

NEWSLETTER

Dunstable & District Local History Society
No. 45 February 2016



Chairman's Notes

This is advance warning that the History Society's committee, reluctantly, will ask members at the annual meeting in March to agree to an increase in our annual subscription fee.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The recommendation will be that this is raised from £6 to £8, to take effect from January next year.

The money you pay in subs should cover the day-to-day bills for the hire of the Methodist Church Hall, the expenses charged by some of our visiting speakers, the printing of our newsletter, the fee for our place on the website, plus insurance, postage, stationery and some other sundry items.

The charges we make for other events, such as our three summer outings and the special Christmas meeting, are kept as low as possible with the aim of breaking even on these.

Happily, we have a thriving membership with large audiences at most of our meetings (in fact, it was quite a problem to fit everyone in at our January meeting) and it is because we have so many members to share the costs that we are able to keep subscription rates so low. I hope you think it is good value!

The bills for the equipment, furnishings and technology at our research room in Priory House, plus the expenses involved in mounting various exhibitions, are met from a separate account which is in a healthy state after receiving some one-off donations. And we have a book fund set aside to pay for special publications in the future.

But the membership subscriptions this year will not cover our routine running costs, which have been steadily rising, and this year we will have to dip into our reserves to pay the difference. Obviously, this cannot continue.

OUR TREASURER

Your committee was most dismayed to hear from our treasurer, Cynthia Turvey, that she wishes to step down from that position. Cynthia is a bedrock of the society, a treasure as well as a treasurer, and has been tackling the complicated matter of our accounts ever since she was elected some 16 years ago to take over from



An attractive illuminated certificate of appreciation presented by the old Dunstable Literary and Scientific Society to its secretary, W. Pitkin, was found by Margaret Arnold of Hampshire behind her parents' framed wedding photo. They lived at the time of their marriage in 1941 at York House, 3 Great Northern Road, but were not related to Mr Pitkin so why the certificate was preserved there is a bit of a mystery. Mrs Arnold sent the certificate to the society and we in turn have passed it on to one of our members, Pat Heath (nee Pitkin) who is pictured here. The beautiful art work for the certificate was created by F.A. Fowler, famous for his drawings of the Priory Church.

Bernard Stevens. She has been doing much more than dealing with the invoices...she has also been organising the distribution of the newsletters and membership cards, which in itself takes up a good deal of time.

Our plan, once the society has elected a new treasurer, is to split the jobs somewhat. If all goes well at the annual meeting we aim to create a new position of membership secretary, and Cynthia would be happy to continue in that role.

REFRESHMENTS

Meanwhile, Cynthia's husband Trevor has been organising tea, coffee and biscuits at the end of our monthly meetings, with the help of Martin Nye and other volunteers. This has given everyone an excuse to linger for conversations in the hall after the main event and have more of a chance to get to know their fellow members. Thanks also to those people who stay behind to help restack all those chairs!

TIME LINE

Rita Swift, who produces (among many other things) the Time Line feature on our website, broke her arm in an accident early in January, which has brought to a temporary halt all those long walks with her dog. So, stuck at home, she has been delving into numerous reference books and finding pages of further entries to add to the ongoing story of Dunstable. These will be on-line soon.

There have been a number of requests, particularly from schools, for the Time Line to appear in a handy booklet form as well as on the website. So that's what we aim to do. In this instance, we are intending to run off, inexpensively, a small number of copies on a computer so that we can easily add further entries when more information is discovered, and reprint according to demand.

If you can add to the Time Line store of knowledge, please get in contact. One gap, for instance, is the arrival and departure of all sorts of enterprises on the Woodside industrial estate. In 100 years time (who knows?) researchers might be as thoroughly intrigued and puzzled about what has been happening there as we are about the pop explosion in Dunstable in the 1970s.

John Buckledee

The Hamblings of Dunstable



William James Hambling, Master of Chew's Charity School from 1856 to 1898, was born in Snape, Suffolk, on 27th February, 1831.

Trained at Cheltenham Education College, he became a churchwarden at the Priory Church when he came to the town, he also founded the Dunstable Rifle Corps, was Colonel of the Bedfordshire Volunteers, a magistrate and Mayor of Dunstable in 1880/2 and 1887/9 and became president of the Dunstable Institute. Information about him and his family can be found in many sources including Census returns.

He was the third of eight children born to Cotton and Amelia Hambling, nee Garrod, in Rendham, Suffolk, his father being a farmer.

In 1851 he was at Cheltenham Education College in the St. Paul's district of the town.

MARRIES ELIZABETH WOODRUFF ADAMS

On 2nd July, 1853 he married Elizabeth Woodruff Adams in Durrington, Wiltshire. He is described as 'School Master' and his bride as 'School Mistress'. They had eight children, Elizabeth Mary 1855, William John Cotton 1855 (died 1857), Henry Herbert 1857, Robert Woodruff 1859, Charlotte Amelia 1861, William David 1863, Catherine Isabella 1865 and John Cotton 1867.

APPOINTED MASTER OF CHEW'S CHARITY SCHOOL

In 1856 William James was appointed Master of Chew's Charity School, at the age of 25. He died in post 42 years later. He joined the Bedfordshire Volunteer Brigade in 1859 as a private. While on exercise at Aldershot he met 'The Emperor of Germany', Kaiser Bill. He was promoted to Major in 1893 and retired with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel in 1895.

In 1861 William Hambling was living in 'High Street' Dunstable, a Schoolmaster, with his first four children and his sister, also called Charlotte Amelia. The eldest girl was born in Islington but the other three children in Dunstable.

Elizabeth, his wife, died at Kelsale in June 1867, aged 33, possibly in childbirth. In that year, Henry Herbert becomes manager at the Kilburn branch of the London and South-West Bank.

The 1870 survey of education in Dunstable records 54 free boys at the Endowed School (Chew's), 301 boys and 159 girls at the (Ashton) Elementary schools while the Wesleyan School had 228 boys and 117 Infants. Elizabeth Mary Hambling, his daughter, died on 1st August 1870.

In 1871 William James was recorded as living in Chew's House with his four sons, a daughter, his sister Charlotte, who was his housekeeper, a nephew, a boarding pupil and a domestic servant.



William James Hambling

JP AND ALDERMAN

William James was elected to the Borough Council in 1874, became a JP in 1879, was made an alderman in 1889 and an alderman of the County Council in 1892. He was an active member of every committee on which he served. His last campaign was to have the projected sewerage system placed on the far side of the 'Chalk Cutting'.

On 28th November, 1880, his daughter Charlotte Amelia married Charles Tyler Wilson. They lived in Poplar and had two boys and two girls. Charles died in 1888 and Charlotte in 1907.

In 1881 William James was living in the 'Charity School' and recorded as 'Schoolmaster, Mayor of Dunstable'. With him are his three youngest children and a domestic servant.

Henry Herbert married Thirza Twigg on 2nd November, 1882, at St John the Evangelist, Ladbroke Grove. They had two sons, Herbert Guy Musgrave, born 12th August 1883 and died 13th February 1966 and William Claude 1885 to 1914. Herbert Guy served in the Canadian Infantry in WWI.

In 1890 Robert Woodruff, third child of William and Elizabeth, married Fanny Button, the fourth of six children who were born in Caistor, Lincolnshire. They had five children, Edith 1892, Robert Lionel 1893, Norah 1898, William 1899 and Eric 1901.

In 1891 William James was living at 'Chew's Foundation School and recorded as 'JP, Schoolmaster'. With him are two sons and three visitors who are 'living on own means'.

HAMBLING APPLE

Besides all this, he propagated a variety of cooking apple, which was named after him. Hambling apples were first registered in 1894. They are large yellow apples, slightly acidic, can be picked in mid October and can be stored for use between November and March. Hambling apple trees and other local fruit trees have recently been planted in public spaces in Dunstable.



Hambling apple trees in Chew's House garden

On 15th February, 1891 John Cotton married Mary Jane Bowden at St. James, Clerkenwell. He died on 9th November the following year. Thirza, wife of Henry Herbert, died in Dunstable on 8th July 1891. On 15th December, 1897 William David married Beatrice Ida Montague Collings at Christ Church, Streatham Hill. Catherine Isabella married Charles Louis Toyne in 1893.

DIES IN DUNSTABLE AGED 67



William James Hambling's gravestone in Dunstable Cemetery

William James Hambling died in Dunstable in the early hours of Sunday 25th September, 1898, aged 67. His sudden illness was attended by Dr Morcom. His funeral, in the afternoon of the following Thursday, was a magnificent event. All the shops were shut and flags flew at half mast. The Priory Church was packed. The Rector, Revd J H Macaulay, led the service and the Mayor, F T

Garrett, led the tributes. The Volunteers, led by Sergeant-Instructor Sheppard and Sergeant E Odell, formed the honour guard at the church and at the cemetery. In the church the coffin was covered by the medieval Fayrey Pall. All his family were present. The Chew's Governors were Benjamin Bennett, W H Derbyshire, Revd T Green, A E Langridge and T Burch. His favourite hymn 'Abide With Me' was sung. The procession to the cemetery was led by the Volunteers, followed by the clergy and choir, the hearse, six mourning carriages, private carriages, the Mayor and Corporation, magistrates, representatives of the County Council, Chew's Governors, boys past and present, the Unionist Club, the Friendly Societies and lastly the general public.

His gravestone, which is still standing, records his details, as well as those of his wife, his eldest daughter Elizabeth Mary and his mother. Nearby are memorials of John Cotton Hambling and Thirza, wife of Henry Herbert Hambling.

In 1901 William David Hambling and his wife Beatrice were living in Cardiff Grove, Luton, with their two children, Lillian and William Gilbert.

DUNSTABLE, ALBERTA

Robert Woodruff and his family emigrated to Canada. They sailed on the SS Victoria, leaving Liverpool on 1st April 1905. They eventually arrived in Alberta and were part of a community of five farms north of Edmonton. The farmers decided that this settlement should have a name. Each family wrote the place they came from in England and put the pieces of paper in a hat. The name pulled out was 'Dunstable'. The first school building was opened on 8th July 1907 and had 21 pupils. In 1914 a new school was needed as the population had increased rapidly. In 1948 the government of Alberta amalgamated several small rural schools on to one site, so a third, larger school was built in Dunstable. The church in Dunstable, Alberta, is dedicated to St. Peter. Fanny died in July 1914 and Robert Woodruff in 1930.

In 1906 William David and his two children emigrated to Edmonton West, In the Canadian census of 1916 they were still there. Robert Woodruff and his five children were visiting them. In 1911 William David and his family were living In Edmonton, Alberta. William David died in Vancouver on 24th October, 1936.

BARONETCY AT ROOKERY PARK

On May 1st, 1913 Henry Herbert journeyed to New York, sailing on the White Star's 'Olympic'. He was listed as 'bank manager'. At the beginning of WWI he bought Rookery Park in Yoxford, Suffolk. In 1917 he was knighted for his work on the Board of Directors of Barclays Bank and on 27th February, 1924 was awarded a Baronetcy for his contribution to the development of civil aviation in England. In the same year he was appointed High Sheriff of Suffolk. He died on 19th January, 1932 at Rookery Park. His picture is in the National Portrait Gallery.

The details of the Canadian part of the story are derived from 'Tales & Trails, Dunstable & Area History'. This was kindly donated to Dunstable and District Local History Society by Wendie Mills. The book, which is full of local reminiscences, can be consulted in the Society's Resources Room in Priory House.

Hugh Garrod

Blow's Downs Update

In my article about Blow's Downs in Newsletter No. 143, of February 2015, I stated how Worthington G Smith suggested that they might have been named after an 18th century tenant farmer from Poynters Farm.

It would appear the Blow family were in fact tenant farmers at Zouches Farm from the early 1700s until 1800. I have located a will for William Blow of 'Souchers' dated 11th December 1760 and also the will for John Blow dated 28th June 1800 who was the last of the family at Zouches. The parish records list that he was buried on 31st August 1800.

On Jeffery's 1765 map of Bedfordshire, the area had been called Souches Downs. However, the Caddington Enclosures Award map of 1798/1800, has three names describing the area: Gadlers Hill, Sanders Dell Hill and Stanners Hill. Moreover, John Blow was awarded two enclosures at the foot of the Downs. When the first Ordnance Survey of the area was made in 1880, the surveyors obviously used the name by which it was locally known at the time.

David Turner



The 1760 will of William Blow of Souchers John Blow's will dated 28th June 1800



Jeffery's 1765 Map of Bedfordshire showing 'Souches Downs'

Legless Lal

In the great days when Dunstable was a well-known stopping place for stagecoach travellers, one of the local characters was a man, born without legs, who was known as "Old Lal".

He got around in a wooden cart usually pulled by three foxhounds. And he achieved fame after he hit upon a notion for making money. Wearing a scarlet waistcoat and a velvet hunting cap, he used to offer to race stagecoaches down the Watling Street, often giving them a ten-minute start.

WAGER

Bored passengers on the coaches would bet on whether he would arrive first at the Sugar Loaf and there was much excitement as he tried to overtake them on the narrow road. If Lal and his hounds had been on form, passengers would arrive at Dunstable to find him already hopping on his hands at the hotel door while the dogs recovered their breath at the side of the road. The money he received from the amused travellers paid for his food, and he slept in the hay at the Sugar Loaf stables.

ROAD SCRAPINGS



Road Scrapings: Coaches and Coaching by Captain M.F. Haworth

There are various versions of the story, including one which was used on the label of a beer called Legless Lal's Winter Ale, once produced by Tring Brewery. This suggested that he had lost his legs in a coaching accident at Markyate, but the brewery's source for this tale is not too clear, and a more likely basis for details is a rare old book called Road Scrapings: Coaches and Coaching by Captain M.F. Haworth, which was published in 1882. The author had been given the details by Lal's only friend, Daniel Sleight, a horse-keeper at the Sugar Loaf, who also provided information about Lal's death

when the hounds ran off the road at a place near Dunstable called Pine Bottom, presumably chasing a fox. No-one knew what had happened until one of the dogs arrived by itself at the Sugar Loaf wearing a broken harness and led a search party back to the spot where Lal's body was found.

COACHING DAYS AND COACHING WAYS

Captain Haworth's anecdotes were mentioned briefly, six years later, in a better-known book called Coaching Days and Coaching Ways by W. Outram-Tristram which is beautifully illustrated and highly valued by collectors.

But Road Scrapings is much more interesting for those who wish to know more about Old Lal and about Dunstable in stagecoach times. It is worth quoting in some detail from the book, which mentions the horsepond which was once in the middle of the high street outside the Sugar Loaf, the Sugar Loaf "tap" which was the hotel's

Label for Tring Brewery's Legless Lal Winter Ale



down-market bar (now the home of the Ruby Tuesday fashion shop) and an area called Pine Bottom whose location is now a mystery.

Capt Haworth reported that Lal was an old pauper born without legs who had contrived to get built for himself a small simple carriage, or waggon, very light, having nothing but a board for the body, but fitted with springs, lamps, and all necessary appliances. To this cart he harnessed four fox-hounds, though to perform his quickest time he preferred three abreast. In this he could give fast stage-coaches a ten-minute start and beat them over a twelve-mile stage!

He carried nothing, and lived upon the alms of the coach passengers. His team were cleverly harnessed and well-matched in size and pace. His speed was terrific, and as he shot by a coach going ten or twelve miles an hour, he would give a slight cheer of encouragement to his team; but this was done in no spirit of insolence or defiance, merely to urge the hounds to their pace. This was before the legislature forbade the use of dogs as draught animals.

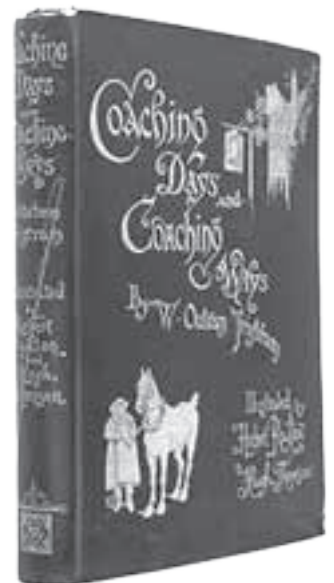
DANIEL SLEIGH

For many years Old Lal continued his amateur competition with some of the fastest and best-appointed coaches on the road. The Sugar Loaf at Dunstable was his favourite haven of rest. He had selected it (wrote Capt Haworth) in consequence of a friendship he had formed with Daniel Sleight, a double-ground horsekeeper, and the only human being who was in any way enlightened as to the worldly affairs of this poor legless beggar.

He became Old Lal's banker, sworn to secrecy.

Capt Haworth wrote: "Years went on, during which the glossy coats of Lal's team on a bright December morning - to say nothing of their condition - would have humbled the pride of some of the crack kennel huntsmen of the shires. When asked how he fed his hounds, he was wont to say: 'I never feed them at all. They know all the hog-tubs down the road, and it is hard if they can't satisfy themselves with somebody else's leavings.' Where they slept was another affair; but it would seem that they went out foraging in couples, as Old Lal declared that there were always two on duty with the waggon.

"When the poor old man required the use of his hands, it was a matter of some difficulty to keep his



Coaching Days and Coaching Ways by W. Outram-Tristram

perpendicular, his nether being shaped like the fag-end of a farthing rushlight; and he was constantly propped up against a wall to polish the brass fittings of his harness. In this particular his turnout did him infinite credit. Of course his most intimate, and indeed only friend, Dan Sleigh, supplied him with oil and rotten-stone when he quartered at Dunstable; and brass, when once cleaned and kept in daily use, does not require much elbow-grease.

NOTHING BUT WAISTCOATS

“Lal’s travelling attire was simplicity itself. His wardrobe consisted of nothing but waistcoats, and these garments, having no peg whereon to hang except the poor old man’s shoulders, he usually wore five or six, of various hues; the whole topped by a long scarlet livery waistcoat. These, with a spotted shawl round his neck, and an old velvet hunting-cap upon his head, completed his costume.

“The seat of Lal’s waggon was like an inverted beehive. It would have puzzled a man with legs to be the companion of his daily journeys. These generally consisted of an eight-mile stage and back, or, more frequently, two consecutive stages of eight and ten miles.”

RETURNING TO THE SUGAR LOAF

Capt Haworth recounted returning to the Sugar Loaf many years later: “Being somewhat sharp set, I determined to dine with the coach, though I should have to spend the evening in one of the dull-est provincial towns in England.

“I had brought a full load down. The coaches dined in those days upon the fat of the land. Always one hot joint (if not two) awaited the arrival of the coach, and the twenty minutes allotted for the refreshment of the inward passenger were thoroughly utilised.

“A boiled round of beef, a roast loin of pork, a roast aitchbone of beef, and a boiled hand of pork with peas-pudding and parsnips, a roast goose and a boiled leg of mutton, frequently composed a menu well calculated to amuse a hungry passenger for the short space allotted him.

“The repast concluded and the coach reloaded, I watched her ascend the hill at a steady jog till she became a mere black spot in the road. I then directed my steps to the bottom of the long range of red-brick buildings used as coach-stables, where I found old Daniel Sleigh still busily engaged in what he called ‘Setting his ’osses fair’.

“This implied the washing legs, drying flanks, and rubbing heads and ears of the team I had brought in half-an-hour ago...”

OLD-FASHIONED HORSEKEEPER

“Dan Sleigh was a specimen of the old-fashioned horsekeeper, a race which has now become obsolete. He had lived with Mrs. Nelson, who was one of the largest coach proprietors of the period, for thirty-nine years, always having charge of a double team. He rarely conversed with anybody but his ’osses,’ with whom, between the h-i-ss-e-s which accompanied every action of his life, he carried on a *sotto voce* conversation, asking questions as to what they did with them, at the other end, and agreeing with himself as to the iniquitous system of taking them out of the coach and riding them into the horsepond, then leaving them to dry whilst Ben Ball - the other horsekeeper - went round to the tap to have half-a-pint of beer.

“Many of his old friends had fallen victims to this cruel treatment. A recent case had occurred in the death of old Blind Sal, who had worked over the same ground for thirteen years, and never required a hand put to her, either from the stable to the coach or from the coach to the stable. She caught a chill in the horsepond, and died of acute inflammation.

“When I interrupted old Dan he was just ‘hissing’ out his final touches, and beginning to sponge the dirt off his harness. He recognised me with a smile - a shilling smile - and the following dialogue ensued.

“Daniel Sleigh was a man who, to use his own words, ‘kep’ ’isself to ’isself.” He never went to ‘no public ’ouses, nor yet no churches.’ He had never altered his time of getting up or going to bed for forty years; and, except when he lay in the ‘horsepital’ six weeks, through a kick from a young horse, he had never been beyond the smithy for eleven years. In any other grade of life he would have been a ‘recluse’.

“His personal appearance was not engaging—high cheek-bones, small gray sunken eyes, a large mouth, and long wiry neck, with broad shoulders, a little curved by the anno domini; clothed always in one style, namely, a long plush vest, which might have been blue once; a pair of drab nethers, well veneered with blacking and harness paste; from which was suspended a pair of black leather leggings, meeting some thin ankle-jacks. This, with a no-coloured string, which had once been a necktie, and a catskin cap, completed his attire.”

TROJAN

With the ostler was one of Lal’s old fox-hounds called Trojan, which led the captain to ask what had become of its owner.

“Oh, he’s left this two years or more,” said Daniel Sleigh.

“Whither is he gone?”

“I don’t know as he’s gone anywheres; they took him up to the churchyard to be left till called for. You see, sir, he never ’ad no kins nor directors (executors), or anybody as cared whether they ever see him again or not. He was an honest man though a wagrant; which he never robbed nobody, nor ever had any parish relief. What money he had I used to take care of for him; and when he went away he had a matter of sixteen pounds twelve and twopence, which I kep’ for him, only as he wanted now and again tenpence or a shilling to give a treat to his hounds.”

“Where did he die?”

“Ah, that’s what nobody knows nothing about. You see, sir, it was as this: He’d been on the road a-many years; but as he had no house in particular, nobody noticed when he came and when he went; when he laid here o’ nights, he used to sleep in the hay-house. The boys in the town would come down and harness up his team and set him fair for the day. He would go away with one of the up-coaches, and not be here again for a week (perhaps more).

WEATHER WAS TERRIBLE ROUGH

“Well, there was one time, it was two years ago last March, I hadn’t seen nothing of Lal not for three weeks or a month; the weather was terrible rough, there was snow and hicc; and the storm blowed down a-many big trees, and them as stood used to ’oller and grunt up in the Pine Bottom, so that I’ve heerd folks say that the fir-trees a-rubbing theirselves against one another, made noises a nights like a pack of hounds howling; and people were afraid to go down the Pine Bottom for weeks, and are now, for a matter of that. For they do say as poor Old Lal drives down there very often in the winter nights.

“Well, one Sunday afternoon I had just four-o’clocked my ’osses, and was a-popping a sack over my shoulders to go down to my cottage; it was sleeting and raining, and piercing cold, when who should I meet but poor old Trojan. He come up, rubbed my hand with his nose, and seemed quite silly with pleasure at seeing me. Now, though I’ve known him on and off this five or six year, I never knew him do the like before. He had a part of his harness on, which set me a thinking that he had cut and run, and perhaps left Old Lal in trouble.

continued overleaf

Legless Lal continued



"You see, sir, what a quiet sullen dog he is. Always like that, never moves hisself quickly. Still, when he come to me that Sunday, he was quite different; he kep' trotting along the road, and stopping a bit, then he'd look round, then come and lay hold of the sack and lead me along by it.

ROCKET

"The next day there was another of poor Old Lal's team come to our place (Rocket), and he had part of his breast-collar fastened to him. They were both pretty nigh starved to death. Trojan he went on with these manoeuvres, always trying to 'tice me down to the road leading to the Pine Bottom. Word was sent up and down the road by the guards and coachmen to inquire where Old Lal had been last seen. No tidings could be got, and strange tales got abroad. Some said the hounds had killed and eaten him! Some that he had been robbed and murdered! No tidings could be got. Still old Trojan seemed always to point the same way, and would look pleased and excited if I would only go a little way down the road towards the Pine Bottom with him.

MEN MADE A SEARCH

"Many men joined together and agreed to make a search, but nothing could be found in connection with the poor old man; so they gave it up. One morning after my coach had gone, I determined to follow old Trojan. The poor old dog was overjoyed, and led me right down to the Pine Bottom. I followed him pretty near a mile through the trees and that, until at last we come upon poor Old Lal's waggon. There was his seat, there was part of the harness, and there lay, stone-dead, one of the hounds.

"No trace could be found of the poor old man, and folks were more puzzled than ever about his whereabouts.

WAGGON SET FAST BETWEEN THE TREES

"It seemed as though the waggon had got set fast between the trees, and Trojan and Rocket had bitten themselves free, the third, a light-coloured one (a yellow one), had died.

"The finding of the waggon set all the country up to search for poor Old Lal, but it wasn't for more'n a week after finding the waggon,

that Trojan and Rocket pointed out by their action where to go and look for the poor old man. And he was found, but it was a long ways off from his waggon. There he lay, quite comfortable, by the side of a bank. The crowner said the hounds had given chase to something (maybe a fox crossed 'em) and clashed off the road, throw'd the poor old man off - perhaps stunned with the fall - and the hounds had persevered through the wood till the waggon got locked up in the trees. And there the poor things lay and would have died if they had not gnawed themselves out of their harness."

ROCKET LOVED THE CHASE

The fox-hound called Rocket was thought to be the instigator of Lal's death because he loved the chase and had once plunged into a mill pond taking with him Lal's waggon and the other two hounds.

"Poor Old Lal bobbed up and down like a fishing-float, always keeping his head up, though before he could be poked out he was as nigh drowned as possible. And this is what makes me think Rocket was the instigator of the poor old man's death. He must have caught a view of a fox, perhaps, or, at any rate, have crossed a line of scent, and bolted off the road and up through the wood, and after they had throwed the poor old man, continued the chase till the waggon got hung fast to a tree and tied them all up...

"They do say Lal is often heard 'ollering for help o' nights since he has been buried. There's a-many people won't go through the Pine Bottom after dark to save their lives."

John Buckledee

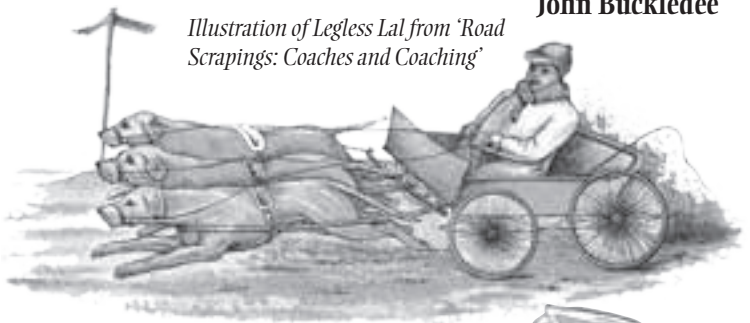


Illustration of Legless Lal from 'Road Scrapings: Coaches and Coaching'

The Butcher's Shop

If you have been along High Street South recently and had time to look up above the traffic, you may have noticed the scaffolding propping up No 4 in Middle Row and wondered what is going on.

Many of us remember it in the days when it was Mr Tilley's butcher's shop, with the sawdust on the floor.

Quite by chance, Margaret Hillyard of Derbyshire, who is the sister of the last owner of the shop, the late Mike Tilley, a former Mayor of Dunstable, has just sent us a whole pile of deeds. They tell us the story of the shop back to the middle of the 1700s and, to my surprise, it was a butcher's shop even then. The proprietor was George Roe (or Row) and the family were butchers there for generations, though latterly the descent was through the female side and the business was run by Eli Sibthorpe and his sons.

George Costin (another well-known local name) bought it in 1891 and then Harry and later his son Victor, ran the business from 1933. After the Tilleys left it became a baker's shop for a while - remember the sign that said 'Use Your Loaf?'

The building was old, of course, when the Roe family were there, and what its future holds we do not know. When we do know more about either its past or its future, we'll let you know. And if you know more than we do, then please let US know.

Joan Curran



In this photo of the shop you can see Mike, aged 5 or 6, peering out of the first-floor window together with his sister Peggy. Their dad, Victor Tilley, can be seen in the left-hand window.

Memories of old Dunstable



John Buckledee is collecting anecdotes and memories of old Dunstable. These days, most of them are arriving via the internet, but you can also contact John on 01582 703107.

LEMMY AND HAWKWIND

The death of Ian Kilmister just after Christmas brought a flurry of inquiries to the history society.

Ian, better known as Lemmy, was the front man in the heavy-metal band Motorhead. But his connection with Dunstable happened when he was in Hawkwind, which made a famous appearance at the Queensway Hall on July 7 1972 when Lemmy sang the band's hit single Silver Machine. People, unaware of the joke at the time, thought the song was about cosmic space travel but the lyrics are really about a silver racing bike!

The song's success meant that the band should have appeared on the BBC TV's Top of the Pops show. For various reasons this didn't happen, so the BBC took a clip from Hawkwind's Dunstable concert and transmitted this with the studio recording dubbed over the top. This clip, with its Queensway Hall Dunstable caption, can easily be seen via computer on You Tube, where it has been viewed millions of times.

Richard Walden, Dunstable's town clerk at the time, mentioned this during a talk to the History Society, pointing out that in terms of profile and publicity, it was probably the most famous event to have ever happened here. And we are not overlooking Henry VIII's "great matter" at the Priory Church!

A report of Richard's talk appeared, of course, in the Dunstable Gazette and from there it was copied on to our website. So all those people who Googled over Christmas for details of Lemmy Kilmister were led, eventually, to the article on www.dunstablehistory.com

QUEENSWAY HALL A CENTRE OF POP MUSIC

We didn't realise it at the time, but the Dunstable of the 1970s is now regarded as a pop music centre. The old Queensway Hall had a lot to do with it. Another example came to our website recently with a query about a photo purchased on e-bay which showed the Sex Pistols punk rock group backstage at the Queensway. The clue

about Dunstable came from a piece of what journalists call "copy paper" pasted on to the back of the picture, on which the photographer listed the names of the group, left to right, and added the message "Mike Glacken has more details".

LIFE WITH HORACE

The late Mike Glacken was a reporter who began his career on the Dunstable Gazette (memorably writing a long-running humorous column about the town called Life With Horace) and then going on to edit the Luton Pictorial before moving to the Luton Evening Post. So the photo was from the Evening Post archives, which have now been sold.

The Sex Pistols appeared at the Queensway in October 1976 when they were comparatively little-known (only about 80 people were there). The Post photographer had to ask them for their names and recorded that of the singer as "John Rotten".

WILLIS CYCLE AND MOTOR WORKS

On the subject of websites, we are grateful to Pauline Bearman for venturing on to Twitter to answer a flurry of queries there about the Willis Cycle and Motor Works at Flinte House in Dunstable. She directed readers to our 2008 Newsletter number 30 (readily available to view on our website) which contains a brief mention of the shop. Her advice was followed, and there were some appreciative comments from twitterers who discovered our newsletter for the first time. All good publicity for the society.

continued overleaf

Mother



As Mother's Day is very near we thought we would include this poem which appeared in the Dunstable Gazette on 31st October, 1928

In the old home far away,
Sit down and write the letter
You put off day by day.
Don't wait until her tired steps
Reach heaven's pearly gates
But show her that you think of her
Before it is too late.

If you've a tender message
Or a loving word to say,
Don't wait till you forget it,
But whisper it today.
Who knows what bitter memories
May haunt you if you wait.
So make your loved ones happy
Before it is too late.

The tender words unspoken,
The letter never sent.
The long forgotten messages
The wealth of love unspent.
For these some hearts are breaking
For these some loved ones wait.
So show them that you care for them,
Before it is too late.

Rita Swift

 *Sad Farewell* 

We are very sorry to announce
the sad loss of

Kathleen Adams John Rogers David Shipp

Greeting New Members

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

Stephen Allen	Gordon Bell
Andrew Dickens	Philip Gillam
Maureen Gorton	Richard Hornsey
Chris Kennett	Lorraine Stott

Memories of old Dunstable continued



Various local history books, particularly Bourne and Bred, have mentioned Flinte House and it has been featured numerous times in the Dunstable Gazette. For the record...Flinte House (sic) stood on the corner of Ashton Road and was so-called because its outer walls were studded with local flint stones. John Edward Willis set up in business here in about 1904, advertising himself as a cycle and motor engineer ("two minutes cycle ride from the L and NW railway station") and offering petrol, lubricants, an inspection pit and repairs of all kinds.

Mr Willis was a pioneer in the cycling world and made his first bike out of wood and old gun barrels in 1868 when he was aged 11. He became an apprentice to a nautical instrument-maker but spent his evenings making bicycles. He started doing that as a business in Bow before moving to Dunstable.

The building later became a clothes shop before being demolished and replaced by the Queen's Court flats.



Flinte House

DUNSTABLE HORSE RACES

The discovery that Dunstable Downs was a venue for horse racing in Georgian times, as recorded in the society's last newsletter, has led to some correspondence with Timothy Cox, who owns the Cox Library comprising around 15,000 books about horse racing.

He has found some Dunstable references from January and March 1756 in the Jockey Club Match Book, which is a hand-written summary of matches made for races to be run at Newmarket.

These record the details of races arranged by a group of noblemen at what was probably a convivial dinner party at a Dunstable venue, most likely the Sugar Loaf Hotel which was much-more upmarket than the normal coaching inn. Names of the gentry mentioned include Rockingham, Gower, Orford, Bathurst, Richard Vernon, March and Ruglen and Jenison Shafto. The entries include the side-bets struck on the results.

For instance, the entry at Dunstable on March 7 1756 says: "Mr Vernon's grey gelding Tickler is to run with Lord March's bay horse Fearnot, for forty pounds, over the Beacon Course at Newmarket on the Wednesday in October meeting 1756, carrying twelve stone each, to start at the usual hour..."

"Lord March bets Mr Vernon one hundred and ten, ten forfeit, on Fearnot. Lord March bets Lord Gower fifty on Fearnot."

DICK FRANCIS

All this is helping to give a reply to numerous queries about Dunstable races which arrive because Dunstable Racecourse is mentioned in

a number of Dick Francis books, particularly the thriller *Odds Against* which was dedicated to the Queen Mother on her 100th birthday. But Mr Francis, writing about present-day skulduggery, was aware of the libel laws and took care to avoid attributable references. His Dunstable sporting venue is therefore a complete invention.

PRIORY ARCHWAY

The renovation of the ancient archway at the entrance to Priory Gardens, next to the Priory Church, prompted the Dunstable Gazette to publish a drawing by historian Worthington Smith of another old structure in the gardens, which has now completely disappeared. It was particularly notable because it included a carving showing a knight wearing a helmet from Norman times.

By coincidence, Priory historian Hugh Garrod has discovered in the British Library a report sent to the Society of Antiquities by Worthington Smith in 1910 which includes a reference to a "rockery with sculptured stones in Dunstable".

This reads: "About 230 feet east of the church of St Peter on the boundary of a field known as the Priory field, there stands a piece of modern 'rockwork' with the rebuilt stones of a very small 14th century doorway.

"It is composed of flints, stones, sculptured and unsculptured, tiles and old wine and spirit bottles. 70 years ago (1840) walls connected with the rockwork, also containing sculptured stones, extended both north and south and formed a boundary wall to the field. The walls have been pulled down and all the stones used for the road. A fence and bushes have replaced the wall.

"Alterations are now going on and it is proposed to pull down the rockery. This would be no loss if some record is kept of the constituent stones. Three of the stones are parts of the Transitional Norman pillar shafts and probably belong to the west front of the church. They fit on to the capitals still on the building..."

"One of the most remarkable stones (in the archway) has been used as a kind of keystone and appears to be early Norman work, belonging to the now demolished oldest part of the church. It appears to represent the head of a Norman knight, with helmet and nose-piece, closely resembling representations of helmets seen on the Bayeux tapestry."

Worthington Smith then added a footnote: "During the last week of May (1910) this structure was totally destroyed and cleared off the ground. One carved piece was rescued. All the (other) pieces were smashed up and rammed into foundations for posts for a fence. The head with the Norman conical helmet and nasal was smashed first, so men say. My drawings are therefore the only record."

Worthington G Smith's 1910 illustration of the lost rockery

John Buckledee

