran

It would be an interesting project to work out a plan of the shops and houses in the town centre from the directory, which only lists people's names in alphabetical order. Anybody interested?

Bedfordshire Churches

a slide presentation by

Christopher Pickford

Bedfordshire Archivist and Historical Author

Saturday 7th October 1995

7.30 pm, Elstow Abbey Church

Admission £2 (£1.50 for the Friends of Elstow Abbey), 45 - 60 minutes, followed by light refreshments