

NEWSLETTER

Dunstable & District Local History Society
No. 49 February 2018



Chairman's Notes

When I produced the book *Dunstable Through Time* a few years ago the publishers particularly wanted photographs of the town as it is today, to correspond exactly with whatever Yester-year pictures were also chosen.

MAJOR CHANGES

That experience brought home to me the extent of the upheaval which is now taking place in every corner of Dunstable. The views from the bridge in Church Street are classic examples of the way the landscape has changed three or four times in just one generation.

Hannah Firth's superb talk at our December meeting, when she described the different layers of archaeology under the site of the old Woolworth building, demonstrated that the town has reinvented itself many times before.

IDEAS TO REFLECT THE TOWN'S HISTORY

It is about to happen again in the town centre, now that the new relief roads have been built. Central Beds Council has put forward some ideas, townspeople have been consulted and the Highways Authority has been talking about what is possible. The changes introduced in 2012 in Hornchurch are being regarded as some kind of role model, although Hornchurch does not have to prepare for the kind of inrush of traffic which Dunstable suffers whenever there is an accident on the M1.

A theme running through many of the discussions has been a desire to place more emphasis on the town's rich history, and your society is fully prepared to help with this wherever possible.

There have been a number of suggestions, with an idea for Roman-style signage receiving some nods of approval, as well as a very ambitious project for creating a replica of the town's



This bust of Dr Joseph Farr, seen here with the history society's Joan Curran (left) and Rita Swift, once stood in the foyer of the Sugar Loaf Hotel. The story about this is in Memories of Dunstable, on page 371.

long-vanished Eleanor's Cross. There's no doubt that what a lot of people really want is a town centre full of up-market shops, but persuading reluctant retailers to take that kind of risk is way outside the history society's remit.

CALENDAR

Your society was pleased once again to help the Don't Let Dunstable Die charitable trust to produce a calendar of beautifully-reproduced photos of old Dunstable. It was such a success that the DLDD is already planning something similar for next Autumn and we will be trawling through the images

stored on our computers at Priory House for another collection. As always we, and the calendar's publishers, are very much dependent on the goodwill of the Dunstable Gazette for allowing free reproduction of their valuable copyright pictures.

WORLD WAR ONE EVENT

Instead of a Dunstable Around The World event in Priory Gardens this May, the town will revert to a history theme this year, with a focus on World War One. Your society may well re-assemble our Great War display last seen in Priory House in 2014.

POPPY APPEAL

Members of this society made a huge effort to help with the Royal British Legion's Poppy Appeal last November. In particular, Brenda Boatwright, John and Lynn Boon, Lynn Buckledee, June Byrne, Judith Cawdell, David and Jackie Jeffs, Stuart and Christine Jones, Pat Larkman, Joan Mackinnon, Chris Smith, Ann Sparrow, John Stevens and Sue and David Turner, all spent very many hours selling poppies outside the town's four main supermarkets. Their efforts paid a big part in enabling the appeal in Dunstable to bank, so far, a total of £38,591.41. The total should pass £40,000 when later sales are included.

John Buckledee

Highfields Cafe



Earlier this year, I was in Priory House to meet Anne Cross and her second cousin by marriage, Eunice Whitmore, who was on one of her visits to Britain.

BORROWED £50 TO OPEN A CAFE IN HOCKLIFFE

Eunice lives in Australia but was born and brought up in Dunstable. She was one of four children born to Sydney and Lilian Beaumont. After leaving the RAF in 1930, her father borrowed £50 from his father and opened a day and night cafe in Hockliffe. The whole family worked very hard and paid back the loan within a year.

WAR-TIME CONCERT AT HIGHFIELDS

In 1932 they purchased Highfields, a tea-room in Dunstable on the A5, and ran it until 1958. Highfields later became The Highwayman public house. Sydney Beaumont served on Dunstable Town Council as a councillor for the Watling Ward for over five years. Eunice remembers a war-time concert which she and her friends held in Highfields. Their average age was ten. In 1942 Clementine Churchill launched an 'Aid To Russia' fund and the London Road Children decided to do their bit for the war effort. The concert was held in the loft above the stables. The audience had to climb up a ladder to attend. The entrance fee was 1d and included a programme and refreshments. The entertainment involved many songs, some dancing and a play about 'Cinderella'. The show concluded with everyone singing the National Anthem. The evening raised £3 for the fund. The children received an acknowledgement from the Red Cross and a hand-written letter from Clementine Churchill, on Downing Street headed note-paper.

HUGE CELLARS USED AS AIR-RAID SHELTERS

Eunice's mother, Lilian, ran the tea-room in a large room which overlooked beautiful gardens and a tennis-court. There was also a large field which lay between Highfields and the Rubber Company. The tea-room hosted many wedding receptions, including those for Eunice's two sisters. Highfields had huge cellars underneath the building and these became public air-raid shelters during WWII, complete with an escape tunnel.



The programme for the war time concert



Highfields tea-room with its beautiful gardens and tennis-court

CHURCH SERVICES HELD IN HIGHFIELDS CONSERVATORY

Eunice also remembers the origins of St. Augustine's Church. The building of the first phase of the Downside Estate began in 1956 and the Rector of Dunstable, Canon Orton, anticipated the need for a church there. Before a building could be erected, services were held in the Highfields conservatory. It was a bit dilapidated as it hadn't been used much, but a working party of local men and women set to work to rectify this. Services started in early 1957, in time for Easter, and the first baptism took place in May.

EMIGRATED TO AUSTRALIA

Sydney and Lilian, along with their three youngest children, emigrated to Australia in 1958. Sydney gave up catering and became a real-estate agent. Highfields was eventually demolished and The Highwayman built on the site. Services were then held in Headley's works canteen, a local company, until the new church was ready. As a result of much fund-raising and money for the Diocese, the original St. Augustine's opened in September 1959.

Sydney and Lilian visited Dunstable in 1963 and saw some of the Pageant of that year before sailing back to their home overlooking Sydney harbour, 'one of the most beautiful views in the world'. Eunice believes that the Highfield cellars must still exist but, on her recent visit, she could find no-one who knew anything about them.

Hugh Garrod



Highfields Altar

Barry Horne in memoriam



Barry, whose death was announced in the last newsletter, had a wide range of interests but he will be remembered chiefly for his contribution to our knowledge of the history and archaeology of the Dunstable area.

OUTBREAK OF POLIO

His parents were both from well-known local families in Eaton Bray and Edlesborough, where he grew up, and an early photograph of him shows a happy, cheeky-faced boy, full of mischief. But at the age of seven he was a victim of an outbreak of polio in Leighton Buzzard and there followed a difficult time with months spent in hospital. (The current treatment at that time was to put patients in an iron lung.) Though he was left disabled his parents were determined that he should go to a normal school and he went on the school bus every day to Leighton Buzzard. From there he went on to Luton Technical College (as it was then) and graduated, as an external student, with a London University degree in chemistry.



Barry Horne

HE PRODUCED A COMPUTER PROGRAM FOR UNIVERSITIES

Finding a job was a challenge (there seemed to be a superabundance of chemistry graduates at the time) but he obtained a post in the computer department of the Open University at Milton Keynes and having by this time learned to drive he could travel there independently. He soon became an expert in what was then the new technology and produced a program which became the basis of the university clearing system still in use today. It was widely used across the world and he was invited to Western Australia for a month to help install the program over there, a trip on which he had not a few adventures.

Among Barry's many interests were the study of climate and the weather and also astronomy. It was his desire to see solar eclipses that led him later to visit Java, South America and China, where his brother took him around in a wheelchair, to the great amusement of the local people. At home he kept records of rainfall, temperature, etc. by having his own weather station in the garden.

ARCHAEOLOGY

An interest in archaeology and local history led to him joining the Manshead Archaeological Society in 1973. He would go along to the 'digs' to observe and help in recording the details of their discoveries, including the Roman villa at Totternhoe and the Dominican Friary in Dunstable. He later served on the committee for some years.

DUNSTABLE MUSEUM TRUST

It was also in the 1970s that he joined a group campaigning for the establishment of a museum in the town.

They set up a registered charity, known as the Dunstable Museum Trust, of which Barry became the treasurer, and an organisation called the Friends of Dunstable Museum, to raise funds for the project. They campaigned vigorously to save No. 26 Church Street (Chez Jerome), then in a dreadful state, from being demolished. Their ambition was to buy the building and restore it for use as a museum. Sadly this never happened but at least the building was saved. The scheme was abandoned in 1991.

Finding somewhere to display the items they had discovered or been given was a continual problem and at one time the group was offered the use of part of the upper floor of Dunstable Library to display some of them – a skeleton in a glass case was one – and volunteers acted as stewards on Wednesday and Saturday mornings. This was organised

by Barry and Vaughan Basham and several other volunteers. But a change in local government brought this arrangement to an end.

GAVE THE FIRST TALK TO THE HISTORY SOCIETY

It was following the end of the Museum Trust that the Dunstable Local History Society was formed. While continuing his work with the Manshead Society Barry joined the History Society and gave the talk at its first meeting, in January 1992, on the reconstruction of an Iron Age house at the Chiltern Open Air Museum, with which he was also involved. And later he and I jointly ran a workshop one evening on using the 1851 census.

For several years he badgered me to write the story of Totternhoe Quarries, which I finally did, and he actually produced the book privately, doing all the layout and graphics himself. His computing skills were invaluable and it was a pleasure to work with him – very much easier than doing it in the usual way.

Later he left the Manshead Society and helped to establish a History and Archaeology Society in Leighton Buzzard. He also produced several books on his own. He always liked to suggest unorthodox ideas and enjoyed provoking discussion. He had his own theories about Maidenbower and where the original Dunstable was situated (not at the crossroads, he suggested!) and where the battle with Boadicea was fought. Others might not agree with his ideas but he made people think.

A CLEVER AND GIFTED PERSON

Barry was a very clever and gifted person, who made the most of his talents and was a great example of overcoming adversity. He has also left behind a legacy of careful research which will be of great use to historians and archaeologists in the future.

Joan Curran



Did you ever go to 'The Beach'?

At an exhibition of photographs last year a visitor looked at a photo of the Grey House and told us she used to go to 'The Beach' there when it was a pub.

Another visitor then said she went there too, but nobody else seems to have heard of it. All they could tell us was that it was at

the back of the pub. So where exactly was it and what did it look like? Did you ever go there?

If you can tell us anything about it please do phone 01582 478954 or email j.curran21@btinternet.com and help us solve the mystery.

Joan Curran

Coaching Days and Coaching Ways



This book features in John Buckledee's article on Legless Lal, see Newsletter No. 45.

It was first published in 1880 and was written by William Outram Tristram and lavishly illustrated by Herbert Railton and Hugh Thomson. I borrowed a copy from my brother-in-law, which is the de-luxe edition of 1893. Whilst there is much in this book about Legless Lal, it has other information not in John's article. The book also recounts stories about the seven main coaching roads: London to Bath, Exeter, Portsmouth, Brighton, Dover, York and Holyhead.



Coaching Days and Coaching Ways by William Outram Tristram

THE HOLYHEAD ROAD

Chapter 7 is entitled The Holyhead Road; nowhere is the word 'Watling' used. The chapter is 35 pages long and the first seven are about the escape from London, in 1605, of some of those involved in the Gunpowder Plot. Much of the text is about accidents along the road, including an account of being stuck in 12 foot of snow. There were apparently three variations on the journey from London to Holyhead. The old route was via Barnet, St. Albans, Dunstable, Hockliffe, Woburn, Newport Pagnell, Northampton, Hinckley, Tamworth, Rugeley, Nantwich and Chester. The second went via Southall, Uxbridge, Beaconsfield, High Wycombe, Oxford, Woodstock, Chapel House, Stratford-on-Avon, Henley, and Birmingham. The third and latest variation was via Barnet, St. Albans, Dunstable, Brickhill, Stony Stratford, Towcester, Daventry, Dunsmoor, Coventry, Birmingham, Wednesbury, Wolverhampton, Shifnal, Haygate, Atcham and Shrewsbury.

THE SUGAR LOAF

The only Dunstable inn mentioned is The Sugar Loaf where the proprietor was called Goodyear, whose family came from Markyate. The standard menu was 'A Boiled Round of Beef, a Roast Loin of Pork, a Round Aitchbone of Beef and a Boiled Hand of Pork with Pease Pudding and Parsnips, a Roast Goose and a Boiled Leg of Mutton.' Tristram says that the Holyhead road was the best of the seven, after Telford had made his improvements to it. The only illustration of Dunstable is the Anchor Archway and is simply labelled as 'Porch at Dunstable' but no indication as to which artist. There are two timetables in the book and Dunstable is referred to in one, where the coach left London at 6.30am arriving in Dunstable at 10.30 am and reaching Shrewsbury by 10.30pm.

WILLIAM OUTRAM TRISTRAM

The author, William Outram Tristram, was born in Bombay on 11th March 1859, the son of a soldier. He attended Winchester School and Merton College but did not take his degree and he married Nina Mildred Brown at Paddington in 1880. Tristram wrote several novels.

Despatched from Bull and Mouth at 6.30 morning.
Coach, Edington, at 6.45 o'clock.

| Proprietor | Place | Miles | Time Allowed | Stall Arrive |
|--------------|-----------------------------|--------|--------------|--------------|
| Sherrin | St. Albans | 22 1/2 | 1 1/2 | 8.48 |
| I. Liley | Redbourn (Breakfast) | — | 0 25 | 9.13 |
| Goodyear | Dunstable | 9 1/2 | 0 45 | 10.27 |
| Sheppard | Daventry | 79 1/2 | 2 54 | 2.15 |
| Collier | Coventry (Business) | 10 | 1 47 | — |
| Vyse | Birmingham (Dinner) | 19 | 1 30 | 5.46 |
| Evans | Wolverhampton (Business) | 14 | 0 35 | 7.36 |
| L. Taylor | Somerset House | 6 1/2 | 0 35 | 8.26 |
| H. J. Taylor | Shifnal | 6 1/2 | 0 35 | 8.51 |
| J. Taylor | Hoggsley | 8 | 0 43 | 9.34 |
| | Shrewsbury | 76 | 0 56 | 10.30 |

Timetable showing the coach leaving the Bull and Mouth coaching inn, Aldersgate Street, London at 6.30am and arriving at Dunstable at around 10.30am

He lived for some time in Chelsea and died in Shepherd's Bush on September 25th 1915. Nina, his widow, was his beneficiary and his estate was worth £2,603.7s.11d, which is about £2 million today. Tristram mentions other books: The Coaching Age, Coaching and Anecdotes of the Road, A Drive Through England, Anecdotes and Reminiscences of the Road in Coaching Days and Annals of the Road. I have put these on my list of books to find in the British Library – some day.

HERBERT RAILTON

Herbert Railton was born in Pleasington, Lancashire on 21st November 1857. He was the fourth of six children born to John, an engineer, and his wife Elizabeth. In 1881 he was living in Blackburn and earning his living as an architect. In the 1891 census he was living in Bloomsbury and is listed as 'sculptor'. Ten years later he was in Balham Hill, with his wife Frances, and is listed as 'artist'. He died in Paddington on 15th March 1910.

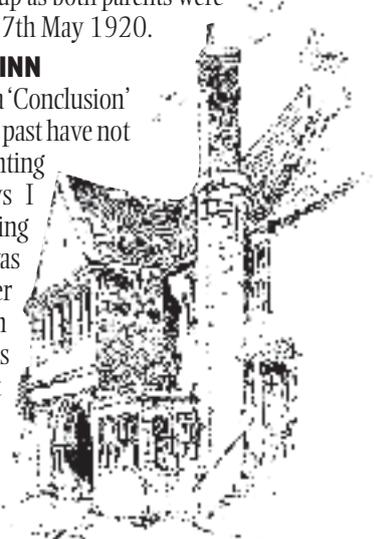
HUGH THOMSON

Hugh Thomson was born in Coleraine on 1st June 1860, the eldest of three children. He left school at the age of 14 and worked for a linen manufacturer. He had no formal artistic training but always had a notebook handy for drawing in. He was hired as an artist by Marcus Ward & Co in 1877, a publishing company. On 29th December 1884 he married Jessie Naismith Miller in Belfast and they moved to England soon after. Their son, John, was born in Gravesend in 1886. In the census returns he was living in Wandsworth and is listed as a 'black and white draughtsman'. By 1911 the family had moved to Sidcup as both parents were in poor health. Hugh Thomson died on 7th May 1920.

TAKING EASE AT THE INN

At the end of the book, Tristram writes a 'Conclusion' which shows that attitudes towards the past have not changed much. 'Our ancestors, on alighting from any of the prolonged journeys I have tried to describe, were used, being fortunate people who lived when life was not all hurry, to sit down quietly over a generous glass and take their ease in their inn. We less fortunate descendants cannot do this now, because time is not permitted us, and we have no inns to take our ease in. We live in an age of hotels, where on touching an electric communicator everything but ease is to be had.'

Hugh Garrod



Sketch of the Anchor Inn, Dunstable

The London to Holyhead Mail Coach

Another book, 'The Coaching Age' by Harris & Sturgess describes transport before the coming of the railways.

A timetable within it shows that the Express Mail Coach left the General Post Office in London at 8pm daily and arrived in Redbourn at 10.44pm, Dunstable at 12.32am, Stony Stratford at 1.26am, Birmingham at 7.08am, Shrewsbury at 11.59am, Llangollen at 2.57pm, Ferry House at 8.43pm and finally arriving at Holyhead Post Office at 10.55pm – a total of 26 hours 55 minutes. It describes how guards on the mail coaches could earn extra money by writing articles for provincial newspapers about events in London. The book also lists 19 contractors who operated on the London to Holyhead route.

Hugh Garrod

Worthington G Smith's architectural illustrations



When we were preparing the Worthington G Smith exhibition, commemorating the centenary of his death, we thought it would be nice if we could locate any of his architectural illustrations.

FREELANCE ILLUSTRATOR

When he became aware that his career as an architect was not going to be successful, he became a freelance illustrator establishing a reputation for producing three-dimensional visualisations for building journals from architectural plans.

NO ARCHITECTURAL ILLUSTRATION

We had many examples of his botanical, archaeological and mycological illustrations, but nothing relating to this aspect of his many talents. One of the journals he regularly worked for was the *Builder* which was launched in 1842 and continued until 1966 when it was renamed 'Building' and continues to this day. Between 1862 and 1878 he produced around 140 stunning architectural illustrations for that journal alone. In attempting to locate some of Smith's architectural work we were fortunate to make contact with Robert Hill, a Canadian architect and architectural historian. Robert became acquainted with the *Builder* magazine in the early 1970s when he was a graduate student, and marvelled at the sheer volume of architectural information packed into each weekly journal. He decided to take advantage of technological advances and make this information freely available to architects everywhere on an academic research website. Anyone using the site could search by date, the name of a building, a city, town or village, name of client or owner, street name, and even type of building. He has now broadened this to include other journals from 1855 to 1920 and beyond and continues to add new information to the website on a weekly basis, including the names of contractors, engineers and artists.



The drinking fountain illustration is the only known illustration of anything designed by Smith

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DESIGN ILLUSTRATION

Robert was able to send me an illustration by Smith he produced for the 12 January 1867 issue. It was of the new National Academy of Design in New York City, designed by the eminent American architect Peter B Wight.

DRINKING FOUNTAIN

Additionally, he sent me the only known illustration of an item actually designed by Worthington G Smith.

His design is one of 8 drinking fountains prepared by various architects in 1859 for the Metropolitan Drinking-fountains Association. These were planned for cities such as London, Bristol, Winchester, Northampton and Leith. He specified the use of various coloured materials but presumably he was unsuccessful with his design.

David Turner



*Smith's illustration of the National Academy of Design in New York City for the 12 January 1867 issue of the *Builder* magazine*

Digitisation of a Bedfordshire Bibliography



Bedfordshire Historical Record Society is pleased to announce the completion of its pilot digitisation project.

The Bedfordshire Bibliography and its three supplements, long out of print, are now available to view on the Society's website at <http://www.bedfordshirehrs.org.uk/content/publication/bedfordshire-bibliography>

AN INITIATIVE OF THE SOCIETY

The Bibliography was an initiative of the Society in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. The main volume and two supplements were painstakingly compiled by L R Conisbee (an English teacher, zoologist and local historian) and the third supplement by A R Threadgill (Bedfordshire Assistant County Librarian and later a minister).

BEDFORDSHIRE MATERIAL

Mr Conisbee delved deeply into locally-held collections of Bedfordshire material, including grey literature; took the time and trouble to identify sections on Bedfordshire in general publications; hunted down obscure items; and was given access to private collections of Bedfordshire resources. The result was an in-depth bibliography of publications about Bedfordshire history, many of which would not otherwise be easily traced today.

The Bibliography remains a starting point for anyone working on the history of Bedfordshire and adjacent counties.

Barbara Tearle,
Bedfordshire Historical Records Society

Vivienne Evans - a grateful au revoir



One summer morning in 2017 a packed Priory Church paid a farewell tribute to an 85-year old daughter of Sussex, who had 'adopted' Dunstable as a young woman and dedicated herself tirelessly to researching and popularising its rich history.

MARRIED FOR 50 YEARS

The church had witnessed her marriage to Lewis half a century earlier and worship there continued as a key foundation stone of her busy lifestyle.

DUNSTABLE SWAN JEWEL

In early days here, she was on site in 1965 when a Manshead Society dig uncovered the Dunstable Swan Jewel – now in the British Museum – and her flair for publicity helped arrange for a TV crew to feature it. That was typical of her lifelong passion to share any discovery with the widest possible audience. And in travelling about to spread the word, as an undaunted non-driver she often had to push the possibilities of public transport to the limits.

PROLIFIC AUTHOR

Many hundreds of her painstakingly researched lectures and courses were made irresistible by an extraordinary ability to explain ideas and set facts in their human context. In 1979, just before I opened The Book Castle, she had established Dunstable Historic and Heritage Studies with her ever supportive husband. For 20 years it was to be my privilege to capture her knowledge for posterity as her publishing partner in bringing a dozen or so of her local history themes to an enthusiastic, ever larger audience. Just to see one of her voluminous, handwritten manuscripts was to sense an endlessly creative, enquiring mind in action. The subsequent, developing discussions were both instructive and inspirational.

DUNSTABLE AND DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

And she campaigned in person to market the wider local area. Steve Williams, an unsuspecting new vicar at Harlington in 1987, was early visited during research for Vivienne's book on John Bunyan, and, passing her tests, was duly rewarded with a stream of intrigued overseas visitors from Canada, USA and Holland especially. Local radio interviews, often from roving outdoor locations, featured her fascinating insights and observations, most notably perhaps in a series with John Pilgrim. The cathedral in St Albans knew her enthusiasm well and she also helped found and run the Bedfordshire Heartlands Tourism Association, deservedly winning their top award. Local TICs benefitted hugely from her promotional support. And no one could have been more enthusiastic about the success of the Dunstable and District Local History Society.



Photo courtesy of The Dunstable Gazette

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

TUDOR FESTIVALS

In Dunstable itself she assisted Town Centre Manager Jean Yates in establishing the popular, award winning Tudor Festivals and History Weeks around millennium time, informing the townsfolk and bringing many coach loads of visitors from further afield. Conducting town centre walks led to her training a knowledgeable band of volunteer Town Guides. Indirectly an ensuing lottery bid enabled the Town Council to buy Priory House and establish there a heritage centre, an innovative tea shop and a souvenir shop where daughter Roz can often be found. That venture has since been supported by her brainwave of the fund-raising, sellout, fortnightly Teatime Tales, which she regularly introduced and often delivered right up to 2017 - relaxing thereafter in a comfy armchair in the tearoom and extending her generous friendship to all comers.

UNSTINTING ADVICE

Students and 'like-minds' over the years have benefited from her unstinting advice and thereby extended her influence. In conjunction with the BBC, the Dunstable at War reminiscence project, like her WEA, Cambridge extramural and U3A courses, mapped myriad stories for future generations. Recently too, for three years she was an invaluable advisor and contributor to a dedicated band of historians who completed the Medieval Dunstable research - with a book, website and unusual physic garden - in time for the Priory's 800th anniversary in 2013. Not surprisingly in 2012 she had been awarded an overdue MBE 'For services to the community in Dunstable'.

Even occasional health issues never limited the extraordinary range of her activities that would have exhausted all but the most dedicated and indefatigable, yet she was always on the lookout for the next adventure or initiative. She achieved so much; she inspired so much. We are all the richer for her vast legacy.

Paul Bowes

Greeting New Members

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

| | | |
|------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Lynn Buckledee | June Byrne | Chris Charman |
| Ann Chatterley | John Chatterley | Geeta Datta |
| Dorothea Gurney | Lee Kimber | Jane Lewis |
| Steve Lightfoot | Marie Montague | Glyn Snell |
| Catherine Stacey | Victor Staples | Laura Thompson |



Sad Farewell



We are very sorry to announce the sad loss of

Eric Barber

Mr P Gripton

Memories of old Dunstable



John Buckledee continues to assemble items of interest about Dunstable. Here is his latest selection.

We like to think that our newsletters are a virtual goldmine for anyone interested in Dunstable's history. And now that these pages are readily available to read throughout the world, via our website, we are receiving an extraordinary range of additional information.

WIMBLEDON VILLAS

For instance, Hugh Garrod wrote an article about Dunstable roads and addresses in our issue of February 2008. In it, he mentioned that he had been unable to trace the location of Wimbledon Villas.

Well, it has taken nine years, but now Chris Lowe has spotted the page on the internet and wrote to our website with the answer.

Chris used to live at 97 West Street, near the doctors' surgery, and remembers uncovering in his garden some stonework which was once on the footpath entrance between numbers 97 and 95. He noticed some faint writing and cleaned them to reveal the word Wimbledon on one and Villas on another. He reinstated them to where they belonged and there's a more-modern sign on the houses today.

Next question is...why were they so-called?

A few yards down the road there's another little item of interest. On the wall of the building next to the surgery, once the home of the senior doctor in the practice, Dr John Clark, is a plaque showing an old military cannon. We are assured that this was placed there when the surgery was built because one of the doctors was an enthusiastic football fan, supporting Arsenal FC...the Gunners. Dr Clark's widow, Betty, tells me that it was certainly not him, so that's another tiny mystery which Dunstablians with long memories can probably solve.

DR JOSEPH FARR

Another Dunstable doctor has come to our attention in an extraordinary way. Mike Wing of Wheathampstead is downsizing, and wanted to find a good home for a plaster bust of one of his ancestors, Dr Joseph Farr.

Dr Farr (1793-1867) was a founder of a dynasty of local doctors who served this area for many generations (one of the FARRS, Charles, was the medical practitioner appointed to look after the inmates of Dunstable workhouse 1789-1812).

A relation, John Johnson, once ran the Sugar Loaf hotel in Dunstable and the bust of Joseph was one of a pair which stood in the foyer there. The other has been shipped to other Farr relations who live in Australia.

History society members went to Wheathampstead to look at the bust, but it is very large and we were at a loss about where it could be kept. Happily, it has now found a home in the Farr Brewery (no relation) at Wheathampstead.

There is an inscription on the back of the bust which says it was modelled by P. Pierallini of Luton. We have tried to find out more about this artist, clearly very skilful, but without success so far. The Farr family was connected with the Luton hat manufacturers J and F Wing Ltd of King Street.

WIFE STABBED

The name of Farr has cropped up in another query to our website. David Dumpleton, who was working for a Dr Farr in Dunstable in 1876, killed his wife Eliza that year by stabbing her with a knife. She is buried in Dunstable Cemetery and a

cross has recently been erected on her grave. Rob Payne wanted to know more details and the perfect person to provide answers was society member June Byrne who for a long time has been recording and researching all the cemetery inscriptions.

Eliza was, apparently, an aggressive lady who would not cook for her husband and would threaten him with a knife if he came near her. Neighbours gave evidence on behalf of David and the charge against him was reduced from murder to manslaughter. He was sentenced to ten years in prison and died in the workhouse at St Albans in 1895.

We don't know who has put up the present cross.

CURRENCY CLOSE

A carpet fitter working in a new house off French's Avenue wonders why the road there, Currency Close, is so called. Well, the history society was not consulted about this by the council but we can make an educated guess. The road is on the site once occupied by De La Rue, the security printers whose specialities included bank notes. So Currency seems entirely appropriate.

HEATED DISCUSSION

Our website has been called upon to adjudicate in a "heated discussion" about former use of land at Eastern Avenue, Dunstable. There were once allotments on the site which had been converted from farm fields. The Parrott and Jackson cardboard box factory was there in some isolation from the 1920s before the area was fully developed in the 1950s. In 1934 the Zander and Weyl aircraft factory started in that area.

That brief summary was apparently enough to settle the arguments.

WORLD WAR ONE FIGHTER PILOTS

A Dunstable Gazette Yesteryear article about local World War One fighter pilots prompted some responses which we'll print here so they are "on record" for future researchers.

Second Lieutenant Lewis Tearle, of Dunstable, had an amazing escape when piloting a Sopwith Camel aircraft. He was wounded in 1918 in a dog fight with some German Fokker bi-planes. One of his guns had stopped firing and he had been sprayed with bullets.

One hit his gravity tank and forced part of the tank through his flying suit and into his right arm. He could not continue flying but a Fokker came after him as he dived down from 15,000 feet. His engine was hit and his goggles shot off his head, but he managed to land safely.

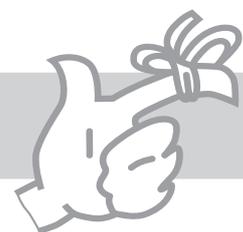
History society member David Underwood tells me that 2nd Lt Tearle was with 201 Squadron, based at Poulainville and the action in which he was wounded took place on September 6 1918. A replica Sopwith Camel has been built for the Shuttleworth Trust at Old Warden and was test flown a few months ago.

Lt Maurice Wilfred Dickens, a former Dunstable Grammar School boy serving in the Royal Flying Corps, disappeared in 1918. He had taken off into thick fog, despite having engine trouble, and was never seen again.

David Underwood says that Lt Dickens, a graduate of London University, was a native of Kensworth, the son of Fredrick and Elizabeth Dickens.

continued overleaf

Memories of old Dunstable continued



On February 25 1918 he was flying a De Havilland DH4, serial number A7733, of 25 Squadron, with Sgt FJ Swain as his observer. It was a test flight, but they may have been shot down. The aircraft was salvaged from the sea on June 23 1918 and there is a memorial to Lt Dickens at Etaples Military Cemetery, France.

WRESTLING MATCH

Wrestling fan and researcher Ruslan Pashayev, who lives in Delaware, Ohio, wrote to our website seeking information about a wrestling match which took place at Hockliffe in 1283. This was watched by a crowd including people from the Dunstable Priory monastery and culminated in two men being killed. The match took place in a square called Staftais, outside the gate of a medieval hospital on the Tilsworth border of the village alongside the Watling Street. Remnants of the old hospital are still contained within Hockliffe House, just a few yards away from the new industrial area which calls itself Hockcliffe (sic) Business Park.

We know a fair bit about what happened at the match, thanks to the record of events kept in medieval times at Dunstable Priory. These Annals are even precise about the location of Staftais square...it was two perches (11 yards) to the east of the hospital gate, and the event took place on the day commemorating the beheading of St John the Baptist (ie August 29).

DUNSTABLE ANNALS

The Annals (written in Latin) tell us that the wrestling had finished and nearly everyone was leaving when John, the smith at the Priory, was killed by an axe. Also killed was a fierce man named Simon Mustard, who was in the service of Sir William Muntchensy.

The Annals entry for 1283 reports that a court had decided that the two men had killed each other, with no-one from the Priory being called to account.

COMPLICATED SAGA

But it was more complicated than that, as demonstrated by later entries in the Annals. Christiana, Simon Mustard's wife, relentlessly pursued claims against a number of men from Dunstable Priory for taking part in her husband's death. It's a long saga, which I'll simplify here.

The men accused by Christiana were John Wederore, Walter Chamberlain, John Porcher, John Celer, Thomas Porter, Walter Pet, William Hakun, Hugo Gledley, William Cotel and John Stodham.

Christiana also accused William, the Prior of Dunstable, of sheltering the men.



A page from the original manuscript of the Annals of Dunstable, dating from the 13th century. The manuscript, (mentioned below in references to deaths after a wrestling match at Hockliffe) was severely damaged by a fire in 1731 but mended with great care

A PREMEDITATED ATTACK

She claimed that John Wederore came to Hockliffe with intent to commit a premeditated attack. He lay in wait with a bow of yew and a string of whipcord at the ready in his left hand, and he shot at Simon Mustard with a barbed arrow which struck him in his left side. She said that Walter Chamberlain then struck Mustard with a Danish axe making a wound on the left side of his head which would have killed him if he had not died of the arrow shot. She also said that John Porcher shot a barbed arrow at Mustard, hitting him on the brawny part of his arm.

There were numerous witnesses who denied her claims and a jury decided that none of the accused were guilty. The verdict was that John Faber (Faber is the Latin for Smith) of Flamstead killed Mustard with an arrow in his right side and that Mustard, before he died, had struck Smith on the head with a staff, and felled him. The jury added that Roger Ballok had then killed Smith.

This, of course, contradicts the earlier Annals report that Smith and Mustard had killed each other, and introduces a new name to the story.

So who was Roger Ballok?

We know a bit more about Sir William Muntchensy, employer of Mustard. Sir William, from the Norfolk/Suffolk area, was the guardian of John Malherbe who had inherited estates at Hockliffe but who was still a minor. The Malherbes administered the manor of Hockliffe under the overlordship of William Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, and were the early patrons (and perhaps founders) of the Hockliffe hospital for sick and poor travellers.

SENSATIONAL EVENTS

Sensational events involving the family are mentioned in another part of the Annals of Dunstable. Robert Malherbe inherited the property at Hockliffe in around 1240 when he too was under age. The Annals in 1255 reported that he had borrowed from a Jewish moneylender named Abraham, of Norwich, pledging all his land and possessions. It seems he failed to pay back the money, and Richard, Earl of Cornwall, took up the case. The result was that a number of people had to be ejected from 29 acres of land in the manors of Hockliffe and Houghton Conquest.

There have been recent suggestions that the document produced by the moneylender was a forgery. But the source for this is 'Quandam Chartam inventi' in the Annals, which more likely means 'found a charter,' rather than 'a forged charter'.

Somehow the Malherbes survived the scandal but remained in difficulty. Robert Malherbe's nephew, John, inherited in 1251 but was still 'in great need' and borrowed money in 1262. It was possibly his son, ward of Sir William Muntchensy, who was mentioned in the report of the 1283 wrestling match.

John Buckledee