

# NEWSLETTER

Dunstable & District Local History Society  
No. 47 February 2017



## Chairman's Notes

**I**t was a pleasure to welcome to Dunstable John Lynde and his friends and family from Toronto, who had travelled from Canada to look at the town where their ancestors once lived.

### REV ZACHARY SYMMES

The Lyndes are descended from Thomas Lynde and his wife, who were among the group of Dunstable people who emigrated with their minister, the Rev Zachary Symmes, to England's new colony in the vast wilderness of America. They landed at Boston on September 18 1634, aboard the small sailing ship the Griffin. Lynde was a maltster, whose skill in making the ingredient for "small beer" would have been particularly useful to the colonists.

Zachary Symmes had conducted a non-conformist form of worship at the Priory Church, and decided to leave England when official toleration of this came to an end under Archbishop Laud. His name is still to be seen in the Priory on the long list of ministers at the church.

The Lyndes came to Dunstable on a wet and cold Sunday, but were made welcome at the Priory and at the old Baptist Church which survives on the Wilko car park. They viewed the Priory House Heritage Centre and lunched in the thatched pub at Totternhoe, the Cross Keys. They seemed to enjoy their visit, but it was chastening to hear them ask, on viewing Dunstable crossroads, whether this was "downtown Dunstable". The state of Middle Row remains embarrassingly awful.

### THE PLIGHT OF MIDDLE ROW

So why is this historic part of Dunstable being allowed to decay? The answer is that the properties are owned by a number of different people, and the costs of substantial renovation are too great for them to bear. Some folk on Twitter and Facebook have simply been demanding that "the council does something" but councillors, some of whom are in touch with this society, are reluctant to commit to action which would end in council tax-payers having to subsidise the upkeep of shops there. They are already meeting the continuing costs of maintaining Grove House and Priory House. Should tax-payers be asked to do more?



*Weatherfield pupils, Jack Hough and Shannon Flitton with the 1963 Dunstable Pageant shield.*

### DUNSTABLE YEAR BOOKS

The society has a fairly comprehensive collection of the old Dunstable Year Books, which give useful lists of everyone living in the town and their full addresses (people were not so jealous of their privacy in those days!). The paperback volumes are becoming rather dog-eared and battered and, as they are so useful to historians, your society has decided to have them rebound. That's quite an expensive project, but this seems a worthwhile use of some of the funds earmarked for use in our research room.

### MAISIE BATES

Sad to report the death of Maisie Bates, who had been a member of this society for many years and who had so many anecdotes about Dunstable. Her husband, Norman, had taken a leading part in the production of the great Dunstable Pageant

of 1963 and made one of the shields used in the re-creation of knightly tournaments once held in the town. This was part of Maisie's memorabilia, and it has now been presented to Weatherfield School, where it has been beautifully refurbished. Our photo shows pupils Jack Hough and Shannon Flitton with the shield.

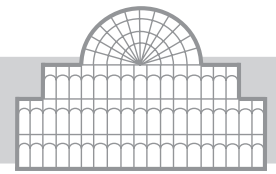
Maisie was a prominent member of the Methodist Church at the Square, and one of her other great interests was the town's Inner Wheel club. She once wrote a brief article giving her recollections of past years in the club and mentioned many of the places where members held their regular meetings. They included the Noah's Ark, the Red Lion hotel, Dunstable Boys Club, Cordova, the Saracen's Head and Kingsbury Court. Dunstable once had such a wide choice of venues!

### CHRISTMAS PARTY

Hope you all enjoyed the festive fare prepared by Rita Swift and Joan Curran for our December meeting. It might be the last in this format, because Rita and Joan are stepping down from the work involved, and the table layout was too cramped even though we limited numbers. Any thoughts from members about arrangements for this year's event would be welcome

**John Buckledee**

# Joseph Paxton and Milton Bryan



*John Hockey crystallises his thoughts after a visit to a small village*

**This is the story of a Bedfordshire man of humble beginnings who rose to greatness and designed one of the most iconic buildings of the Victorian age.**

## A FARMER'S SON

How did a farmer's son who started life in a small village on the northern edge of the Chilterns become a gardening prodigy? What surroundings influenced his childhood thoughts – and how did water lilies and blotting paper play a part in the design of the Crystal Palace?

Joseph Paxton (1803 – 1865) was born in the village of Milton Bryan near Woburn, Bedfordshire. The name Milton means 'middle farm' and the Bryan element refers to the family that were Lords of the manor from the 12th to the 14th century. At the time of his birth the whole parish had only 300 or so inhabitants and, being quite a rural settlement, must have had a somewhat isolated feel. After looking into his life, I wonder if the ponds, buildings and landscape that Paxton knew as a child worked their way into his consciousness and reappeared later in the vast Victorian projects he became known for.

## BATTLEDSEN HOUSE

Take ponds for instance. Within the village of Milton Bryan is a delightful small pond which must have been known to Paxton, now frequented by all manner of ducks. (An interesting aside is that during his lifetime it had an unusual edifice built, partly on the bank and partly on stilts extending right over the water – this was the village's Methodist Chapel. A sign near the edge states that it was not unusual for solemn services to be interrupted by quacking from under the chapel floor!) One of Joseph's first jobs was helping his brother Thomas at nearby Battlesden House, the home of the eccentric Sir Gregory Osborne Page-Turner, where he created a large lake - the 'New Fishpond'. Such experience in excavating large amounts of soil for well-to-do landowners would be invaluable in later life at Chatsworth where the Emperor Fountain required the Emperor Lake to feed it. This latter tract of water filled a hole which once held 100,000 cubic yards of soil. Projects on that sort of scale do generate spectacle though, for The Emperor Fountain at full bore reaches twice the height of Nelson's Column.

Many members of the Paxton family were employed around Milton Bryan. Joseph's uncle, also called Thomas, ran the Red Lion public house and when Thomas died in 1823 his estate consisted chiefly of credits for beer sold to men labouring on new fish ponds at Battlesden House.

## FINDING NEW WAYS TO GROW FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

According to contemporary accounts, even as a teenager Joseph was always experimenting and trying to find 'many new ways of raising, treating and forcing vegetables and flowers'. As we shall see, this experience would come in handy later at Chatsworth in Derbyshire and would ultimately influence the design of the



Crystal Palace. Paxton's remarkable rise really started when he was working in London. At that time (1823) the RHS leased the Chiswick Gardens from the Duke of Devonshire and began to reconstruct them. Paxton, to improve himself, obtained employment in the arboretum there and was soon made foreman. Whilst at Chiswick he met the Duke and the latter outlined his plans for Chatsworth. In a remarkable show of confidence, and recognising Paxton's potential, the Duke offered Joseph the post of Head Gardener at the tender age of twenty.

## CHATSWORTH

Paxton arrived at Chatsworth full of enthusiasm. He reached the estate at 4.30am and started by exploring the garden. Scaling the kitchen garden wall he set the staff to work on various projects. He met the Housekeeper and her niece Sarah Bown (his future wife) and took breakfast. As he noted in his diary 'I completed my first morning's work at Chatsworth before nine o'clock.'

I think we tend to regard Victorians as dynamic, with a 'can-do' attitude and this is certainly borne out by Paxton's work at Chatsworth. He accomplished many things in the Derbyshire home of the Duke of Devonshire including redesigning the gardens around the north wing, setting up a pinetum (now a forty acre site), incorporating many new trees including moving some weighing eight tons from Derby, designing a rock garden and constructing the magnificent Emperor Fountain. For light relief he re-built the nearby Edensor village (the place of his burial) and got married in 1827.

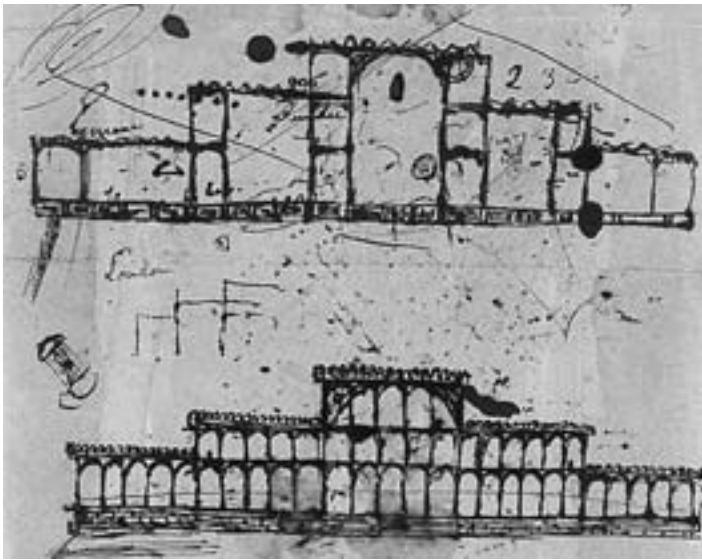
## INTEREST IN GREENHOUSES

In 1832, aged 29, Paxton became interested in greenhouses. He made a feature of using a design of roof which both channelled the water and added stiffness – the so called 'ridge and furrow' design. This, together with an ingenious frame that admitted maximum light, proved highly beneficial for the growing of plants. Although the surrounding land near Milton Bryan is not particularly rich in ridge and furrow, the undulating fields certainly channel the water into specific points and one can only wonder if early observations of how shape affected run-off percolated through into his later designs. The Great Conservatory at Chatsworth (now sadly demolished) was constructed from cast iron, wood and glass and measured 227 feet long by 123 feet wide. Such structures were essentially a test bed for Paxton's most iconic building, the Crystal Palace.

## HOW A LILY PROVIDED A SOLUTION TO A PROBLEM

One last piece of the jigsaw which needed putting into place concerned how very large structures would support themselves and here a piece of luck helped point Joseph to an elegant solution. In 1849 a seedling of *Victoria regia* (a water lily obtained by Kew from the Amazon) was sent to Chatsworth to see if it could be encouraged to grow and flower. In two months Paxton had succeeded and everyone was astonished at the rate of growth of this plant. The leaves quickly assumed a diameter of 4½ feet and a month later it flowered. The plant continued to expand and





*Paxton's sketch on blotting paper for the design of the Crystal Palace which is now housed at the Victoria and Albert Museum*

even needed its own greenhouse, the 'Victoria Regia House'. In order to test the strength of the leaves of the plant, which were floating on the water, Paxton arranged a remarkable feat. He had a daughter Annie, then seven years old, who was picked up and placed right in the middle of the lily leaf. The plant supported her weight and Paxton observed the rigidity of the radial ribs coupled with the flexibility of the cross ribs – his 'Eureka' moment some would later claim.

### THE GREAT EXHIBITION

For the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, a Royal Commission was set up. The competition for the main building attracted 245 designs which they managed to whittle down to two. Sadly both would have taken too long to construct and would have been too permanent. Enter Joseph Paxton who was appraised of the problem whilst in London for a meeting of the Midland Railway Company, of which he was a director. At a further meeting held in Derby shortly afterwards, Paxton was doodling on some blotting paper and there and then sketched a suitable design. Appropriately this blotting paper sketch is now housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum. The advantages of the design were that it was to be modular and would be very quick to assemble (one man could fix over 100 panes in a day). When built the Crystal Palace, as it became known, was 1,848 feet long, 408 feet wide and 108 feet high. Incorporating 4,500 tons of iron, remarkably it only took eight months to build. Paxton, Charles Fox (responsible for the ironwork) and William Cubitt (Chairman of the building committee) were all knighted. Sir Joseph Paxton went on to receive many other awards such as Fellow of the Royal Horticultural Society (FRHS), Fellow of the Linnaean Society, Member of the Society of Arts etc. He also collaborated on the design of Mentmore Towers for Baron Mayer de Rothschild, designing a ridge and furrow roof over the central hall. After he died in Rockhills, Sydenham in 1865, his wife, Sarah, erected a memorial stained glass window in St Peter's church, Milton Bryan.

### THE OLD POST OFFICE

By chance, if you look at the Old Post Office building in Milton Bryan, surely known to Paxton as it is situated right opposite his uncle's Red Lion public house, you will see a timber structure that bears an uncanny resemblance to the blotting paper sketch. Who knows what childhood influences shape our grown-up persona? As Queen Victoria wrote in her diary after the opening



*The Old Post Office building in Milton Bryan which may have provided inspiration to Thomas Paxton for his glasshouses*

of the Crystal Palace 'He rose from an ordinary gardener's boy'. Milton Bryan and all in the Chilterns should be eternally proud that he did.

**John Hockey**

*This article was previously published in Chiltern Magazine, Autumn 2015*



*The timbers of the Old Post Office building which show an uncanny resemblance to the blotting paper design*



## Sad Farewell



We are very sorry to announce  
the sad loss of  
**Maisie Bates**

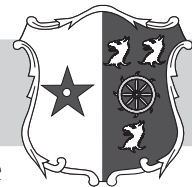
## Greeting New Members

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

**Mrs J Batson**  
**Mr M Cater**  
**David & Shirley Deller**  
**Shauna Dyke**  
**Mrs R Shotbold**  
**Mrs A Sommerville**

**Mr & Mrs D Bentley**  
**Ray & Julie Collins**  
**Mr & Mrs N Dove**  
**Mrs S Savory**  
**Gill Short**  
**Penny Waggett**

# Joseph Robinson Scott



**On 23rd June I went to Ashton Middle School, along with many other people, for a final look round the building before it closed as a school.**

Having been a parent of a pupil, it was interesting to see it all again. In the Library there was a collection of books on the table. I browsed through them but one in particular intrigued me. On the inside of the front cover it said

**Joseph Scott, May 31st 1849  
From the Trustees of Dunstable School**

The date was puzzling, as 1849 is nearly 40 years before the opening of the Ashton Grammar School. It could have been from Chew's Charity School, but their bibles were usually embossed with griffins and Catherine wheels. The National School opened in 1838, in what is now the Priory's church hall and the British School opened in West Street in 1843. Books presented by these two schools would have had 'National' or 'British' written in them. The other possibility was that this was some other Dunstable school we did not know about.

I contacted the Middle School office and asked if I could borrow the bible in order to see if I could resolve the issue. Not only did they lend me the book but gave me the correspondence that went with it. The bible was posted to the school in 1998 by a Mr. John Bassett, living in Jersey. The card inside it said that he found it among his grandmother's effects. Mr. Locke, the then Headmaster, wrote him a letter of thanks.

## **CHEW'S CHARITY SCHOOL**

After searching for Dunstable schools at the Record Office in Bedford, no new schools were discovered. I also consulted the Chew's Charity School pupils' register and was delighted to find Joseph Scott listed every year from 1844 to 1848/9 when he left, with an apprenticeship, aged 14. I then consulted the Census and other returns which showed that Joseph Robinson Scott was born, in Dunstable, on the 13th October 1834, the second of six children

born to Joseph and Charlotte Scott of Middle Row. Joseph, his father, was a butcher. In 1851 Joseph is apprenticed to Henry Harrison, a 'druggist' in Sheffield, where he stayed for ten years.

## **MARRIED AT THE PRIORY CHURCH**

In 1852 Joseph married Martha Darvin, a widow, at the Priory Church on 23rd September. Martha was born in 1838, the last of the four children of William and Mary Garnett of Binstead in Hampshire. They had two sons, Arthur who was born in St Albans in 1859 and Charles Walter who was born in Brussels in 1866. This last fact may be the reason why there is no sign of this family in the 1861 census. By 1871, Joseph's father is farming 117 acres at Brooklands, Aldenham. Joseph and two of his sisters are also living there. Joseph, now a widower, is listed as a Wine Merchant and his two sons are also with him. Ten years later, Joseph, still listed as a 'wine merchant', is living in a cottage in Cassiobury Park, Watford. His son, Arthur, is a boarder in Hemel Hempstead and the rest are still on the farm in Aldenham. His father died at his farm on 23rd May 1887 and left an estate, worth nearly £½m, to Joseph and his sisters, Sarah and Elizabeth.

## **MARRIED, FOR A SECOND TIME**

Joseph was married for a second time on 14th January 1890 to Edith Martin, a widow, née Ozanne, who was born at St. Peter Port, Guernsey in 1852. They were married at Aldenham. The 1901 census shows Joseph and Edith living at Sowell Lodge, St. Peter's, Broadstairs. He is listed as a 'retail wine merchant'. His son, Charles Walter, is living in Ramsgate and is listed as a 'physician and surgeon'. Joseph Scott died at Sowell Lodge on 12th November 1908, aged 74. Probate was granted on 1st March the following year, with an estate worth £209.15s, (about £20,000 RPI).

I still have Joseph Scott's bible and claim it for Chew's Charity School.

**Hugh Garrod**

*Chairman of the Chew's Foundation Trustees*

# Harold Cutler Deacon 1877 to 1951



**In the Dunstable Gazette for 16th March 1951, there is recorded the death of Harold Cutler Deacon LRAM (Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music) and ARCO (Association of the Royal College of Organists).**

## **ORGANIST AND CHOIRMASTER FOR 45 YEARS**

He probably studied and attained both qualifications externally. He was aged 74. Harold was appointed organist and choirmaster at Dunstable's Priory Church in 1901, aged 24. He retired 45 years later, in October 1946, due to failing eye sight. Harold had served under six rectors. He was the first to play the current organ, when it was installed in 1913. He was also Music Master at Dunstable Grammar School for most of this time.

## **THE YOUNGEST OF FIVE CHILDREN**

Harold Cutler Deacon was the youngest of five children born to William and Ellen Deacon of Rothesay Road, Luton. Cutler was his mother's maiden name. He was born on the 10th January 1877 and baptised two days later at Christ Church, Luton. In the 1881 census his father is listed as 'coal merchant' but he must have been fairly well-off as he employed a domestic servant. Harold's obituary says he spent a year at Dunstable Grammar School before going to school in Ulceby, Lincolnshire, and then to College. In 1891, aged 14,

Harold is a 'boarder' and 'scholar' at South Kyme in Lincolnshire. The village church had a new organ installed that year and Harold may well have learnt with the organist as his tutor. By 1901 Harold is back at the family home. This is about the time he was appointed at the Priory, by Revd. John Heyrick Macaulay. By 1911 Harold was still living at Rothesay Road, Luton with his parents. Harold, having served during most of WWI in the 2nd Battalion of the 2nd Bedfordshire Regiment, ended the war with the rank of 2nd Lieutenant. The battalion served on the Western Front for the entire war. Harold, who never married, went to live with long term friends, Mr. and Mrs. Stimpson, in Chiltern Road after his parents died in the early 1920s. Commonly known as 'Deacie', Harold had been a keen tennis player and walker in his younger days but gave them up and became an accomplished bridge player.

## **DIED SUDDENLY**

Harold died suddenly on 9th March 1951 and was buried in the cemetery on the 13th. His funeral was conducted by Revd. Reginald French, assisted by Revd Christopher Mackonochie, then vicar of Goldington. The organ was played by Alan Carter to a packed church. The choir formed a Guard of Honour as his coffin left the church. His estate was valued at £12,679.8.1d (approximately £350,000 RPI) and his grave is still visible in the cemetery.

**Hugh Garrod**



# LOOKING AT OLD HOUSES IN DUNSTABLE



**It's not unusual to hear people complaining that all the old buildings of Dunstable have gone.**

But sometimes we don't even notice those we still have, we just walk by them without a second glance. It's true that some have been altered so much that we don't realise how old they are, like the Nationwide offices in High Street North, with its Victorian facade concealing a much older building behind.



## A SMALL HOUSE BESIDE THE SARACEN'S HEAD

But there are three houses in the High Street still with frontages that are clearly from the 18th century, with distinctive sash windows set in recesses with rounded arches. One of these, a small house beside the Saracen's Head, now No. 47 High Street South, appears to have been built by Humphrey Daniel, who described himself as a 'haberdasher of hats'. As far as we know he never lived there (he had several other properties in the town) and when he died in 1742 he left it to his son, Henry.

In the 1800s it was bought and sold several times, at one stage belonging to the brewers who owned the Saracen's Head, and in the first half of the 20th century it was for many years a butcher's shop, with a slaughterhouse behind it. More recently Dr. Donald had his surgery there, from 1986 until 2010, since when it has had various tenants.



## NORTON HOUSE

Across the road another house with the same characteristic windows is Norton House. Who built it is not clear; the first person known to have lived there is Edward Lockhart, a straw dealer. Born in Surrey, by the 1830s he was renting the house from Thomas Gostelow, who lived next door in the house that is now the White Dove Funeral Parlour. This was a more substantial house than No. 47 and had a carriageway through to the back.

Edward moved across the road in 1851 and it was later rented by a London firm of hat manufacturers, Stuart & Taylor, as a residence for the manager of the factory they built at the rear. Today the Norton Court apartments have been built on the site of the factory and the house is now offices, but the 18th century frontage remains.



## HARRISONS, THE JEWELLERS.

The third of these 18th century buildings is in High Street North, now occupied on the ground floor by Harrisons, the jewellers. Bigger even than Norton House, when auctioned in 1851 it was described as having 10 rooms, with steam and bleach houses, stables and other buildings at the back, a large plait drying ground, a flower garden and a paved yard, plus a carriageway to the back.

Who built it? The owner in the late 1790s was James Oliver and it was later used as a hat factory by William Oliver, very probably a family connection. From the opposite side of the High Street it looks as though it could have been a typical inn of the period, and it was certainly very large for a private house.

The deeds tell us that James Oliver did in fact buy an inn called the Swan in High Street North in 1790 and an earlier deed showed that in 1752 John and Richard Sadler had sold the Swan to a Richard Whiteley. Unfortunately there is a gap between these two deeds, but from the details of properties on either side it was obviously the same building. Looking at an old drawing of the High Street it seems possible that this was an even older building, just given a face-lift in the 18th century.

There are other buildings, of course, which were certainly here before 1800, including the houses on the Square, from the former offices of the solicitors, Williams and Co., to the Noah's Ark, Moore's old shop and the row between it and the Indian restaurant, and the Nag's Head, the Bank, the Sugar Loaf and the White Swan. The Cart almshouses, Ladies' Lodge and Chews House were all built in the 18th century, as was the Duke of Bedford Arms which, greatly enlarged, became Grove House. And there are others.

If you've never really looked at these houses as you have walked past, do stop and have a look at them next time you go by.

**Joan Curran**

# William Pitkin

## Dunstable Literary and Scientific Society

**Mr. W. Pitkin - Honorary Secretary –**  
**A tribute from the Dunstable Literary and Scientific Society**

### TRIBUTE

At the Christmas Party in 2015 I was presented with a tribute from the Dunstable Literary and Scientific Society to its Honorary Secretary Mr. W. Pitkin on the event of his resignation from the society. This then appeared on the front of the February 2016 Newsletter.

This tribute had been found by Mrs. Margaret Arnold in the frame behind her parents' wedding photo and had been there since their marriage in 1941. Margaret's parents had lived at York House, 3 Great Northern Road, Dunstable, around the time of their marriage. But they were not related to Mr. Pitkin – so why was a tribute to him behind their wedding photo?

The tribute was in script and surrounded by beautiful art work by F.A. Fowler who was famous for his drawings of the Priory Church.

### MONTHS OF RESEARCH

After many months of research at both Luton Central Library and Dunstable Library; our Society's office in Priory House; various websites; census etc.; and correspondence with Margaret Arnold; I have now found the answer to the question.

The tribute relates to Mr. William Pitkin who was born on 23rd August, 1859 in West Street, Dunstable, being the youngest child of Mary Ann (Hardwick) Pitkin (a bonnet sewer) and John Pitkin (a carpenter). William had older siblings named Charles Pitkin, Edward Pitkin and Sarah Pitkin.

By the 1881 census William had moved from number 119 West Street, Dunstable, to London. As William was a carpenter, and so were his father and two brothers, maybe there was not enough work to sustain all of them in West Street and he went to London in search of work there.

In the fourth quarter of 1890 William Pitkin married Laura Squire in the district of Marylebone, London. Laura was born in 1858 in Watford. By the 1901 census William and Laura were living at 31 Beversbrook Road, Islington, London.



York House, 3 Great Northern Road, where the certificate was hidden behind a wedding photo



William Pitkin's certificate, awarded by the Dunstable Literary and Scientific Society

### A MOVE BACK TO DUNSTABLE

By the 1911 census William and Laura had moved back to Dunstable, and were living at "Fairview", Upper Union Street, Dunstable – a house built around 1906. Although on the day of the census Laura was not listed as being in the house, and this census revealed that William and Laura had no children. It was exciting though to find an original copy of the census written and signed by William.

William and Laura lived at this same house for many years but the address of it changed from just being known as "Fairview" to having a number 173 Upper Union Street in 1914. Then the "Upper" was removed in 1920 leaving the address as 173 Union Street, Dunstable.

But by the time of Laura Pitkin's death on 23rd April, 1937 they had moved to 17 Great Northern Road, Dunstable. Laura left her husband William (who was still listed as a carpenter) effects of £190 43s. 5d. which was quite a lot of money in 1937.

### YORK HOUSE

After Laura's death William moved down the road to York House, 3 Great Northern Road, Dunstable, which was the house of Mrs. Florence Shugg who took in boarders.

In the 1939 Register there were numerous people living at York House being: Florence K. Shugg (housewife); Pearl (Shugg) Barnard (unpaid domestic duties); Mary Ann Pearce (retired); William Pitkin (retired); Laura Jenner (retired); Harry Garrett (retired); and Elizabeth M. Malsbury (retired).

After I corresponded with Margaret Arnold, she confirmed that Florence Shugg was her Grandmother; Pearl (Shugg) Barnard was her Aunt; and Mary Ann Pearce (or Pierce) was her Great Grandmother. She is also familiar with Mr. Garrett's name and thinks he may have been a jeweller. So three family members and four boarders were living there in 1939.

Then in the fourth quarter of 1941 William Pitkin died aged 82 years. In the meantime Margaret (Shugg) Arnold's parents (her father Richard J. Shugg, known as Jack, and mother Honor had married in the first quarter of 1941) also had rooms at York House, although her father was mostly away in the Army. Margaret was brought up in the house until she was 7 years old, and also remembers rooms being rented to Miss Gillett, Mrs. Speller, and Mrs. Pepper in later years. At other times rooms were rented to shift workers from the Met. Office and the Police.

### HIDDEN BEHIND A WEDDING PHOTO

So this is the answer to why the tribute was found in the frame behind Margaret Arnold's parents wedding photo – William Pitkin must have left the tribute in the frame in his room at York House when he died – and when Margaret's parents married and moved into York House in the same year they used the frame for their wedding photo kindly still leaving the tribute in its place!

**Patricia Heath (née Pitkin)**

(An article on the Dunstable Literary and Scientific Society will follow in a future Newsletter)



# Schools & Head Teachers



**D**uring my researches into Chew's Charity School, I have come across references to other local schools and the people who ran them.

## ASHTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS,

The two Ashton Elementary schools, Boys' and Girls', were in the same building and took the age range from 5 to 11. They were opened in 1865, with two school houses, where Aldi now stands. Most of what follows is taken from their early Log Books and census returns.

## FREDERICK HATT

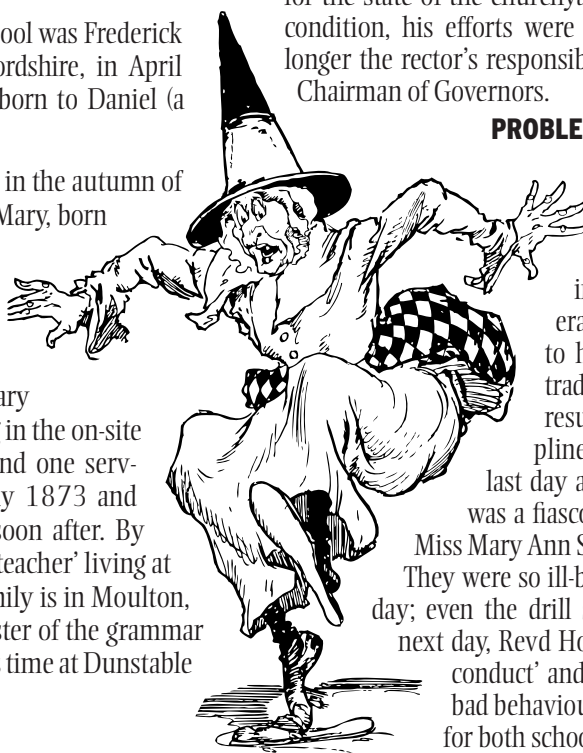
The first Head of the Elementary Boys' School was Frederick Hatt. He was born at Sonning Eye, Oxfordshire, in April 1837. He was the third of four children born to Daniel (a baker) and Eliza Hatt.

Frederick married Margaret Lavinia Hallett in the autumn of 1859 and they had five children Beatrice Mary, born in 1860, Frederick Ronald 1863, Alfred Stanley 1865, Arthur Cyril 1867 and Henry Victor 1871.

Frederick Hatt became the first Head of Ashton Elementary Boys' school, in January 1865. The 1871 census shows he is living in the on-site 'Schoolmaster's House' with his family and one servant. Their daughter, Beatrice, died in early 1873 and Frederick and his family left Dunstable soon after. By 1881, their son, Alfred Stanley, is a 'pupil teacher' living at Stondon, Bedfordshire. The rest of the family is in Moulton, near Spalding, where Frederick is headmaster of the grammar school. Every inspection during Frederick's time at Dunstable gives the school a good review.

## ALFRED PHILIP WIRE

Frederick Hatt was succeeded as Head of Ashton Elementary Boys' school by Alfred Philip Wire. He began his duties on 30th June 1873. Alfred Philip was born towards the end of 1839 in Colchester. He married Susan Horth in Little Baddow, Essex, on 11th August 1863, when he had just qualified as a teacher. It is evident that Alfred Philip did not stay anywhere for very long as his nine children were born over a period of twenty years in seven different locations – Little Baddow, Macclesfield, Radwinter in Essex, Newmarket, Dunstable, Wandsworth and Leytonstone. His time in Dunstable may illustrate why.



*Sally, The Dunstable Witch*

## SALLY, THE DUNSTABLE WITCH

Dunstable's four churchyards had been closed in 1860 when the Cemetery opened in West Street. The Priory's churchyard became the responsibility of the Borough Council, soon after its formation in 1864. The church itself was in need of restoration. Frederick Hose, who was the Rector from 1845 until he died in 1884, spent most of this time fund-raising for and organising the renewal of his church. In 1875, Alfred Philip wrote a long and tedious poem, called, 'Sally, The Dunstable Witch', in which he attacked Revd Frederick Hose for the state of the churchyard. If he really were concerned for its condition, his efforts were misplaced – the churchyard was no longer the rector's responsibility – and ill-judged as Hose was his Chairman of Governors.

## PROBLEMS AT THE SCHOOL

His time at the school had its problems too. His staff consisted of three pupil-teachers, a monitor and a drill sergeant. In 1875 Alfred Philip Wire introduced some of the sciences and liberal arts into the curriculum. This appears to have been at the expense of the more traditional subjects. The annual inspection resulted in a 10% cut in the grant as discipline and standards had both fallen. Wire's last day at the school was 23rd June 1876 and was a fiasco, the headmistress of the girls' school, Miss Mary Ann Sandham had to take charge of the boys. They were so ill-behaved she sent them all home for the day; even the drill sergeant could not control them. The next day, Revd Hose 'spoke to the boys concerning their conduct' and three ring-leaders were suspended for bad behaviour. Miss Sandham remained responsible for both schools for the rest of the month after which Thomas William Thompson was appointed head of boys' on the 3rd of July. He died in post just over two years later. Things must have stabilised as the 1877 inspection recommended no further cut in grant.

## FOLLOWING IN THEIR FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS

At least three of Wire's children followed Alfred Philip into the teaching profession and he died in Leytonstone on 12th June 1914, leaving an estate worth £604.0.8d (£52,000 RPI).

I hope to write up other local Heads for further editions of the Newsletter. **Hugh Garrod**

# Memories of old Dunstable



**D**unstable Council is pressing on with its plans for a splash park on part of Bennett's Rec.

As part of the preparations, this society has been helping to try to trace the location of an air-raid shelter or trench which is recorded in old guide books as being somewhere on the rec.

## AN UNUSUAL TRACKWAY

This has reminded us, in turn, of the fascinating story of the unusual trackway there. It's told in Joan Curran's book about Dunstable's Whiting Works, which includes details of the works owned by

George Morley Cogswell on land between the end of Icknield Street and the beginning of Bull Pond Lane.

The chalk was brought there by horses and carts from a quarry at Spoodell. The heavy loads would have sunk in the mud, so Mr Cogswell laid a track, about half a mile long, using railway sleepers laid side by side. Not surprisingly, says Joan, the track became known as Sleepers Lane. This was in the early 1900s, so it's a little surprising that no photographs seem to exist of such an unusual sight.

*continued overleaf*

# Memories of old Dunstable continued



## UNUSUAL NAMES

It's sometimes possible to make an educated guess about a man's age simply by hearing his name. Favourite Christian names for 2016 included Oliver, Noah, Harry, Jack and Charlie. In 50 years' time, as fashions change, that will date them. For girls, popular 2016 names were Olivia, Lily, Sophia, Emily, and Amelia.

I mention this because Kathryn Warner, the expert on the reign of Edward II, who helped so much with the Dunstable Medieval Project's research into Dunstable tournaments, has just produced a list of some of the unusual names which she's found in documents of the Edward I period.

Here's a very small selection of her vast list: Maud Daft, Maud Lusshefish, Erneberga de Hardreshull, Marcelina Belost, Godeleva Dobel, Emelina Inkepenne, Joceus de Camera, Basilia Reynaud, Gaceus de Calvo Monte, Sigreda Avenel, Hugh le Hoppere, Strangia Daungevyn, Sir Anger de Baslada, Boruncinus Galteri, Sanxius Petri, Flemilda de Pursford, Boudekeu de Contek, Dionisia Hubaud, Floria de Cantilupe, Avicia de Cokefend, Eudo Dragun, Coppus Cottene, Walkelin Kibus, Ketel de Pardyeshou, Acelina de Viridario, Haldanus de Sutton, Felomena de Kersewell, Saburga de Wakeringe, Comitissa Clifford, Simon Mustard, John Littelfat, Karenillus le Parker, Tassius de Neubaut, Flora Mauvey-sin (her last name means 'bad neighbour' in French), Sapiencia Mody (her first name means 'wisdom' in Latin), Juetta Short, Tottus de Monte Claro, Sir Serlo de Nausladron, Menaldus de Rybere, Gracia de Savenayk and Terricus de la Bruere.

## BRIAN STUART BENNING

Information about Brian Stuart Benning, a son of Charles Crichton Stuart Benning, a well-known town clerk of Dunstable, has come from Chelmsford Rugby Club in Essex, which is producing a book to celebrate the club's centenary in 2020. Brian, a founder member of the rugby club who lived as a child in Priory Road, joined the Royal Naval Air Service at the outbreak of the First World War and became an expert balloonist, commanding kite balloon sections of the service.

As a pilot, he became a Flight Lieutenant in June 1915 and was subsequently promoted Squadron Leader. He entered the RAF and was a flying instructor at Cranwell in 1916 and 1917. In early 1918 he went to France as a flight commander with No. 57 Squadron and from May 1919 until the autumn of that year he was in command of No. 49 Squadron in France.

After the war, he worked for the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company and played an important part in the development of wireless communications in many parts of the world.

He took up flying again when he reached the age of 40 but in 1935 he was struck by a propeller when starting an engine at Croydon Aerodrome and died later in Croydon Hospital.

Brian's younger brother, Murray Stuart Benning, was killed in 1914 while serving as a Lieutenant in the 3rd Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment in France. Another brother, Commander Chas Stuart Benning, was decorated for his work on submarine warfare during World War One.

## A RECENT TALK BY JEREMY WALKER

The visit here (mentioned in chairman's notes earlier in this newsletter) by descendants of non-conformists who fled to America from Dunstable in 1634 to avoid the investigations of Archbishop Laud, reminded us of a recent talk by Jeremy Walker at Kensworth Parish Church.

Local Baptists had received permission to organise the talk in the church because the subject was the Rev Edward Harrison, a Vicar at Kensworth during those troubled times, who had been a noted champion of Baptist views.

(A church history, repeated on the internet, mentions that a stained-glass window there commemorates the Rev Harrison, but this is clearly a mistake).

## JOHN BUNYAN

Vivienne Evans' book *John Bunyan, His Life and Times*, refers to a special report to King Charles by Archbishop Laud saying that "troupes" of people were refusing to attend church at Kensworth. Instead, crowds of people had been walking to listen to a man preaching in the open air somewhere around Kensworth crossroads or Dunstable Downs.

## JOHN SYDALL

The vicar at that time was John Sydall who, being a strong supporter of Archbishop Laud, had suffered great distress from a rebellious congregation.

Sydall was forced to leave in 1645 after the king's defeat in the Civil War. Sydall had faced an accusation, unproven, that he was a "frequenter of alehouses" but (says Vivienne Evans) it was more likely that Parliament's committee took more seriously his refusal to administer communion to anyone who would not come up to the rails to receive it. Later, when the rails were taken down, he said that this act was "the beginning of the abomination of desolation..." and that "whoremongers and drunkards are as excusable as those that go from their own parish to hear sermons" and that "Papists were better subjects than Puritans".

Sydall was replaced by Edward Harrison who had been treasurer during the Civil War to Sir Samuel Luke's Parliamentary forces in Bedfordshire. It is very likely that the teenaged John Bunyan spent most of his military service in Luke's garrison at Newport Pagnell, during which time Edward Harrison was not only handling the money but acting as a private messenger and "diplomat".

## DELL HOLE

Followers of John Bunyan held open-air meetings in 1673 in a field at Kensworth called the Dell Hole. They later bought land in Dunstable to build a Baptist Chapel. Wouldn't it be interesting to discover the whereabouts of Dell Hole?

John Buckledee