

NEWSLETTER

Dunstable & District Local History Society

No. 54

May 2020



Chairman's Notes

When the society's previous newsletter was produced, we had no inkling of the upheaval which was about to occur.

CANCELLATIONS

But our problems are of small importance compared to what is happening elsewhere. Suffice to say, the coronavirus has meant the cancellation of various society meetings and other town events in which we were to be involved.

In the meantime, to give you something interesting to read during the lockdown, we have brought forward the publication of this newsletter, which would have been due in September, and we're using money saved by the cancellations to pay for its delivery to everyone by post.

MIDDLE ROW

During the Spring we've still been quite busy. The heritage panel produced by the society at the request of Dunstable Council, giving a potted history of Middle Row, has now been printed and has been attached to the wall of Messrs Alexander's new premises (pictured). The production of the panel is one of many requirements which need to be met by the council to help secure a grant towards the regeneration of the area.

FUTURE PROGRAMME

Our members have worked to obtain a market stall to sell our books (cancelled), to give talks to schools about VE Day (cancelled) and to take part in the Dunstable Around the World Day (cancelled). We have also finalised the list of speakers for our monthly meetings, up until May next year. This was due to be printed on our usual forthcoming-events cards to be distributed to you all, but we have held fire on this until we know what the future holds.

VJ DAY

I have been preparing an article for the Gazette and for this newsletter about the reaction in Dunstable to the surrender of Japan in August 1945. The first part of this is inside. Celebrations in Dunstable on VJ Day, and indeed on VE Day, were comparatively muted because of the particularly uncertain circumstances locally.



A deserted Dunstable with the new heritage panel shown on the right

Many men from Dunstable were in battalions of the local regiment which were captured during the battle for Singapore in 1943. They were taken prisoner and nothing was heard from many of them for years. It has been a sobering experience to read, week by week, how news of their fate began to filter through after the end of the war in the East.

MANSHEAD ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

We have also made space in this newsletter to report on the closure of the Manshead

Archaeological Society, which since 1952 has played such a significant part in uncovering the ancient history of Dunstable. It was a shock to hear the news, even though we realised that planning conditions meant that much local archaeological work was now being undertaken by professional companies. The history society has been visiting the Manshead headquarters in Winfield Street to transfer some of its valuable documentation to our research rooms, but work on this had to be paused because of the lockdown.

QUEEN KATHERINE'S COURT

I hear that the attractive new homes on the old Woolworth site in High Street South will be called Queen Katherine's Court, in honour of King Henry VIII's first queen whose marriage, famously, was annulled by a court sitting in the nearby Priory. There's continuing confusion about whether to write Catherine or Katherine when referring to the lady from Aragon who herself varied her signature from day to day. Our own Vivienne Evans insisted on Catherine, Hilary Mantel ('Wolf Hall') prefers Katherine.

Meanwhile, we've been told that there is an old postcard naming the 'Church Walk' pathway as St Catherine's Walk, in honour of the 'Catherine Wheel' martyr who was the subject of the Miracle Play performed here in Dunstable. If anyone has a copy of the postcard I'd love to see it.

CYNTHIA TURVEY

Just as this newsletter went to press, the history society was sad to hear of the death of Cynthia Turvey. She had been a long-serving member of the society's committee and was our treasurer for many years, following the retirement of Bernard Stevens. Cynthia had been in failing health recently so we were particularly pleased to see her with her husband Trevor at our February meeting.

John Buckledee

John Franklin - Parish Constable



Among a bagful of old newspaper cuttings, I came across a page from *The Luton News and Bedfordshire Advertiser* dated Thursday October 9th 1924.

It had been kept because it contained an article called 'Dunstable A Century Ago' and is about the Franklin family. Septimus Franklin was landlord of the White Horse Inn in Church Street.

A CACHE OF PAPERS

While they were having the roof repaired, a cache of papers was found which dated from the time of his grandfather, John Franklin, the Parish Constable, who had also been landlord of the inn. One of the papers set out the list of 'victuallers' in 1818 when Dunstable's population was barely 1,300. They were: -Thomas Carter at the Sugar Loaf, Joseph Haynes, White Hart; Thomas Shaw, Red Lion; John Franklin, White Horse; Thomas Angle [sic], Yorkshire Gray; James Cook, Saracen's Head; John Gilbert, Swan; Sarah Gostelow, Waggon And Horses; Philip Higgs, Swan With Two Necks; George Wright, Shoulder Mutton [sic]; William Watley, Horse And Crown; George Willmore, Black Horse; John Bennett, Nag's Head; John Green, Crow; John Holmes, Anchor and Rebecca Lloyd at The Crown'. The list was signed by the magistrates at Woburn and sent to the Parish Constable - our John Franklin.

Much of his activity is evident by the receipts found in the bundle. In 1838 he filed a receipt from John Eaton from Newton Longville for £3.10s for a 'brown horse, with one eye nearside; warranted all right, good worker and quiet.' Not long after, John Eaton purchased another horse from him, presumably this time with two eyes. Many of the receipts were for beer, often for the bellringers at the Priory Church. For example, December 27th 1814, 'Beer ordered by a party of gentlemen at the Crown, to John Franklin, on account of news from America, 5s paid by Mr. Rogers, Churchwarden.'

An annual duty of the Parish Constable was to contact all the houses in his 'constablewick', listing the men aged from 18 to 45 and noting which of them 'labour under any infirmities' which were likely to cause them to be unavailable to serve in their local militia. Men under 5 feet in height and those possessing property worth less than £100 were exempt too. He also had to prepare jury lists and present them to the magistrates in Woburn. The one for 1818 contained 37 names, their occupations included cordwainer and coachmaster.

APPREHEND MISCREANTS

John's medical accounts record teeth extraction at 1s each as were leeches! An inoculation cost 5s. His main duty, however, was to apprehend miscreants and take them for trial in Bedford. He was allowed 1s.6d a mile for one prisoner, 2s.6d for two and 3s for three. There was no police station so prisoners were housed in the White Horse until the Constable could arrange to escort them. At one time the White Horse was full and the overflow was accommodated at the Yorkshire Gray. John Franklin received his expenses from Thomas Warner, 'Keeper of the Common Gaol in Bedford'. Also in 1818, the Ampthill Coroner instructed John Franklin to assemble a jury of 12 'good and lawful men' at the Waggon and Horses to enquire into the circumstances surround-

ing the death of Hannah Sapwell's infant child.

Hannah was kept at the White Horse for eleven days before being taken to Bedford where she was charged with wilful murder. She was acquitted of murder but found guilty of concealing the death of her child and sentenced to two years in gaol.

RUTHMATICS AND TRAVEL

Our Constable evidently suffered from 'Ruthmatics' as he rubbed into the affected joints a concoction of 'Oil of marshmallows, 2; oil of juniper, 2; oil of peters, 1 and spirits of wine, 1'.

Travelling by horse and gig was not cheap in 1823. To Watford or Bedford cost 14s, Eversholt or Brickhill 12s, Woburn 10s, Ampthill 9s and Luton 5s. He paid 10s.6d in window tax and 4s for a dog but nothing for horses or hair powder (the shilling in 1818 was worth about £4 in today's money).

ELECTION MATERIAL

The bundle also contained Election material. One card, undated, says, 'The favour of your Vote and Interests particularly requested for the Marquis of Tavistock, who will, with all possible dispatch, wait upon the Freeholders to solicit the Honour of their Support.' Another card, dated from Woburn Abbey March 13th 1820, reads 'You are requested to favour Lord George William Russell with your Company to Breakfast at Woburn Abbey on Thursday Morning next, at eight o'clock to proceed from thence to the Poll at Bedford.' The implication is that, after a free and lavish breakfast and free transport to the polling station, those invited could do little else than vote for His Lordship!

THE BOROUGH BAND

The 1924 article records that Septimus is 73 years old and still plays in the Borough Band, and that it is probably the oldest band in the County. Sixty years earlier, he was sworn into the old Volunteer Corps as a drummer boy and it was from that band of Corps that the Borough Band was formed. It concludes by noting that Councillor T W Bagshawe is collecting material for the new Dunstable Museum, which is due to open in the following year, and that the find of the old newspaper cuttings came just at the right time. It is anticipated that they will be 'cleaned, annotated and mounted in a large volume' and made 'available for the perusal of all who are interested.' If this 'large volume' ever materialised, I, for one, would be most interested to peruse it.

Hugh Garrod

Greeting New Members

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

Jack Costin



Sad Farewell



We are very sorry to announce the sad loss of

Sam Caen (former Borough Surveyor)

Lois Counter

Kath Horne

Cynthia Turvey

How Victory in Japan affected Dunstable



The 17 August 1945 edition of the Dunstable Borough Gazette, celebrates VJ Day

Dunstable people had mixed feelings during VE Day in May, 1945, when the Allied victory over Germany was celebrated.

Amidst the jubilation, everyone was well aware that many local families were still anxiously awaiting news of sons and fathers who had been sent to fight the Japanese. A battalion of the local regiment, the Bedfs and Herts [sic], had been captured at the disastrous battle for Singapore in 1943. Very little had been heard of them since.

Japan surrendered in August after two of its cities were destroyed by atomic bombs. The end of the war in the Far East was marked in Dunstable by comparatively subdued celebrations on what was known as VJ Day. It was only later that news began to filter through about what had happened to hundreds of local soldiers. Those who eventually returned home had suffered years of brutal treatment in prison camps.

STORIES OF INDIVIDUAL SOLDIERS

The Dunstable Gazette, over the following four months, did its best to tell the stories of each individual soldier. Today, it is a chastening experience to read the Gazette reports in sequence, week by week. Here are very brief summaries of just a few.

LANCE CORPORAL DAVID EBDEN

After the Japanese surrender, Mrs D Ebden, of 4 Park Road, Dunstable, received a letter from the War Office giving her the sad news that her husband, Lance Corporal David Ebden, had died on June 16 1943 while a prisoner in Japanese hands. The last communication Mrs Ebden had received from him was a card which arrived in July 1943 telling her he was then safe and well. L/Cpl Ebden, who was 32, was a member of Dunstable Liberal Club and before joining up was employed at the Home and Colonial Stores. He was an enthusiastic member of the Dunstable Thursday FC.



David Ebden

PTE JOE ASHDOWN

Official notification was also received by Mr and Mrs S L Ashdown, of 'Wyken', 18 High Street, Houghton Regis, of the death of their son, Joe Ashdown, while a prisoner in Japanese hands, Captured at Singapore, Pte Ashdown had died on July 23, 1943, while working on the Burma-Siam railway. At the time of his call-up in 1940 he was a Linotype



Joe Ashdown

operator on the Luton News. He had previously served his apprenticeship with the Dunstable Borough Gazette. He was well-known for his sporting activities in Houghton Regis where he was secretary of the Houghton Regis Boxing Club and a member of the cricket and tennis clubs. His parents ran a dairy business in Houghton for 23 years.

GUNNER R.E. JANES

There was sad news also for Mr and Mrs E Janes, of Hambling Place, Dunstable, who had been waiting hopefully for news of their son, Gunner R.E. Janes. They were notified that he died on November 5 1943 in Thailand. The cause of his death was not known. Only two cards had been received from him since he was captured. The last, which arrived at Christmas 1943, was dated February 23 of that year. He was employed at Waterlow's before he joined the army just before the war. He was an old Rosedale FC player.



R E Janes

GUNNER ALAN WILLIAM BASHEM

There was happier news after the Japanese surrender for Mrs J Bashem, of 55 Garden Road, Dunstable, who received a telegram from her husband, Gunner Alan William Bashem, informing her of his release from prison and arrival in India. Gnr Bashem, who in peacetime had been chief clerk and committee clerk in the Dunstable Town Clerk's office, became the first Dunstable prisoner to fly back from the Far East. Two months before the end of the war American paratroopers had landed about ten miles from the camp in Siam where he had been held since the fall of Singapore. They had surrounded the camp and established a secret headquarters in the jungle where they organised bands of Chinese and Siamese and carried on guerrilla warfare.

PTE STANLEY WILLIAM HARDY

Pte Stanley William Hardy sent a card from a prisoner-of-war camp at Saigon, dated August 21, to his wife, Mrs G. Hardy, of 28 Western Way, Dunstable. He had also been taken prisoner at Singapore. In peacetime he had frequently played football and cricket for Waterlow's, where he was employed as a machine minder in the printing department. His brother, Pte Aubrey Hardy, had been killed at Malta in June 1943.

GUNNER NORMAN HOLDEN

Gunner Norman Holden, back at his home, 42 Kingsbury Avenue, Dunstable, told the Gazette that during his captivity his weight went down to six stones. After being taken prisoner in Java, he and other prisoners had their heads shaved and if they allowed their hair to grow above half an inch they received a 'bashing'.

How Victory in Japan affected Dunstable



Norman Holden at home with Mum

Men were also beaten up when they failed to obey orders given in Japanese which, of course, they could not understand. After 12 months he had been transferred to Siam to work for eight months on the railway to Burma which cost so many lives. His friend, Gunner Harry Hollis, of Dunstable, who joined the army with him, died of dysentery, Gunner Holden also had dysentery and malaria. One day paratroopers descended and the prisoners discovered that the war was over. He had been a prisoner for two and a half years before a letter from home reached him. When he arrived home he found that his first card to his parents had not been received by them until July 1944.

GUNNER NEIL BURR

Gunner Neil Burr, asked by the Gazette reporter for his impressions of life in the prison camps, replied: 'Whatever has been said about it, there could be no exaggeration. It was indescribable.' The message 'Welcome home Daddy' greeted him when he arrived at his home, 14 Matthew Street, Dunstable, where his family had been eagerly awaiting him, Especially excited were his two small daughters, Yvonne aged five and Gloria, aged four. Gnr Burr, captured at Singapore, worked on the Burma-Siam railway. He was wounded in the hand by a bullet from an Allied plane which machine-gunned the train in which he and hundreds of fellow-prisoners were travelling. Doctors in the camp, using the crudest of instruments, operated on his hand from which a knuckle had been blown away. After this he had been transferred to a camp in Saigon, travelling in the hold of a ship amongst its cargo of coal. His ship was the only one of a convoy of four to survive air-force attacks.

Gnr Burr's brother, Gnr Allen Burr, had also worked on the Burma-Siam railway at the same time, but they never met. When Gnr Burr arrived at a transit camp before coming home he found that his brother had sailed the day before.

SGT JOHN EDGERTON

Although he arrived in Dunstable a day earlier than was expected, a warm welcome awaited Sgt John Edgerton from his wife and two young children at his home at 35 Union Street, Dunstable. Over the front door, with a large Union Jack and other flags, was the message 'Welcome Home Daddy, from Betty and Gladys'.

SGT KENNETH HOLLAND

Sgt Kenneth Holland, RA, of 4 Kirby Road, Dunstable, was also welcomed home. A pre-war Territorial, he was employed in the accounts department at Dunstable Municipal Offices before being called up at the outbreak of war.

GUNNER ERIC BURGESS

Gunner Eric Burgess, a former Waterlow's employee, arrived back on a Saturday when neighbours joined with his parents, Mrs and Mrs L Burgess, of 33 Beale Street, Dunstable, to give him a joyful welcome. Later, Mrs E Room presented him with a cheque for £5 on behalf of Beale Street residents.

With Gnr Burgess during the whole of his three and half years' captivity was his friend Gnr Eddie Eastham, of 895 Dunstable Road, Luton. After their capture at Singapore they were constantly on the move with working parties. They began work on the Burma-Siam railway where they remained until the railway was finished. They were then transferred to Ubol camp near the Indo-China border. It was while they were there that they heard of the Japanese surrender but it was not until nearly two months later that troops were parachuted into their camp and they began the long journey home. All three of his brothers were also serving in the army.

GNR JACK EAST & PTE ARCHIE EAST

Messages received by Mrs E East, of 7 Bidwell Hill, Houghton Regis, brought her the doubly joyful news that her two sons, both taken prisoner at Singapore, were safe and well. Pte Archie East had arrived in India and Gnr Jack East had arrived in Australia. Both had been employed at Waterlow's. The last time Mrs East had heard from them was in June 1944.

L/BDR ALEC DUDLEY

Another Singapore man to return home was L/Bdr Alec Dudley, of 288 High Street North, Dunstable. He came home via Canada and made the latter part of the journey in the liner Queen Elizabeth. He was employed at Bagshawe's and was a playing member of the Dunstable Argyle FC.

GNR FRANCIS MAWDSLEY

Also home was Gnr Francis Mawdsley, of 1 Blows Road, Dunstable, captured at Singapore, who had been forced to work in copper mines in Formosa and then in a coal mine at Fukoako. He was there when the atomic bomb was dropped in Nagasaki, only about 40 miles away.

GNR JACK WRAGG

Another Dunstable man working in the coal mine at the same time was Gnr Jack Wragg, of 3 Princes Street, Dunstable. When he returned home he gave Dunstable the first local eye-witness accounts of the effect of the atomic bomb. 'Nagasaki is now utterly devastated, and piles of rubble are all that remains,' he said. Gnr Wragg was employed at Waterlow's as a Monotype operator.

SGT WILLIAM GLADSTONE

Sgt William Gladstone, captured at Singapore, reached home at 5 The Retreat, Dale Road, Dunstable, where his son, four-year-old Billy ran towards him with outstretched arms and calling 'Daddy'. Also there were his wife and his other two children, Helen aged eight and Brenda aged six.

Pte Wilfred Franklin, son of Mr and Mrs A Franklin, of 39 Kirby Road, Dunstable, wrote home from Saigon, Indo-China, stating that he was fit and well. He had been employed at Index Publishers.

BDR K. WAKEFIELD

Since the fall of Singapore, Bdr K Wakefield had been in a prison camp at Formosa. His mother, Mrs E Wakefield, of 35 Evelyn Road, Dunstable, received a cable from him saying the he had been released. He had been employed at the Luton Stadium.

GNR GORDON HUTCHINS

Taken prisoner at Singapore while serving with the Royal Artillery, Gnr Gordon Hutchins notified his mother, Mrs S Hutchins, of 40 Alfred Street, Dunstable, of his arrival at Columbo. Before joining the Territorials in 1939 Gnr Hutchins was employed at the Davis Gas Stove Co at Luton.

How Victory in Japan affected Dunstable



L/BDR JACK MUSKETT

L/Bdr Jack Muskett, a prisoner since the fall of Singapore, cabled his wife at 17 Park Avenue, Houghton Regis, telling her that he was safe. He was employed at the cement works and played football for Houghton Rangers. He had three other brothers serving in the forces. The youngest, wounded in Germany, was in hospital.

COMPANY QUARTERMASTER SERGEANT FOSSEY

A card from Company Quartermaster Sergeant Fossey saying he was safe was one of the first messages to reach Dunstable after the Japanese surrender. CQMS Fossey, one of two brothers missing in Malaya, was a son of Mr and Mrs J Fossey, of 56 St Mary's Street, Dunstable. A reservist from the Suffolk Regiment, he was recalled in July 1939, served with the British Expeditionary Force in France and went through the Dunkirk evacuation. Afterwards he was transferred to a Cambridgeshire Battalion before going to the Far East.

GPT E FRANK UNDERWOOD

Until recently a prisoner in Siam, Pte Frank Underwood, of the Bedfs and Herts Regiment, who was taken prisoner in Singapore, is in India according to a message received by his parents, Mr and Mrs S Underwood, of Broomhills Road, Leighton.

GNR CHARLES NIMMO

A card from Saigon brought the good news to Mrs M Nimmo, of 21 Britain Street, Dunstable, that her son, Gnr Charles Nimmo, taken prisoner at Singapore, was safe and well. He was a former employee of AC Sphinx.

CPL J WESTWELL

Mr and Mrs G Westwell, of 82 Northfields, Dunstable, received the long-awaited news that their son Cpl J Westwell, was safe and well after three and a half years as a prisoner of the Japanese. Employed by George Kent Ltd. he was well-known as a keen boxer and table tennis player.

PTE MYER GREEN

A cable received by Mr and Mrs B Green, of 139 High Street North, Dunstable, brought them the cheering news that their son Pte Myer Green, taken prisoner at Singapore, was free again and in Australia. He joined up in February 1940 with his elder brother Harry who was a Quartermaster Sergeant serving with the Royal Engineers in Italy. Mr and Mrs Green's youngest son, Lionel, was in the Royal Artillery. Before joining the forces, all three sons assisted their father in his business as a fruiterer and greengrocer.

PTE HARRY LINNEY

A telegram, letter and card, all received within a few days, brought the glad tidings to Mrs H Linney, of 13 Park Avenue, Houghton Regis, that her husband, Pte Harry Linney, had been freed. He had been taken prisoner at Singapore.

GNR EDWARD FRANK BIRD

The Commanding Officer of the 419 Battery of the Bedfordshire Yeomanry, Major E W Swanton, visited Dunstable to meet relatives of men taken prisoner at Singapore. Through him it was learned that Gnr Edward Frank Bird, son of the late Mr and Mrs Bird, formerly of 43 Houghton Road, Dunstable, died in hospital at Saigon on May 30 1945. A pre-war Territorial, Gnr Bird had been called up two days before the declaration of war. He was then working at Vauxhall, Luton, but before that was employed as an outfitter's assistant with the Beds Supply Co, Dunstable. He played football for Houghton Rangers and the Dunstable Thursdays. His mother died during the time he was a prisoner.

L/BDR GEORGE 'WINK' BAILEY

L/Bdr George 'Wink' Bailey wrote to his mother, Mrs E K Bailey, of 31 King Street, Dunstable, saying he had been released from a prison camp in Saigon. He had been captured at Singapore. A former Dunstable Grammar School pupil, he played hockey for Waterlow's.

W/SGT H A KETTLEWELL

Under a headline 'Still They Come: Local Men Home From Far East' the Gazette interviewed even more soldiers back from the prison camps. 'We almost fell over the side of the ship to get our first glimpse of England for over five years,' said W/Sgt H A Kettlewell, son of the Rev F Kettlewell, Rector of Hockliffe and Vicar of Chalgrave. Sgt Kettlewell had worked on the Burma-Siam railway and had suffered four or five bouts of malaria. Ironically, he had been born in Japan, where his father was a missionary for 20 years. Treatment meted out to prisoners was not as good as it might have been, he said, though on a three and a half day march from one camp to another, undertaken at night for fear of bombing by our planes, the Japanese sergeant in charge was quite decent and treated the prisoners fairly.

REGIMENTAL QUARTERMASTER SERGEANT W LAWRENCE

Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant W Lawrence notified his wife, Mrs Lawrence of 130 High Street North, Dunstable, of his release from Changi Camp, Singapore. Sgt Lawrence had a remarkable military record. After joining the regular army and being decorated with the Military Medal during the 1914-18 war, he came to Dunstable to take a position at Dunstable Drill Hall. He went to India with Dunstable Territorials in 1941 and was taken prisoner at Singapore.



Welcome home Sergeant Lawrence

L/BDR E SMITH

Mr and Mrs J H Smith, of 36 Olma Road, Dunstable, were told that their son, L/Bdr E Smith, was in hospital in Bangalore, Burma, following his release from a prison camp. Taken prisoner in Singapore, he was employed at Harrison and Carter Ltd in Dunstable.

BDR JAMES BRENNAN

Another prisoner at Fukuoka Camp had notified his parents of his release. Mr and Mrs T Brennan, of 17 Princes Street, Dunstable, received a cable from Bdr James Brennan.

There will be more stories of soldiers returning home in the next edition of the newsletter.

John Buckledee



VJ Day service Grove House Gardens August 1945

The Manshead Archaeological Society



The local society which discovered much of what is now known about Dunstable's early history has decided to disband.

THE SWAN JEWEL

Manshead Archaeological Society is famous for finding the priceless Swan Jewel, a 15th century gold brooch now on display in the British Museum.

The society was formed in 1952 when extensive quarrying was taking place in the north of the town to provide chalk for the cement works at Houghton Regis.

Ancient remains were being uncovered there and a group of local people, headed by Les Matthews, began what turned into a 15-year archaeological dig at Puddlehill, the windswept area next to the chalk cutting. They recorded evidence of 6,000 years of occupation, including remains from the Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age and the Roman and Saxon periods.

The amateur archaeologists then found themselves invited to investigate numerous other sites in the town during a period when much of Dunstable was being redeveloped.

DISSOLVING THE SOCIETY

The society's membership has dwindled in recent years as professional archaeologists are often now retained on new development sites as part of planning regulations.

Manshead's chairman Ren Hudspith said: "It is very sad to have to dissolve the society after all these years.

We are in discussions to find homes for our collections and archives but, of course, things are particularly complicated during the present lockdowns."

ROMAN EXCAVATIONS

One of the most crucial excavations carried out by the society in its heyday was when the area alongside Dunstable crossroads was being cleared to make way for the Quadrant shopping centre. Manshead found numerous wells and remnants of roads and buildings there, proving that this was indeed the site of the Roman town called Durocobrivis. A town of that name in mentioned on Roman documents as being on the Watling Street north of St Albans, but historians had previously disagreed on where this could have been.

The society spent two seasons excavating a Roman villa at Totternhoe, and recorded the details of a Saxon cemetery which was uncovered when building work started at Marina Drive. It carried out a geophysical survey of Priory Meadow to trace the foundations of the old monastery, and the land there is permanently marked out with its findings. There have been numerous other smaller excavations and surveys but the dig which provided the greatest excitement was on the site of the old Friary, behind the Square. This was where the 15th century gold and white brooch in the shape of a swan was discovered.

In 1993 Manshead was able to purchase its headquarters at 5 Winfield Street (the old Sportsman pub) thanks to the generosity of Dr Gerald Ashton and other society members.

John Buckledee



Excavating the Dominican Friary at Friary Field in the 1960s



12/13th century 'behive oven' excavated at Friary Field in the 1960s



The Swan Jewel, now at the British Museum, was found at Friary Field in 1965



Excavating Saxon huts at Puddlehill in the 1960s

British Newspaper Archives



The British Newspaper Archives have a vast and varied collection of newspapers but unfortunately not the Dunstable Gazette.

However many items can be found about Dunstable in the most unexpected papers. Here is a sample of Dunstable in the 18th Century, when it only had a Town Crier, including the original spelling and layout but for convenience some articles have been condensed.

OXFORD JOURNAL - SATURDAY 09 JUNE 1753

DUNSTABLE HORSE RACES. On Tuesday a Plate of Fifty Pounds

NORTHAMPTON MERCURY - MONDAY 25 MARCH 1782

WHEREAS a person left a little bay horse on the 7th of this instant, at the Saracens-Head, in Dunstable (*this is the first Saracen's Head not the present one*): This is to give Notice, that if the said Person don't return in fourteen Days, from the above, the Horse will be sold to pay the Charges, JOHN COOKE.

NORTHAMPTON MERCURY - MONDAY 20 DECEMBER 1784

The great Variety of affected Persons of Consequence, who have applied to Dr. RAYNES, at the BULL INN in Dunstable, who is universally allowed to be one of the first Surgeons in Europe, will induce him to continue for the time longer in that Town.

The afflicted real or Parish Poor will be cured by him for six Days to come, without Expense and not after that time under any pretence whatever.

NORTHAMPTON MERCURY - SATURDAY 07 OCTOBER 1786

Masters and all Persons concerned with Horses

That I EDWARD SMITH, of Dunstable, in the County of Bedford, Book-Keeper to the Leeds and Manchester Coaches, have had a Receipt by me for upwards of 20 Years, for the Cure of the YELLOWS and STAGGERS in that useful Animal, which I promised never to make public, nor tell any Person until after the Death of the Gentleman who gave it me, and who is now deceased. I have cured many myself by this Receipt. It may be given with the greatest Safety by any Shoeing-Smith, Groom, Coachman, Hostler, or Horse-Keeper.

Two Drenches, which never fail a Cure, properly given according to the printed Directions, 5s. 3d. each Drench. Two Doses of Physic proper for the Disorder, 2s. 6d. each Dose.

Which Articles will be sent to any Part of England with printed Directions.

NORTHAMPTON MERCURY - SATURDAY 26 MAY 1787

JOHN MOSLEY, Surgeon and Apothecary

Late a Pupil Mr. John Hunter, Student at Dr. Baillie's and Mr. Cruickshank's Anatomical Theatre, and six Months resident Pupil at the Middlesex Hospital, London, begs Leave to acquaint the Inhabitants of Dunstable, and its Environs, that he has taken in a House in Dunstable, with the assistance of his Partner, Mr. Bowlass, of Ampthill, he means to practice the different Branches of SURGERY and MEDICINE; and, being determined to pay an unremitting Attention to the Duties of his Profession, he hopes he shall be found merit the Approbation of his Employers.

N. B. Persons who stand in Need of Medical or Chirurgical Assistance, and are deemed Objects of Charity, (not having Parish Relief) by coming properly recommended, will be carefully attended, and supplied with medicines, gratis.

John Hunter was very famous and Dr. Baillie was the nephew of Mr. Cruickshank

IPSWICH JOURNAL - SATURDAY 23 MAY 1789

Wednesday morning an extraordinary match of foot-ball took place at Dunstable Downs; a young gentleman took the hill for 200 guineas, against 11 of the best foot-ball players in the county, which was decided in his favour, after a contest of four hours and a half.

NORTHAMPTON MERCURY - SATURDAY 22 MAY 1790

TO COVER, this Season, 1790, John Hickman's, the Anchor, in Dunstable, at Seven Shillings and Sixpence each Mare, and One Shilling the Groom,

That handsome Chesnut HORSE, M A N U E L

He was got by the original Old Manuel, then belonging to Mr. Thomas Stokes and Mr. John Smith, Dealers. He is fifteen Hands high and a sure Foal-Getter and is the only Stallion that covers in these Parts that was truly got by Old Manuel. His Dam was a good Hunting Mare, got by Tortoise; and her Dam by Old Sloe, then belonging to Lord Gower.

NORTHAMPTON MERCURY - SATURDAY 02 OCTOBER 1790

WANTED, A sober, steady MAN-SERVANT that can wait at Table, look after a Horse, and understands the Management of a Garden. None need apply whose Character will not bear the strictest inquiry. Apply to Mr. West, White-Hart, Dunstable

NORTHAMPTON MERCURY - SATURDAY 26 JANUARY 1799

LOST ABOUT the 6th of December last, from the Sugar-Loaf Inn, DUNSTABLE, A Black-Tann'd TERRIER BITCH, cropp'd. Had on a brass Collar, with the Name E. Chaplin, London, thereon. Whoever can give Intelligence her, so that she may return again to E. Chaplin, No. 46, Paternoster Row, shall receive HALF-a-GUINEA Reward. As there is reason to believe that she has been Stolen, whoever withholds her after this public Notice, will be prosecuted.

NORTHAMPTON MERCURY - SATURDAY 09 FEBRUARY 1799

LOST A PORTMANTEAU TRUNK On Thursday January 24th 1799 between Little Brickhill and Dunstable. Containing Wearing Apparel, a Barrister's Gown and Band, and a Book with the Name of Shirley Parkins in it.

Whoever will bring it with its Contents to Mr. Sleath at the Bull Inn, Stony-Stratford; or Mr. Coates, at the Sugar-Loaf Inn, Dunstable; shall receive a Reward of ONE GUINEA on its Delivery.

NORTHAMPTON MERCURY - SATURDAY 16 FEBRUARY 1793

EDWARD CHANDLER Late WAITER AT THE Bull Inn, DUNSTABLE, BEGS to inform. his Friends, and the Public in general, That he has Taken and Entered on the Old SHOULDER OF MUTTON, NORTHAMPTON—but now the Phoenix where has laid in a fresh assortment of Neat Foreign RUMS, BRANDY, &c. and hopes by a steady Attention to Detail to merit the Favours of his Friends and the public in general, which will always gratefully acknowledged, Their humble Servant, EDWARD CHANDLER.

LONDONDERRY STANDARD - 9 AUGUST 1849

Her Majesty Queen Victoria bowed repeatedly in acknowledgment of the cheering and waving that greeted her from the boats. The Queen wore a large shawl of red plaid, which she kept closely folded round her, and a plain Dunstable straw bonnet. After having remained a few moments in sight of the assemblage, she retired to the deck, round house cabin.

I make no excuse for including this 19th century item. It was always known that Queen Victoria had a Dunstable Bonnet but it took an Irish newspaper to prove it.

Rita Swift

Memories of old Dunstable



Dane Hawley wrote a nostalgic message to our website from Australia, having viewed on Google Earth his old home in Aubrey Road.

AUBREY ROAD

Although the house is still there, the street no longer exists under its old name. It was built parallel to Luton Road, at the foot of Dale Road, but eventually joined up with Jeans Way as the two roads extended. The sensible decision was then taken to call the whole length of road Jeans Way.

This raises the interesting question about how names change over the years. The road was originally called Jean's Way (with an apostrophe) because it was named in memory of Mrs Jean Sell, wife of Leslie Sell who built many of the houses there. The apostrophe has been dropped over the years, which is a pity, but many people are now calling the road Jeansway, which is rather odd.

The origins of the street's name was first researched by reporter Alan Harris as part of a series of articles he wrote for the Dunstable Gazette.

SCOTT'S GARAGE

Many people want apostrophes abolished but they have their uses. One example which developed over time was Scott's Garage, founded by Mr Scott on the site in High Street South now occupied by Cash Converters. When Mr Scott's two sons joined him in the business it became known as Scott and Sons and then Scotts' Garage, with the apostrophe placed precisely where it should have been.

ORGAN TRANSPLANT

The organ which was once a feature of the Baptist Church (now Christ Church) in West Street, Dunstable, is still very much in use – in The Netherlands.

It was made by Tom Atterton, who ran an organ-building firm at 11 High Street. Leighton Buzzard (now the home of the Fabric World store) and was installed in the Dunstable church in 1896

The organ was dismantled in 1980 and later shipped to the Netherlands where, in 1984, it was rebuilt and installed in the Reformed Church of Kornhold.

Now it has been moved again, to the St Francis Church in Wolvega. A special service was held there featuring some of the music played by Fred Gostelow of Luton at the organ's debut in Dunstable. Dunstable History Society helped to trace the original programme.

Fred Gostelow, born in Dunstable, was a musical prodigy. He was appointed organist at Dunstable Congregational Church when he was only 13 and in 1888 became organist and choirmaster at St Mary's, Luton, a position which he held until his death in 1942. He and his business partner, Albert Farmer, founded the well-known music shop, Farmer's, in Luton and Dunstable.

A FICTIONAL VICTORIAN MURDER

History society member John Pratt, a dedicated supporter of Luton Town FC, was intrigued by a Luton Town reference in a book, Mrs Jeffries and the Merry Gentlemen, about a fictional Victorian murder. The book compares Luton's form with a team called Southampton St Mary. Inquiries reveal that Southampton St Mary's were elected to the Southern League in 1885 to replace the 2nd Scots Guards team. By 1887 their name was shortened to just Southampton. The American author of the book, Emily Brightwell, has certainly done her homework!

KING EDWARD II

Research into Royal connections with Dunstable led to queries about King Edward II, who is said on some internet sites to have taken part in a tournament in Dunstable in 1309. This is incorrect but the king IS known to have settled gambling debts incurred by his sister Mary when she was a nun at Grovebury Priory in Leighton Buzzard.

So what kind of betting occupied Mary's time when she wasn't at prayer?

Historian Kathryn Warner, an expert on Edward II, kindly tried to answer our query but nothing specific about Mary's wagering has been traced. Her brother regularly lost three, five, ten, twenty shillings gambling, which wasn't all that much on each occasion, but soon mounted up. He played various games of dice, possibly also chess or other board games, called 'tables', and cross and pile, the medieval equivalent of heads or tails. There was also a game called palet, not unlike modern boules.

"I suppose it depended how much you were willing to bet on dice, really," she writes. "Edward always spent five pounds on Christmas Day playing at dice, which doesn't sound like a lot, but in fact was more than a year's wages for most people at the time."

A FASCINATING DOCUMENT

Spare a thought for the society's vice-chairman Hugh Garrod who spent an enormous amount of time transcribing a fascinating 1542 document listing (rather illegibly) the property owned here by the Dunstable Priory monastery before its closure. Only when Hugh's work was finished did we discover that the list had already been published in volume 64 of the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society (pp115). The property owned by Dunstable Friary is listed in the same book (pp137).

WHIPSNADE'S WAR

The society has been given a number of items collected by Harry and Beryl Stevens, of Luton Road, including a book, Whipsnade's War, by C.H. Keeling. This was produced in manuscript format in 1990 and contains details from Whipsnade Zoo's occurrences book recording the arrivals, births and deaths of the animals there. There's a distressing section about the death during the Second World War of a giraffe which was so frightened by a stray bomb which landed near her paddock that she ran amok for almost a day until she died of heart failure. Harry was a keeper at the zoo with special responsibility for the rhinos. He was forced to retire in the 1970s after being accidentally injured by a water buffalo.

HAWTHORN BAKER

A former member of the history society, Lois Counter, died in November last year, aged 88. For most of her working life she had been personal secretary to Henry Colman, managing director of Hawthorn Baker, the Dunstable printing equipment firm. Lois assembled a photo album of company events which is now kept by Henry's son Baden. Some of the photos have been featured in two Yesteryear pages in the Dunstable Gazette.

John Buckledee



Lois Counter



Hawthorn Baker's first factory in Nicholas Lane