

NEWSLETTER

Dunstable & District Local History Society

No. 44

August 2015



Chairman's Notes

The society has once again had a successful series of summer outings, mainly thanks to the sterling efforts of Sue Turner, Rita Swift and Gordon Ivinson, together with the financial oversight of our treasurer Cynthia Turvey.

These events are always complicated to organise... we realise only too well that professional tour guides really earn their money!

RIVER TRIP GLITCHES

Our July expedition, for instance, involved Gordon in more than the usual amount of stress.

He had set up an ambitious trip, booking us into two separate venues with a boat trip down the Thames in between. By sheer chance, because a menu query had arisen, he found that one of the venues had not entered our plans into their diary, and they were double-booked. That was sorted out after numerous phone calls and letters, but they then cancelled anyway because of other problems. An alternative venue nearby was arranged but then their opening hours were altered. Then we found that the price had gone up!

In the end, our members seemed to have enjoyed their day out. But what an exhausting time for Gordon!

AUCTION HOUSE VISIT

The outing to the auction house at Bedford organised by Rita had not yet taken place when this newsletter went to press. Fingers crossed that this went well.

HARLINGTON MANOR VISIT

Sue Turner, too, has been particularly busy. Apart from arranging our trip to Harlington Manor, she was the principal organiser of the hugely successful Jacobean Day at Priory House and Gardens.

The owner of the manor, David Blakeman, personally showed us around his home, displaying an amazing knowledge of almost every brick and beam. And we really were given the most comprehensive tour, even disturbing the studies of his daughter who was engrossed in working for her A levels. She seemed remarkably unfazed by the experience.



The Three Musketeers on stilts were some of the re-actors who entertained the public on Jacobean Day in Priory Gardens, pictured with the mayor, Cllr. Stocks

JACOBAN DAY

The Jacobean day included a history society display, organised by Joan Curran and Rita Swift, which contained details about Robert Catesby who had his horse reshod in Dunstable while fleeing for his life after the failure of the Gunpowder Plot. I mention this because Catesby's adventure was one of the questions in the day's Jacobean quiz which stumped most of the entrants.

Priory Gardens featured civil war re-enactments, excerpts from Shakespeare's plays, and displays of alchemy, handicrafts and cookery of the period. A falconry show provided additional excitement when the birds of prey were harassed by an indignant flock of Dunstable rooks. And the pet dog of a hurdy-gurdy man caused hilarity by howling (almost in tune) whenever his master's ancient bagpipes were played. It was a really fun day...

GEORGIAN DAY

Next on the agenda for the society is an exhibition in Priory House featuring Dunstable in Georgian times. This is in connection with the host of forthcoming events being master-minded by Hugh Garrod to celebrate the tercentenary of the founding of Chew's School in High Street South. David Turner is designing new panels to decorate the Priory House walls, and I am providing suitable words. It is leading us into a world of stagecoaches, smallpox, cock-fighting, highwaymen and roasted larks. Clearly, life is very much better in Dunstable today.

A TEMPTING OFFER FROM AMAZON

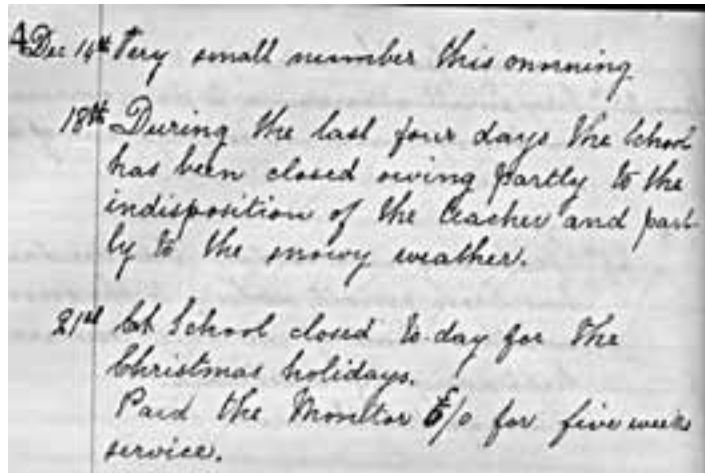
Finally, a note about Amazon's unbelievably efficient marketing. I occasionally buy history books from their online site and, obviously, their computer has made a careful note of my interests. Even so, it was particularly gratifying to receive a personalised email from them warmly recommending a local history book which they thought I might find interesting. It was titled *Dunstable Through Time* by someone called John Buckledee. Tempting, but not tempting enough!

John Buckledee

The Theft of the Christmas Pudding



On the 21st December 1874 the Dunstable National Infants School in Church Street was closed for the Christmas holidays with the monitor being paid 6/- for five weeks service.



School log entry for 14th December, 1874, indicating the wintry weather

The entry in the School Log Book confirms that it had been snowing heavily and some children were prevented from attending.

CHRISTMAS DINNER

However the weather did not prevent Mrs Hicks from holding a Christmas dinner, prepared by Mark Rest, landlord of the Saracen's Head, at the school rooms on the 24th. Unfortunately the records do not include a guest list.

NO TRACE OF THE PUDDING

At the end of the meal Mr Rest asked Arthur Champkin to assist with the clearing up by helping pass the dinner items to the ostler William Stokes. William was on the cart loading everything safely into baskets ready for the return journey while Mr Rest went backwards and forward collecting the remaining items. Mrs Hicks had given him a spare plum pudding which he left Champkin holding ready for packing. Back at the Saracen's Head when the baskets were being unpacked, this item was found to be missing. Mr Rest questioned Arthur Champkin who swore, claimed he was innocent, had never seen a pudding, was not going to waste his time here and ran off. The ostler was sent for the police while Mr Rest pursued Champkin down the High Street into Church Street via Church Lane, into Markham's Yard and then into a house. Asked what had happened to the pudding Champkin again swore, claimed no knowledge and told Mr Rest to look for it, but in spite of a thorough search no trace was found of the missing item, valued at about 8 shillings.

FOOTPRINTS FOUND

At the police station he continued to deny all knowledge of the pudding. Police Sergeant William Addington and P C Henry Tofield together conducted a night-time search of the church yard where the frozen snow proved to be an advantage. Footprints showed a person appeared to have climbed over the wall behind the schoolroom but had left the impression of a basin on the ground. The footprints disappeared behind a tombstone, again

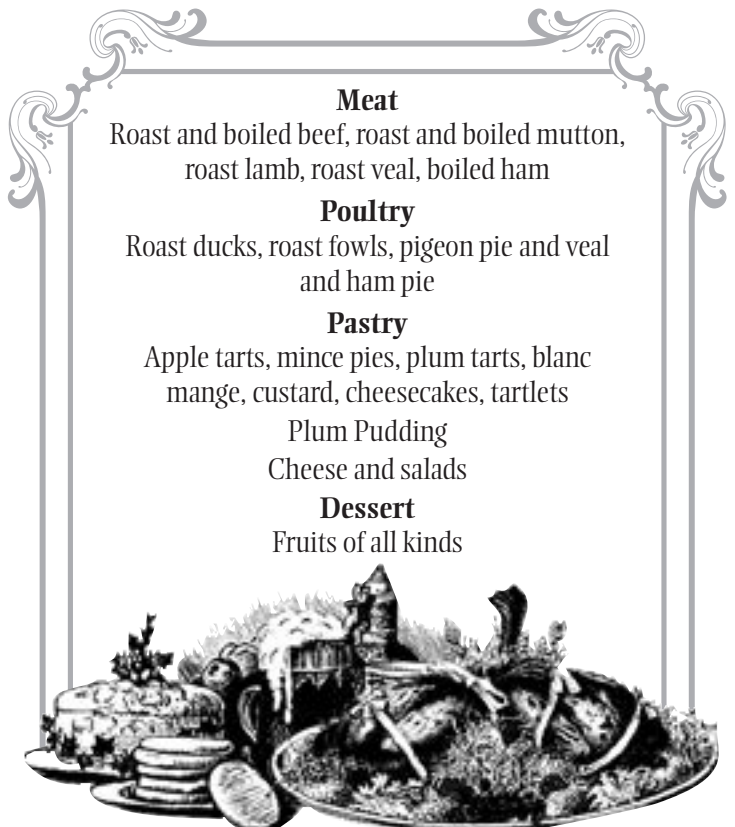
the impression of a basin could clearly be seen together with a piece of string and fragments of pudding. Due to the freezing snow the police were able to make a cast of the footprints which, when compared with Champkin's tipped and nailed boots, matched exactly. As the basin and pudding were never found Arthur Champkin was acquitted.

SERIAL OFFENDER

But Arthur Champkin continued to get into trouble with the law, usually for stealing. In 1877 he was sentenced to 10 months for stealing a rabbit. In 1878, while on remand for two counts of larceny, he unsuccessfully tried to cut his throat and was charged with attempted suicide. In 1879 and 1880 he was acquitted of stealing a horse's bit and a leg of lamb respectively. In 1880 he was sentenced to five years penal servitude for housebreaking with an additional month for assaulting a police constable where Pentonville Prison had the pleasure of his company. By 1896 he was making regular appearances in the Luton Workhouse being admitted repeatedly but usually only stopping a few days. In the 1901 and 1911 census he was an inmate of the workhouse and his occupation given as hawker. He died in 1913.

THE SARACEN'S HEAD

Mark Rest was the landlord of the Saracen's Head from 1872 to 1879 and he and his wife became well known for their excellent dinners. The Mayor and Council, Ancient Order of Foresters, Loyal Philanthropic Guild No. 3290 Manchester Union, local Cricket Team, The Fire Brigade, 4th Beds Rifle Volunteers were a few who held celebrations at the Hotel. A typical menu for an annual dinner was:



Ref. BLARS & Dunstable Gazette

Rita Swift

Where were Dunstable Races Held?



A frequently asked question is: Where were Dunstable races held?

One guess has been that they took place at Dunstable Park, the old name for the fields which later became Grove House Gardens.

But now we have traced an actual reference to the events. The source, surprisingly, is the Oxford Journal which, in May 1753, published invitations to racehorse owners to take part in races on Dunstable Downs on Tuesday, June 5, and Wednesday, June 6.

The organisers gave an assurance that the course would be put in very good order, adding that no horse was to be plated other than by a subscriber, and that no liquor was to be sold on the course other than by a subscriber.



Field on Dunstable Downs which just might have been the venue for Dunstable Races

COCK FIGHT

An added inducement to persuade the sporting gentry to come to Dunstable was the announcement that “a Main of Cocks will be fought at the White Hart each morning of the races”.

A main was a match between fighting cocks. The White Hart, in those days, was the building now occupied by the Nationwide Building Society (the former Charlie Cole bicycle shop). The White Hart moved to new premises almost next door in 1785.

GODOLPHIN ARABIAN

The Oxford Journal published reports and results from Dunstable races on June 9 1753. A plate of £50 was won by the Earl of March’s bay horse Wanton in a race where another horse named True Blue ran out of the course, galloping on the wrong side of the post. The Earl of March won a plate of £50 the following day with a grey horse named Blossom, a five-year-old “got by the Godolphin Arabian”. (The Godolphin Arabian (c. 1724 – 1753), was one of three stallions from which modern racehorses are descended. His best-known owner was Francis, Second Earl of Godolphin).



Godolphin Arabian

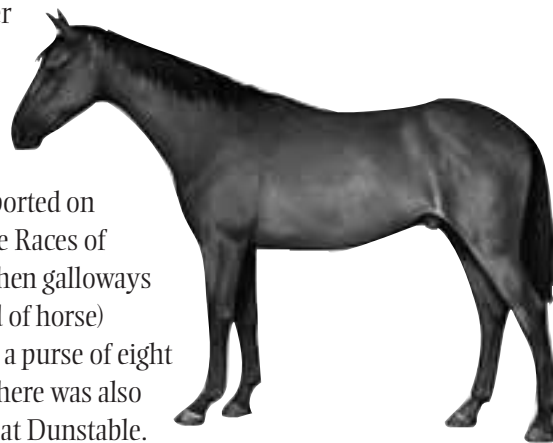
On June 29 1754 the paper carried further reports and results from Dunstable races.

Whether the Downs continued to be the venue for horse racing, or whether the events were held elsewhere in the town is so far unclear, because reports published later, in the 1800s, simply refer to “Dunstable Races”.

For instance, in August 1826 the Morning Post reported that the sweepstake at Dunstable Races had been won by Mr Crowder’s Phoenix.

GALLOWAYS

On September 4, 1853, Bells Life of London and Sporting Chronicle reported on the Dunstable Races of August 31 when galloways (a stout breed of horse) competed for a purse of eight sovereigns. There was also a hurdle race at Dunstable.



A Galloway horse

The same paper, in 1854, reported on races run over a mile and a half at Dunstable where the stewards were Charles Hamilton Esq and Captain Nightingale, and the clerk of the course was Mr Oldacre.

Not to be confused with “Dunstable races” are the point-to-point jump races held by Hertfordshire Hunt at Sewell, just outside the town, in the early 1900s. Photographs exist of people standing beside the course, and walking back to Dunstable along the chalk cutting.

The hunt for horse-race references in Dunstable uncovered another sporting event which was so peculiar that it rated a mention in the Ipswich Journal on May 23 1789.

FOOTBALL MATCH

It said: “Wednesday morning, an extraordinary match of football took place at Dunstable Downs. A young gentleman took the hill for 200 guineas, against 11 of the best foot-ballers in the county, which was decided in his favour, after a contest of four hours and a half.”

Perhaps his goalposts were on top of the hill!

John Buckledee

Victorian Stop Press



Occasionally articles appear in the Victorian copies of the *Dunstable Gazette* about animals. Usually they are run away horses, lost dogs or theft of various forms of livestock. But a few are more interesting and amusing.

Our mailmen will never have the problem some of their counterparts had to face.

1899 RUNAWAY MAIL HORSE

On Saturday night, while the mail-carts were being laden, one of the horses suddenly bolted down the High Street. Some young fellows, who were walking up the street, immediately turned and set off in pursuit. Before the horse had got any considerable distance, Alfred Ives pluckily stopped it, fortunately before any damage was done.

NASTY SHOCK

Health and Safety was unheard of or Mr William Hyde would never have been allowed to issue the following Warning to Trespassers in 1881.

I beg to give notice that newly invented powerful detonators are freely used at night at the Princes Street Poultry Yard and trespassers go there at their certain peril.

BLACK-FACED SHEEP

Town Criers look resplendent in their smart uniforms but there was a down side to ours as he was also responsible for the Town Pound. Found Straying in Dunstable on Monday November 2 1885, 4 black-faced sheep. The owner can have them, on applying to the Town Crier at Dunstable, by describing them and paying expenses.

BULLOCKS!

Market day had its fair share of noise and danger as there are several references to bullocks running amok.

In 1872 Miss Hopkins was attacked and knocked beneath a stall which fortunately fell between her and the bullock thus saving her from further harm. She was badly bruised but her two friends escaped unscathed. The enraged animal continued to attack passersby and it was with great difficulty that it was finally captured and later shot. At the next council meeting the council discussed the problem of cattle being loose on the Square. For the safety of the public Mr Southam was requested to put down posts and a rope to confine the animals during the sale. A few still managed to escape and cause havoc though.

DEER OH DEER!

Several times the hounds belonging to Baron Rothschild chased a stag into the High Street. In 1859 one stag even raced up Albion Street where it proceeded to jump easily over fences into gardens.

Finally it sought shelter between a pile of bricks and a wagon. Mr T Johnson, seeing a favourable opportunity jumped into the wagon and seized it by the horns. Additional help was given and the stag was captured and housed in the stable of Doctor Joseph Farr who seemed both proud and pleased with his visitor.

A JUMBO BREAK-IN

But no one could have been more shocked than Mr Cheshire of Church Street as one night in 1881 he had the impression that someone was breaking into his house. Cautiously going down stairs he was astonished to see an elephant's trunk poking through the pantry window. The largest elephant in a visiting circus, although declared blind by his keeper, had managed to get loose and find its way to the rear of Mr Cheshire's house. The pantry window proved no problem to the animal who consumed a pudding, but a joint of meat was more difficult and slipped from its grasp causing the noise which had aroused the household. The keeper quickly found his charge and led him away.

COW IN THE HOUSE

On 7 October 1874 a most amusing incident was reported and as the writer paints a very clear picture, it is reproduced here as it appeared in the paper:

On the last evening about 2 pm, our townsman Mr Ayre of Church Street, received a visit from a cow which was so totally unexpected, that not the slightest preparation had been made for her reception, and even now the object of the visit or intrusion as some people jeeringly call it has not been fairly made out. It was we believe thought at first that the stranger required a little of the "staff of life", but as she walked past the shop into the parlour and stayed there some minutes, its more than likely that her object was to have a tune on the harmonica. Be that as it may, as soon as her ladyship had reached the parlour a crowd of people had collected outside, anxiously expecting her exit, which was not easily brought about. After about quarter of an hour had lapsed, and all attempts by means of ropes to make the stranger walk out backwards had significantly failed, she was induced by sundry operation with sticks and high words to walk out the other way. No sooner was her head seen coming gracefully out of the door than a general stampede took place and people of all sorts and sizes began to run in all directions. Many disappeared suddenly inside the neighbouring houses, the doors of which were slammed to with great emphasis, and it is reported that some people ran round the corner who never ran before. As the visitor did no damage at all, we are authorised to state that the police will not be summoning her before the mayor unless the act be repeated.

Rita Swift

History of the settlement of Dunstable in Canada

Wendy Mills, a former Mayor of Dunstable, has donated to the Society, a copy of the history of the settlement of Dunstable in Canada, which was given to her when she visited Dunstable School there recently. It is available for loan from the History Room at Priory House to any members who may be interested in reading it.

Greeting New Members

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

Brenda Brewer

Michael Cain

Judy Page

Peter Hoare

Walter Payne

OUT OF HOURS



I have in my possession a letter which mentions a local book called 'Out Of Office Hours'. It was written in the house in which I live. If you know about it, or have a copy, I would be interested to hear from you

Hillside,
Gt. Northern Rd
Dunstable
Dec. 8th 1916

To the Right Worshipful, The Mayor of Dunstable, Alderman E Franklin,

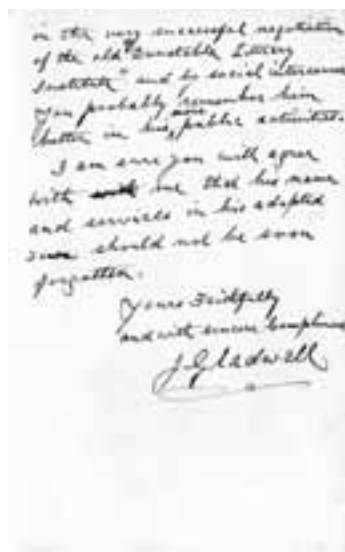
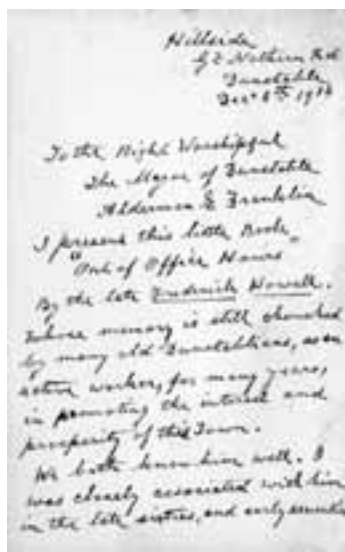
I present this little book, 'Out Of Office Hours', by the late Frederick Howell, whose memory is still cherished by many old Dunstablians, as an active worker, for many years, in promoting the interest and prosperity of this town.

We both knew him well. I was closely associated with him in the late sixties, and early seventies in the very successful negotiation of the old 'Dunstable Literary Institute' and by social intercourse. You probably remember him better in his more public activities.

I am sure you will agree with me that his name and services in his adopted Town should not be soon forgotten.

Yours faithfully and with sincere compliments,

J Gladwell



James Gladwell's letter

JAMES GLADWELL

I have done some research into the author of this letter and the person he is writing about.

James Gladwell was born in Barking, near Needham Market, Suffolk in 1839 and so was about 77 when he wrote the letter. The 1841 census shows him living in Barking with his parents, George and Sarah and his siblings Frederick who is 11, Sarah 10, Henry 7 and Roseanna 6. George is listed as a 'thatcher'. Two doors down the road lived Mark Woollard 26, with 20 year old Elizabeth, presumably his wife, and six months old Charles. Mark is recorded as an 'agricultural worker'. In ten years time, Mark is married to Sarah and their household consists of Roseanna and James Gladwell as well as Charles, Henry and Ellen Woollard. Sarah is now listed as 'shopkeeper'.

1861

In 1861 James is living in Shoreditch with his sisters, Sarah Ann and Roseanna. Sarah is in the jewellery business and the two other children are in the hat manufacturing trade. There is a visitor, William F McBrain, who is listed as 'painter and decorator'. Ten years later James is married to Annie Jane from Haddenham near Aylesbury. They have three children, Sydney W 2, Percy G 1 and Chricton J 1 month, all born in Dunstable. They are living at 81 Victoria Street, Dunstable. James is recorded as 'Leghorn hat Manufacturer'. No. 81 is now 153.

1881

In the 1881 census, James and Annie are living at 26 John Street, Luton. James is a 'Straw Hat Manufacturer', employing over 100 people. The Gladwells now have 7 children. The youngest four are Ernest 6, Francis, 5, Agnes E 3 and Montague E 5 months, all born in Luton. They have a 'domestic servant' Elizabeth Router, 31, who was born in Chalton. Ten years later, the family is at the same address. James is a 'Straw Hat and Bonnet Manufacturer', Percy is working in the same trade, Ernest is a 'Banker's clerk', Chricton is not listed, Francis is a 'Tea Broker's clerk', Agnes and Montague are 'scholars' There is an additional child, Reginald J 12 who was not listed ten years earlier as well as Guy A who is 3.

1901

In 1901 the Gladwells are living at 17 Moor Street, Luton, and the household is reduced to four people. James is a 'Straw Hat Manufacturer', Annie is now 54, Percy is an 'Assistant Manager', possibly at his father's factory and Guy, 13 is a 'scholar'. Ten years later James and Annie are the only residents of my current home. He is listed as 'Retired Straw Hat Manufacturer'. In the 1922 and 1924 town directories the house is owned by Annie Jane Gladwell.

FREDERICK HOWELL

Frederick Howell was born in Frant, near Royal Tunbridge Wells. In the 1871 census it is listed as being in Sussex while in 1881 it is said to be in Kent. He was born about 1844. In 1861 he is lodging with Charles Rutherford, an 'accountant in an insurance office' while James is listed as 'clerk in an insurance office. They are living in Oakley Road, Islington. Ten years later Frederick, now a 'Bank Manager' is married to Dora and they have a 1 year old daughter, Mildred. They are living at 78 High Street North, Dunstable, in The Bank House. There is a lodger, Ambrose Theobald who is a 'Bank Assistant' as well as Jane Bird, 'cook' and Mary Bidgood, 'nursemaid'. They are two doors away from George Scroggs at the Post Office.

In 1881 they are still at the same address and there are five extra children, Beatrice, Gwendoline, Mabel, Rupert and Dorothy. Frederick's mother, Sarah, is now living with them. Jane Bird is still 'cook' while the 'nursemaid is Agnes Maldon. Ten years later the family has moved to Marlborough Road, Wanstead in Essex. Frederick has gone into business and his wife is an 'agent'. There are three more children, Marjorie, Kenneth and Donald. All nine children were born in Dunstable. Jane Bird is still with them and is joined by Jane Bush. Mildred has left home and Gwendoline is a 'dress maker'.

In 1901 Dora Howell is recorded as being a 'widow'. Her daughters Marjorie and Dorothy are still with her, as is Jane Bird. It is likely that Frederick died some 20 years before the letter was written.

Hugh Garrod

Harlington Manor Visit



On Friday, 5th June, the Society arranged a visit to Harlington Manor which 18 people went on.

This was preceded by lunch at the Carpenter's Arms and then a leisurely stroll down the road to the Manor. The house is privately owned by Mr. David Blakeman and can only be visited by special arrangement. David led the tour himself showing the group not only into the more general areas of the building but also into their personal rooms as well. One even contained their teenage daughter in bed revising for her 'A' Levels!

JOHN BUNYAN AND EDMUND WINGATE

The Manor is absolutely fascinating with rooms dating from different eras and sympathetically restored according to their age. This is where John Bunyan, author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, was interrogated and briefly imprisoned and was also the home of Edmund Wingate, the mathematician.

David was a very enthusiastic host who took great delight in sharing the history of the building with everyone. The tour was



Members of the Society outside the Manor

followed by a splendid afternoon tea, provided by his wife, in the beautiful garden. It was unanimously agreed that it had been a very interesting and enjoyable outing.

Sue Turner

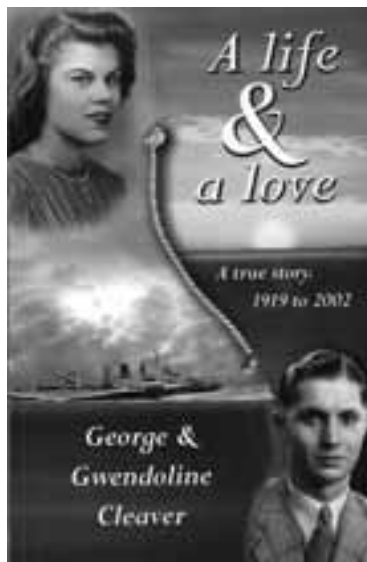
Memories of old Dunstable



John Buckledee is collecting local memories of life in Dunstable and District. You can contact him on 01582 703107 (answerphone).

A LIFE & A LOVE BY GEORGE CLEAVER

History society member Les Marsh has loaned me a book called *A Life & A Love* by George Cleaver, who spent his early life in Dunstable before emigrating to Australia. George lived, as a boy, in the rather dilapidated cottages which once stood in Church Street next to the Ladies Lodge. The book contains a wealth of memories of old Dunstable and its shops. And George, born in 1919, tells many a story about the folk who were his neighbours.



Cover of 'A Life & A Love' book

A CHIMNEY SWEEP NAMED JACK TILCOCK

One was a chimney sweep named Jack Tilcock who augmented his income by collecting herbs for Marchants, the chemists in High Street North, who would buy poppy petals and elderberries. Jack used to hang around by a lamp post near the car park of the Royal Oak (the pub which once stood opposite the Priory Road junction) and sing his drunken heart out every weekend night, eventually stumbling exhausted into his house.

There was a lamp lighter, a quiet man who would light the street lamps every evening and put them out again early in the morning using a long pole with a hook on the end.

Another occupant was named Matty Far who used to get drunk every weekend and kick his wife out of the house. George never knew where she went but she was always back in the mornings.

DOBBIN HOLT

Near the Royal Oak was the house of Dobbin Holt, down in a hollow with old fruit trees in the garden. Sometimes they were festooned with pheasants hanging by their legs for, among other things, he was a game dealer and they were for sale at three shillings and sixpence a brace. Dobbin, writes George Cleaver, was a big man who did little else but go shooting with his friend Dumbleton, who lived next door, and drink whisky in the pubs.



Dobbin Holt

Perhaps George's memories were of Dobbin in his later days – he had been a borough councillor and an elaborate headstone once marked Dobbin's grave at Dunstable Cemetery. There was considerable anger locally when this was badly damaged by vandals.

continued overleaf

Memories of old Dunstable continued



GEORGE'S FATHER

Drink also dominated the life of George's father, who was deeply affected by his experiences during the Great War. He was barred from many of the town's pubs, including the Nag's Head where he had once caused havoc by throwing a live goose over the bar. He was a very strong man, working for years in the lime kilns on Blow's Downs, and was part of the team which carried out the dangerous job of extending the well, presumably at Half Moon Hill, which provided the town's drinking water. They were lowered in down in a bucket and dug an extra tunnel at right angles to the main shaft.



Worthington G Smith standing in a clay pit at Caddington

WORTHINGTON GEORGE SMITH'S CATALOGUE

Dr Peter Hoare is a visiting academic attached to the British Museum and an Associate Member of the Pathways to Ancient Britain Project.

He tells us that the British Museum is currently transcribing Worthington George Smith's catalogue of his archaeological finds they hold. Every page has been scanned and the transcribing is being carried out via what is called the crowd-sourcing scheme, each item being entered on the computer by three different people, as a form of proof-reading.

Once the work is complete, Dr Hoare hopes to collaborate with one of the project leaders to illustrate the journeys WGS undertook in the Dunstable area and further afield in his search for artefacts. As history society members well know, he covered vast distances, mainly on foot.

SOUTH BEDS FARM PRODUCE CO

Dr Hoare was born at 7 Victoria Street, Dunstable, and we learned about his WGS connection after being asked to provide information about the South Beds Farm Produce Co whose office was at that address. Dr Hoare owns a picture of the Produce Company's van which has a reference to National Mark Eggs: a grading system which was introduced in 1928. We showed the photo to exhibitors at the Dunstable Vintage Motor Show in Priory Gardens in June, where enthusiasts identified the van as a Model T Ford and remarked on its wooden wheels, cycle-style mudguards and split-window windscreen. But so far no information about the Produce Company. Do any of our members know?

THE GREAT SNOWSTORM OF 1881

A graphic description of adventures in Dunstable during the great snowstorm of 1881 has emerged from documents kept by the Chiltern Lodge of the Freemasons and shown to me by Terry Ogden, a past master of the lodge.

The masons and a goodly number of guests had enjoyed a convivial evening at a banquet at the Sugar Loaf Hotel. James Gladwell recorded what happened next:

"We plunged, through a blizzard of snow, into the big omnibus which, with the utmost difficulty, ploughed along the High Street and down Church Street to the railway station.

"There we found all hands at work endeavouring to extricate an engine which had embedded itself in a snowdrift on the north side of the station. Luckily, there was a good fire blazing in the waiting room, which proved indeed a 'waiting room' for it was more than an hour past midnight before the officials were ready to start to Luton.

"We moved off bravely and having some 'bon vivants' among us we soon became quite jovial again. But, horrors, the train was slackening; she stopped. Down went the windows, and out went our heads. What's the matter now, we cried. 'Can't get through,' a voice replied. 'Snowed up'. 'Push back again,' we cried. No answer, all was silent as the tomb save for the howling of the wind.

"The snow was falling thicker and faster and we were glad to draw in our heads, wrap ourselves up as comfortably as we could, and WAIT.

"And wait we did, two hours, which seemed like 22 hours.

"At last came sounds from the engine, a tremendous motion of the carriages, and slowly but surely we were brought back again to the platform at Dunstable.

"Out we jumped, as well as our stiffened joints would permit, happy to find a good fire still blazing in the waiting room. There too stood a constable, who seemed to regard that as the pleasantest spot on his beat that night.

"He produced from, I know not where, a bountiful supply of whatever kind of refreshment we asked him for; he even obtained for us a pack of cards, which revived our joviality until about four o'clock. Then we were informed that the Luton stationmaster had arrived, and that the officials were ready to make another effort to get through to Luton. Some of us, however, were skeptical as to the result and preferred not to venture. Others risked the chances and started a second time, but only to repeat the same experience through which we had already passed several hours previously.



The South Beds. Farm Produce Company Model T van complete with wooden wheels
continued overleaf

Memories of old Dunstable continued



“It was ten o’clock in the morning before they were able to push back to the station again. Meanwhile, those of us who had remained solaced ourselves with our cards, whisky, tobacco and a good fire until eight o’clock when we resolved to trudge back through the deep snow to the Sugar Loaf where we received a hospitable reception, refreshed ourselves and spent the remainder of an enjoyable morning in the billiard room.

“The whole town was soon acquainted with our predicament and the Sugar Loaf became the scene of considerable excitement.”

THE ALLISONS

The queries which arrive at the history society are many and varied, but a message to our treasurer, Cynthia Turvey, was particularly interesting. This was from John Allison, who was part of the singing duo The Allisons who performed at the California Ballroom on March 3 1961.

It was, in fact, their first ballroom date and John wanted to get in touch with Diane Ilka, who wrote the best-selling book about the Dunstable venue – the Cali Album. Cynthia was able to provide Diane’s address.

The Allisons represented Britain in the Eurovision Song Contest in 1961 with a number called Are You Sure which came second in the competition but which went on to become an enormous best-seller. They appeared at the Cali just a few days after appearing in the contest’s British heat.

John’s singing partner, Bob Day, died in 2014 from Motor Neuron disease.



The Allisons

HUSH WAAC

Tina Pittock, curator of the Royal Signals Museum, is trying to gather information about Miss A.M. Thring who was a “Hush WAAC”, a nickname given to the servicewomen at St Omer, France, who decoded German wireless messages during the First World War.

The Medal Rolls at the National Archives give her Christian names as Elsie Margaret. She was Gazetted on September 12 1917 as Assistant Administrator (2nd Lieutenant) and was one of six WAACs who went to St Omer in September 1917.

An Elsie Margaret Thring died in 1965 at Salisbury Hospital on September 30 1965 when her address was given as Old Quarry Church Street, Keinton Mandeville, Somerset.

She was undoubtedly the daughter of the headmaster of Dunstable Grammar School, whose son Ashton died while serving in the war.

Any information from members about Elsie would be gratefully received. Elsie’s service records were lost during the bombing in the Second World War.

PRIVATE JOHN DALY

Michael Newberry is trying to trace details of Private John Daly, a Waterlow’s employee who was killed in the First World War. This is another example of service records being destroyed in the blitz.

John Daly worked at the Finsbury factory of Waterlow’s so we can’t find his name in any of our Dunstable material. But our search has led us to try to locate the present whereabouts of the Waterlow’s Dunstable war memorial. This was transferred to the former Christ Church in High Street North.



From left: David Mills, secretary of FordSport; Gordon Stewart, manager of Lumo Cars; Mrs. Bette Hill; Graham Hill and Chris Courtenay, secretary of Bedfordshire FordSport Club

GRAHAM HILL

Not all the queries to the history society go so far back. We were asked to trace details of a visit to Dunstable by racing driver Graham Hill. That involved an eye-watering search through Gazette microfilms, but the paper of April 10 1970 provided the answer: he was the VIP guest at the launch of a FordSport centre at Lumo Cars Ltd in London Road, Dunstable – now Hartwell Ford.

He had to be chauffeur-driven to the event because he was still recovering from injuries received in a high-speed racing crash.

He would have been no stranger to Dunstable: a photo exists of him driving in an auto cross time trial over the gliding club field in September 1954 when he was in his first year in motorsport.

MAP OF THE MANOR OF TODDINGTON

John Little and Alan Higgs have been instrumental in recreating images of the 1581 map of the Manor of Toddington.

The map, measuring about 8ft x 10ft, hung in Toddington Manor until it was cut up into twenty sections and stored in an oak case at the British Museum. Now it has been digitally reassembled and the results were on display last March at the Learning Zone at Toddington Garden Centre.

John Buckledee