

# Newsletter

DUNSTABLE & DISTRICT  
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

N°8

September 1997



## The Queensway Hall

33 YEARS  
AGO

The Queensway Hall (originally named Civic Centre) was opened on 16th April 1964 at a cost of £320,000. At the time Dunstable was in a fever of modernisation, demolishing and rebuilding. The Queensway Hall did not replace anything on its site as it was built in the middle of fields belonging to Dunstable Park.

At the opening it was acclaimed as an imposing, impressive building. I will quote here a few extracts from the *Dunstable Gazette* of 17th and 24th April 1964.

'The Civic Hall stands at the head of Queensway. Viewed from High-street North, it is an impressive building, with its 100-foot-long domed roof and its broad glass frontage, framed by trees. Inside, in the imposing ground-floor foyer the impression of space and light is even more evident, since the foyer is completely surrounded by glass, with reconstructed stone and local bricks.'

'In the centre of the hall is the main assembly hall and auditorium, called the Queensway Hall. It is elliptical in shape, with curving walls of wood reaching up to the specially designed and moulded ceiling, made of white fibrous plaster.'

'The Queensway Hall can seat up to 900 people for concerts and stage plays, and is equipped to serve more than 500 people at a banquet. The large foyer outside the hall provides ample room for meeting prior to dinners and contains a bar and cloakrooms.'

'For dances, in the Hall accommodating up to 900 people, a complete square of carpet, about 3,150 feet square, can be removed from the middle of the floor.'

'Acoustically lined with special hardwoods, the Hall has many special features. Different coloured lights reflecting on to the mottled ceiling, can create special effects, while spotlights and magnificent stage facilities can cater for any type of entertainment.'

'For banquets, the back of the stage can be moved forwards to make the hall into one enclosed room, while for smaller gatherings, when it may be necessary to reduce the size of the hall, a partition curtain is available.'

'The Hall was designed by Messrs. Shingler Risdon Associates and built by Messrs. Ford and Walton Limited. The heating and ventilation plant was installed by Messrs.

C.D. Stone (Dunstable) Ltd., and electrical work was by another local firm, Messrs B. Thomas.

'The Civic Hall is the major part of a long-term development programme for Dunstable. It was designed to cater for the civic and cultural needs of the rapidly growing town

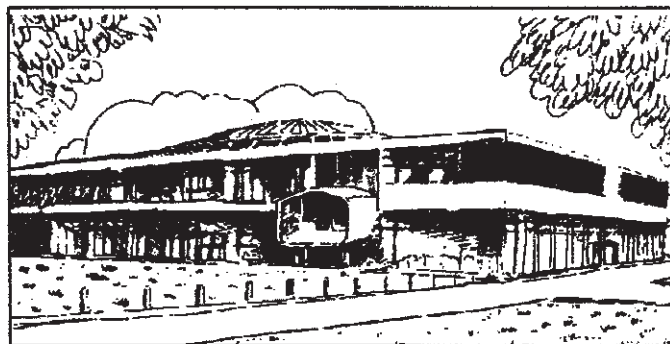
with a special thought to the future. For, since the start of the 1950's Dunstable's growth and its need for further development has demanded considerable and careful forethought.'

'With the removal of the hedge around Grove House Gardens the old has been merged with the new greatly contributing to the beauty of the whole scheme. Designed on an "open vista" plan, the Centre will be finished with an open piazza.'

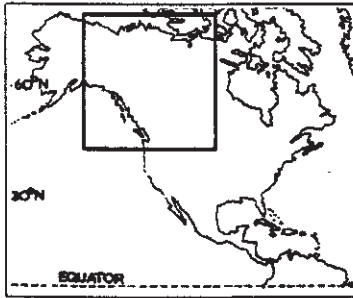
### Over Thousand Teenagers Vote New Hall "Fab"

'Dunstable's new Civic Hall received a fantastic reception from the town's teenagers on the first occasion that they were given the opportunity to use it. It is estimated that about 1,300 teenagers attended the "Top Twenty Disc Nite" held there on Monday evening. Their unanimous verdict on the Hall: "It's Fab." Several members of the Town Council . . . popped in to see how things were going. Any worries they might have had about the hall being damaged by the hooliganism we have read so much about lately were needless — for, in general, the youngsters treated the hall with a great deal of respect.'

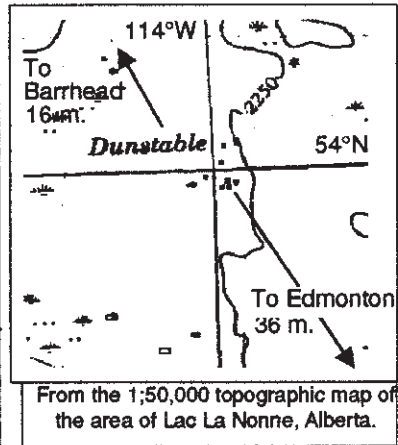
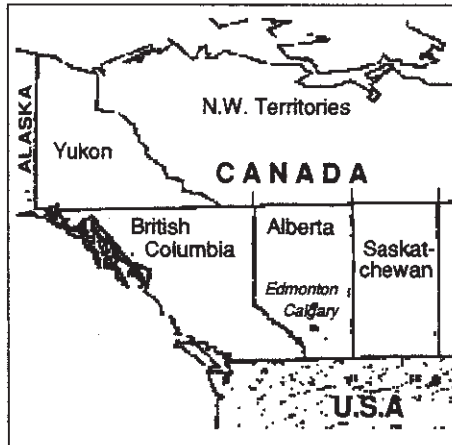
O.Roucoux.



# DUNSTABLE - Alberta - CANADA



North America  
and West Canada to locate  
DUNSTABLE - Alberta



From the 1:50,000 topographic map of  
the area of Lac La Nonne, Alberta.

## DUNSTABLE - IT'S JUST A GROUP OF HUTS IN ALBERTA, CANADA

This was the big title on page 8 of the *Dunstable Gazette* of 1st January 1972, written by Ralph A. Lewin. He is presented by the paper as 'A Dunstablian who is now researching at the University of California and who traces some Hambling family history back to the gold rush on the Klondyke.'

Ralph Lewin visited Dunstable, Alberta, in June 1971 and reported that a Robert W. Hambling of Dunstable (Beds) came out west along the old Klondyke trail and settled there in 1905. He must have brought everything he needed on horse-back. In England he was in the insurance business and seeking new fields to conquer. He read the euphemistic immigration recruiting literature of Canada and was won over.

Robert was a son of William Hambling, the last headmaster of Dunstable's Chew's Foundation Charity School and also the Commanding Officer of the Company of local volunteers. At six feet plus, a clipped military moustache and bearing, active in politics and holding an elective position and rank in the Volunteer Reserve, he was obviously following in his father's footsteps. He packed his trunks, including the colourful uniform, and with Mrs Hambling and a family of five, arrived in Edmonton in 1905. On hearing of a large lake (Lake George) with an abundance of fish, Mr Hambling, with the enthusiasm and optimism of the day, visualised a summer resort with cottages, boating, fishing and duck shooting. He purchased 80 acres of CPR land at the east end of the lake. As a concession to the custom of the country, he acquired a broad-brimmed Stetson of the style favoured by Dr Halliday, built a large square log house with verandah and proceeded to substantiate his vision.

Adapting where necessary, modifying when possible, he lived his life and to a great extent achieved his object. Mr Hambling and his sons built the first summer cottage on the lake.

Friends in England were advised of the educational problem facing the local families and as a result, Mr and Mrs Ballans, teachers, taught the first school in a log building in the Hambling property. The boys, Lionel, Bill and Eric, embraced the life wholeheartedly, but the enthusiasm of the women, Mrs Hambling, Edith and Nora, accustomed to the plush and polish of the Victorian era was more reserved. A garden was ploughed and planted, Mr Hambling's pride. Nets and traps were bought, a boat built, and the family was in business.

Lionel developed into the carpenter and boat builder, Bill and

Eric into hunters, fishermen and trappers.

Mrs Hambling died in 1914 and Nora in 1917. Edith was left to care for the house, father and brothers.

A few names of other immigrants in the area should be mentioned. In 1903, the first arrival was M. J. Stamper with his wife and four children, the eldest 13 years old. Before coming to Canada, Mr Stamper had been headmaster of Cockermouth Grammar School. Later he was Justice of Peace and Secretary - Treasurer of the Local Improvement District.

Mr. and Mrs James Redwood and a small daughter came from Devonshire to Edmonton and moved to Dunstable in 1905. They had a General Store and later kept the Post Office for many years. Mr Johnny Young came from Scotland in 1906. The Wilson, Patterson and Hood families are also mentioned as staying with the Youngs before starting their own homestead.

In 1908, enough emigrants had settled there to justify the establishment of a post office and it became necessary to choose a name for the place. Bob Hambling suggested 'Dunstable', after his own town. Other names were also proposed, written on pieces of paper and put in a hat. 'Dunstable' was picked, and officially adopted.

One cannot buy petrol at Dunstable any more or chewing gum, or baling wire, or brooms. No more letters are being postmarked "DUNSTABLE, ALBERTA" and only a few huts are left of a once thriving place. Memories are kept in the museum of Barrhead, a little town situated 16 miles north-west. I am indebted to Mrs Flora Stewart, the secretary of the Barrhead & District Historical Society, for the newspaper cuttings, maps and information I have used.

However, the school of Dunstable is still active. In 1948 a new school was open to re-group the pupils of a number of small settlements of the area and in 1952 a larger, newly constructed Dunstable School was opened to accommodate all the students under one roof. This is the school building which remains in operation. In 1990 a reunion was organised which managed to contact most of the 500 ex-pupils who attended the school between 1948 and 1970. I have the address of Dunstable School, if anybody is interested in contacting someone there.

Paul and Wendy Mills visited Dunstable in 1988 — when Wendy was Mayor of Dunstable, Bedfordshire — and again in 1994. They met a number of relatives of the Redwoods and Hamblings. Their visits were reported in *The Leader*, the local newspaper published in Barrhead.

Omer Roucoux

# QUEEN VICTORIA'S DIAMOND JUBILEE

100 YEARS  
AGO

Now that we are hearing so much about celebrations for the millenium it is perhaps a good time to look back at the celebrations one hundred years ago for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The anniversary of the Queen's accession actually fell on Sunday June 20th. 1897, and on that day there was an impressive civic service at the Priory Church, attended by all the local dignitaries, and in all the local chapels and churches the ministers and vicars gave suitably patriotic and emotional addresses.

The day for celebrating and having a good time was Tuesday June 22nd. For several weeks beforehand the *Gazette* had carried advertisements for flags and bunting, 'illumination devices in copper and iron for gas, wire frames for coloured lamps' and anything else that could be used for decorating everything and everywhere. The weather on the Sunday wasn't too good, so naturally everybody was somewhat jittery about what sort of day Tuesday would be. But they need not have worried for Tuesday, as the reporter in the *Dunstable Borough Gazette* wrote, brought beautiful 'Queen's weather'.

Dunstable woke that day to the sound of the 'merry chimes' of the Priory bells. It was the start of a very busy day. Early in the morning the Dinner Committee met to prepare the Old Folks' Dinner. Tables were set in the newly renovated Town Hall, 'gay with flags and and banners', and at midday the senior citizens of the town sat down to their meal of roast beef and vegetables, followed by 'unlimited supplies of tempting pudding', all accompanied by 'unlimited quantities of ale and mineral waters, provided free by Mr. Benjamin Bennett'. Then the 'old ladies were regaled with snuff, and the old gentlemen provided with tobacco'. (Not quite the thing for the millenium perhaps!) And when the band outside played the National Anthem 'the whole company rose and joined fervidly in that grand old loyal air'.

At two o'clock in the afternoon there followed a civic ceremony in the Square, where all the schoolchildren had assembled. A platform had been erected on which the Mayor and Town Council stood, along with Rev. Canon Macaulay, who gave an appropriate address and exhorted everybody to remember that the author of all their blessings was the Lord. His message that day, he said, could be summed up in the words 'God bless our gracious Queen'. There was a final prayer and then a grand procession was formed, headed by the Cycle Brigade, their cycles adorned with flowers, flags and bunting. It proceeded round the town, the children's section marching behind the Excelsior Band, with the Borough Band heading the Ancient Order of Foresters. By then the Dinner Committee had retired and it was the turn of the Tea Committee to prepare the children's tea, held in England's Meadow. Both bands were there, too, playing the National Anthem once more, and the children enjoyed the usual sports, games and competitions.

After this came a brief interval when everybody must have been glad to get their breath back (particularly the bandmen) before the celebrations started again, just before nine, when all the illuminations were turned on. A huge arch, made of "ornamented gas pipes", spanned the High Street and was fixed to the Gas Company's mains at each side of the road. The Gas Company supplied the gas free of charge for the evening and the whole arch was lit up, providing a

'magnificent spectacle' and lighting up the whole street. (What would a Health and Safety Officer say now?)

The Sugar Loaf was 'outstandingly pretty' with fairy lights. The decorations on the Victoria Bun House and the Red Lion were spectacular. Fairy lights and Chinese lanterns were everywhere.

On The Square torches were distributed, and led once more by the two indefatigable bands a procession moved off to the Downs. At the top of the hill a bonfire 35 feet high, and weighing at least 25 tons, had been built. On the stroke of ten a rocket went up and beacon fires were lit right across the country. With a telescope they could be seen from the Downs as far away as Guildford and Oxfordshire.

But that was not the end of the celebrations. Everybody came back down the hill for the last event of the day, the firework display on The Square, which started at 11 o'clock and went on until after midnight.

When finally the bands played the National Anthem for the last time nobody was ready to go home and even at two and three o'clock in the morning many people were still there. It had been a good day, with no hitches and no disasters, "a never-to-be-forgotten day, regal weather, and right royal celebrations".

Joan Curran

## A clock face for Priory Church

Whilst the main emphasis for the Jubilee Celebrations was the organising of the parties for the children and old people, the procession, the bonfire, firework display and the decoration of the town, the Government encouraged communities to consider a more permanent memorial of the occasion. Many suggestions remained at the talking stage and failed to materialise.

Prompted by the *Dunstable Borough Gazette*, the Trustees of the Cart Charity were approached with the suggestion that the Church clock should be repaired, fitted with Westminster quarter chimes and an external face on the north side of the Church tower as a memorial of this occasion. This was readily agreed and the Trustees gave £50 towards the cost, being money that had accrued whilst the clock had been out of action. The balance of the cost came from donations made by the general public. The face was cast in two sections, was (and still is) seven feet in diameter and weighed four hundredweight. The gilt numerals measured over a foot in length. The wall of the Tower through which the crankshaft bearing the hands passed was three feet eight inches thick. The work on the clock was carried out by Messrs. J. Smith & Sons of Derby and completed in time for the Dedication Service on Saturday, 6th August 1898 when Mrs. Macaulay, wife of the Rector, Canon Macaulay, formally set the clock going. The Rector took the opportunity to preach a sermon on the need to give thanks to God for the blessings received during the sixty years of Her Majesty's reign and to dedicate the clock and its chimes to His service in the future.

Unfortunately not many hours after the Dedication Service the chiming mechanism failed. The fault was subsequently rectified by the makers and gave good service until they had to be disconnected to avoid irritation to nearby residents.

John Lunn

# Society Comments —

Welcome to the new season of meetings, 1997 - 98. I hope that you will enjoy the programme which has been arranged. If you are a new member reading this, a particular welcome to you and we look forward to seeing you.

Apologies immediately for an error on your membership programme which somehow escaped notice. The May meeting should read **Tuesday 12th**, not the 10th.

Over the summer, the Society has had four very enjoyable outings, when we have been blessed with fine, sunny weather, both on the two evening gatherings in the Redbourn area and at College Lake, Pitstone, and for the two (the second by popular demand!) full-day outings exploring the Ouse. The last event was the first full-day outing that the Society has undertaken and we would welcome your comments as to whether we should continue to have an outing of this length (if feasible), or a half-day one (as in the past), as well as our customary evening trips.

Following the Extraordinary General Meeting at our May meeting and the alteration to rules to enable us to increase our general committee by two, Mrs. Lydia Raby and Mr. Stanley Knowles have been invited to join the committee as co-opted members, and have accepted. They will continue until the AGM in March of next year, when election for officers and committee members take place.

Our Society hosted the tenth annual Bedfordshire Local History Conference on Saturday 14th June, when some 50 representatives from societies from all over the county visited Dunstable for an all-day programme.

The morning centered round the Priory Church, where two lectures were given, David Warren, Site Director of the Manshead Archaeological Society, gave a talk on 'The Hidden History of Dunstable', describing the excavations made by the Society over the years and the burials and many items discovered.

Sheila Furnell, one of our members and a church guide and present church warden, talked on 'The History of the Priory', taking the audience through succeeding centuries to the present day and describing the many artefacts of the Priory. Conference members were then able to walk round the church. This was followed by a guided walk through Dunstable, using the blue leaflets published by Dunstable Town Council.

An excellent lunch, prepared by some of our ladies, was then taken in our usual meeting hall at The Square. The afternoon talk was given by Paul Bowes, of The Book Castle, under the title of 'Publishing Books on Local History'. Paul gave an in-depth insight into his unique position of being a bookseller and a publisher at the same time and gave a descriptive view of over 50 books that The Book Castle has now published.

The conference closed with afternoon tea. At The Square our display stand was used, with suitable local illustrations and literature covering all the panels. A letter has since been received from Mr. Harry Arch, Chairman of the Bedfordshire Local History Association, thanking us for a successful conference and for the hard work put in, and saying how much those present enjoyed all the varied items of the visit.

Some of you with an eagle eye may have noticed that the sub heading of Flemons & Marchant recently disappeared from the chemist's shop on the corner of West Street and Princes

Street. After 116 years, therefore, the name of Flemons (although under different owners) has gone from the Dunstable scene. The herbal business of Mr. Flemons ceased in 1962, as recounted in our first book, published at the end of last year. However, not everybody, apparently, thinks so. The last proprietor, Mr. Michael Twelvetrees, tells me that he continued to have odd letters referring to the herbal trade. He has kindly let me have the last one he received, dated January of this year, and this is reproduced below for your interest.

Somewhere, probably in a trade manual, there must still be a reference to Joseph Flemons & Sons, Ltd !

## INTERNATIONAL EXPORTERS

(Exporters and Importers of Drugs and Chemicals)  
TC 9/1239, Tiruvandur 695 010, Kerala, S. India  
Tel +91 471 88000, 84277

328000, 321277, 320675

No.116/IE/96-97

13-1-1997

M/s Joseph Flemons & Sons Ltd  
Wholesale Herb Merchants  
Dunstable (Bedfordshire)  
U.K.

Dear Sir,

We are Exporters of Medicinal Plants and their Extracts in Thick Paste and in Dry Powder form. The Extracts are manufactured by our sister concern M/s. Herbs India charitable Society. The list of products manufactured by M/s. Herbs India is enclosed herewith.

Kindly let us know your requirements, so that we can offer the prices of the standardised products.

Expecting an early reply.

With regards

Yours sincerely,

  
for International Exporters

Talking about books, the second of our series under the title of 'Old Trades of Dunstable' will be published, all being well, in time for our November meeting. For details see next page. This one follows our Trades Evening held in November '95, when Fred Moore talked about some of the shops he remembered in Dunstable and Don Kemp gave an account of the Cattle Market which used to take place on The Square. The forthcoming book will contain much more fascinating information and anecdotes and as we went out of print very quickly on our first publication, we suggest you may like to order your copy (copies) now! — to Bernard Stevens or myself, please.

Colin Bourne

# — News and Views

## Old Trades of Dunstable



Fred Moore  
Don Kemp



## Exhibition at Markyate

To celebrate 100 years of the parish of Markyate the village Local History Society will be putting on an exhibition on Friday 7th and Saturday 8th November, at the Baptist Hall in Buckwood Road. It will include photographs of Markyate from the last 100 years and old advertisements.

As we shall be having Richard Hogg, the Chairman of the Markyate Local History Society, to talk to us about the village at our meeting the following week, the exhibition will be of particular interest and worth visiting.

FRED MOORE reminiscences about the old shops and the tradespeople he remembers between the wars, and DON KEMP writes the fascinating story of the Cattle Market and the Fat Stock Shows in which he played an important part.

56 pages

£2.95

Well illustrated

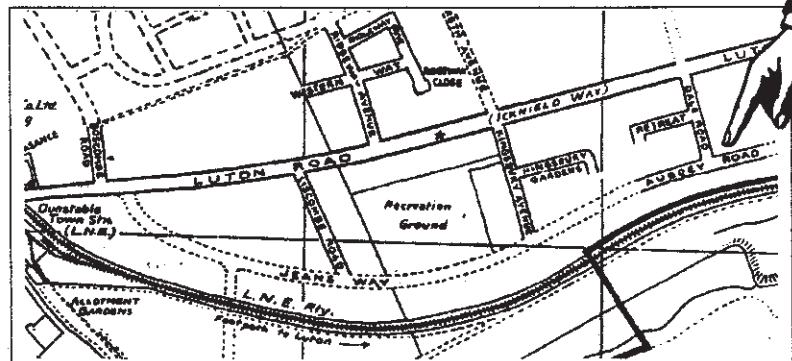
**A History Society publication, out early November**

### *Do you remember Aubrey Road ?*

We have recently had an enquiry from a Mr. Dane Hawley, living in Australia, who tells us that he was born in Aubrey Road, Dunstable, in 1944, and his family emigrated to Australia in 1949. Aubrey Road is now part of Jeans Way, but in the '30s and '40s was a short length of road forming a T with Dale Road. The map below is from 1939. It was extended in both directions in the '50s and linked up with what is now Liscombe Road, and the whole road was then called Jeans Way.

If anyone has any recollections of Aubrey Road in the 40s, or of the Hawley family, Mr. Hawley would be very interested to hear from you. His address is Buckingham & Fowler's Road, Koonwarra, Victoria, 3954, Australia.

Joan Curran



Section of a Dunstable Guide map of 1939 - 40 showing the projected Jeans Way, starting opposite the Boscombe Road corner (west) to Skimpot Road (east). Eventually only the section from Liscombe Road to the sports ground was built.

© Articles published in the Newsletters may not be reproduced without permission.

### *Any Volunteers ?*

Over the winter months there are two projects which the committee would like to see the Society undertake, but your help is needed. The first is to sort out the large collection of photographs of old Dunstable held at the Town Council Offices at Grove House, which has been built up over the years without formal cataloguing and now requires attention. This would involve several sessions with a small team of people, and obviously a good knowledge of the town is needed. The subject of the pictures will be very well known in many cases and some of the pictures will actually be labelled, but background information may also be needed for the photos, which come from a variety of sources.

The other project is to record people's memories of old Dunstable and we have someone with good recording equipment who is interested in helping with this. What we need from you is the names of people whose reminiscences you think would be interesting and worth recording.

One other plea. Is there anybody out there who is experienced at proof reading and would be willing to do some now and again ?

Please let either Colin Bourne or Joan Curran know if you can help with any of these.

# The Old Sugar Loaf

*Mr. Twaddle, who lived in Whipsnade, was a fine local historian and an expert on the history of South Bedfordshire. Many of us no doubt will have his book, entitled 'Old Dunstable', published in 1975, and re-issued by The Book Castle, in 1989. Mr. Twaddle worked at Bagshawe's for many years and was well respected in the neighbourhood. He died in 1992. The following article was written in 1972 for the Sugar Loaf Hotel, and is part of a four-page leaflet which was, at the time, produced for publicity purposes for the hotel.*

«Dunstable as good a town as ye shall meet with on the road - it is full of inns» wrote Celia Fiennes in 1697. The busy Watling Street follows the alignment of the ancient Roman Road through the town.

The Sugar Loaf was owned by George Briggs in 1707. He also had six other inns, all of which have disappeared. About 1713 The Sugar Loaf was purchased by Mrs. Jane Cart who rebuilt it in 1717. The facade is substantially as it was originally. The adjoining two storey building is much older, it could have been part of the earlier inn, altered about 1800 to accommodate troops on the march during the Napoleonic Wars. The extension from the main building at the rear is modern.

Mrs. Jane Cart was the widow of James Cart a London Merchant and Distiller, the youngest daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Chew and granddaughter of William Marshe of an ancient Dunstable family. She out-lived her nine children and died aged 83 in 1736. The Sugar Loaf remained in the care of successive trustees as part of a Trust until it was sold in the early 1930s.

The Sugar Loaf was designed to cater for the needs of private travellers, paying an annual duty of £500 - £600 per year as a posting inn. The many references to the house indicate an impressive reputation, «. . . roomy and staid, reprobating unseemliness» writes one traveller.

It would be impossible to enumerate the famous and notable personages who visited the inn on their journeys to and from London. A day book exists covering the period from October 1828 until 1834. The landlord Mr. Johnson has left a valuable record of his guests. Numerous noblemen and their families, business gentlemen from the North and expanding Midlands. Jane Cart's Trustees have met here for more than 200 years, Bishops during visitations, the Quarter Sessions, The Court Leet for the Royal Manor met to regulate market tolls and officers of many regiments on the march north, south, east and west.

The Sugar Loaf has always provided exceptionally good hospitality with variations to suit each generation. Fried Larks, prepared by a secret formula were a popular dish, greatly in demand. Rook pies, also popular, were, it is said, not esteemed by all! Excellent meals are now provided to modern tastes.

Among politicians we find Sir Robert Peel, twice Prime Minister, who reorganised the police force. Also Sir Rowland Hill who introduced pre-paid penny post in 1840. Before that date delivery of a letter by coach from London cost the landlord 7 pence.

Thomas Telford, another famous visitor, designed and constructed the London to Holyhead Road through Dunstable. During the most prosperous years eighty coaches passed through the town each day, in addition came private conveyances, wagons and travellers on horseback.

A great change came when the London - Birmingham Railway was opened in 1838. The number of stage coaches was reduced to 12 daily and private travellers to one half.

The Sugar Loaf house accommodation fell from £3191 in 1837-8 to £1260 in 1838-9. Posting fell from £2492 to £1005. Sir Henry Parnell, another visitor, attempted to re-introduce the 'Wonder Coach' provided the Commissioner reduced the tolls at the gates from £1-4s-0d to 12/-, but nothing came of the scheme.

The 'Wonder Coach' left London at 6.30 a.m. arriving in Shrewsbury at 10.30 p.m. 158 miles in 16 hours including stops.

Now known as 'The Old Sugar Loaf' the landlord adjusted to the new circumstances and continued to attract travellers. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert paid a brief visit in 1841, on their way to Woburn Abbey, and Lord Byron added his name to the list of famous visitors. A superb stud of valuable greys kept in stables at the inn brought the Duke of Clarence, grandson of the Queen, with other royal Dukes.

Local people would enjoy the visits of the colourful Marquis of Waterford. Universally known as 'Spring Heeled Jack' he had a contrivance of springs fitted to his boots and delighted the bystanders by leaping into the air startling the ladies by landing at their sides.

The depression of the Thirties brought another change. The Old Sugar Loaf was bought by a brewery company and gradually expanded to accommodate the motorist.

Now the 255 year old inn is embarking on another phase of its varied history and I venture to predict that it will prove as glorious as its fascinating past.

*William Twaddle, Whipsnade, 1972*



# Dunstable's Old Fire Engine

From time to time references may be seen to Dunstable's old fire engine, occasionally with the claim that it was the oldest in the country. Some recently discovered references to early fire engines in the town has prompted this research by John Lunn.

The usual quoted references to early fire engines is as recorded in 1886 in the Historical Events listed in various *Dunstable Corporation Yearbooks*: 'Ancient fire engine, 317 year old, was sold to Messrs Shand and Mason of London' for £5. It was exhibited in various Exhibitions and several Lord Mayor's shows. It was also taken for exhibition in Chicago where an offer of £1000 was made for it, but refused by its new owners.

The engine was subsequently given to the Museum of London housed in Kensington Palace and later transferred to the Barbican when the purpose built accommodation there was completed.

In 1974 Mr Maurice Hayward, who at the time was recording the Dunstable Borough Council's documents prior to the hand over to the new South Bedfordshire District Council, initiated correspondence with the Museum with a view to having the fire engine returned to Dunstable for display in the foyer of the new S.B.D. Council's offices. He visited the Museum but could only find a small model of the engine, no one seemed to have any information about the engine itself. Eventually he was able to get a photograph of this model, reproduced above. This shows an engraved plate on the side of the tub. The plate was engraved with the date '1570' and the motto 'Justitia Omnibus Fiet'. This model must have been made by someone with an intimate knowledge of Dunstable as the motto first appeared on an engraving of the Dunstable arms in Lamborn's *Dunstablelogia* published in 1859. At no time has it been adopted as an official part of the town arms or used before the date of that publication. How the model maker arrived at the date of 1570 is anybody's guess, as extensive research has failed to produce any evidence. Could it be that the '7' and the '5' have been inter-changed, making '1750' an acceptable date?

The existence of a Vestry meeting minute book covering the period 1750 to 1819 has recently been discovered, in private ownership. This gives some details of the fire engines at that time.

« **2 December 1783.** At a Vestry at the Parish Church of Dunstable it was resolved that in consequence of the very heavy expense the said Parish are at in the repairs of their fire engines, exclusive of the prime cost, that every adjoining parish who would wish to avail themselves of

this assistance in case of emergency, shall contribute towards the expense. Ordered that your parish shall be entitled to the benefit of them paying the sum of one guinea annually, or half a guinea per annum on the condition that you engage to indemnify and repair any damage that may arise from their removal and attendance on you. That a Vestry will be held at the said Parish Church of Dunstable on Tuesday the 16th instant precisely at 2 o'clock in the afternoon for the purpose of receiving your subscription; in case you do not absent at that time to either of the above proposals, it was

ordered to give you this notice that the said engines should not attend in future without you first paying the sum of five guineas. »

« **16 December 1783.**

At a Vestry held at the said Parish of Dunstable this day it is agreed on by us whose names are under written (*19 names*) that the engines for the

future shall not attend any parish that is not an annual subscriber towards them under the sum of five guineas. Parishes entitled to the benefit of the engines in case of emergency: Houghton, subscribed

Caddington [*not subscribed*]

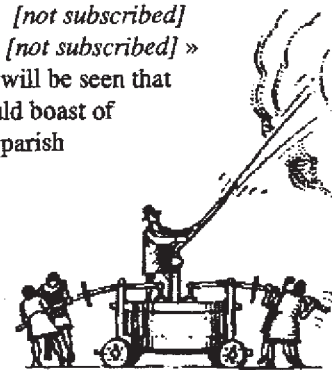
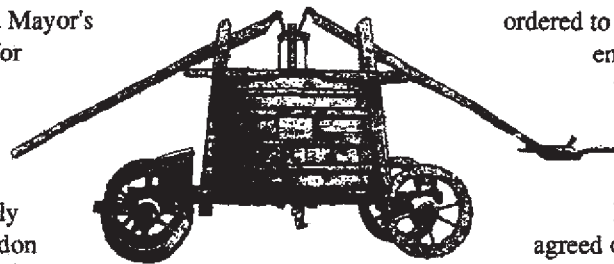
Kensworth [*not subscribed*]

From these entries it will be seen that in 1783 Dunstable could boast of having more than one parish fire engine, and that it was available for use in the surrounding villages under certain conditions. Only the nearest village, Houghton (Regis)

appears to have taken advantage of this assistance in case of emergency. The other villages no doubt felt that the fire would be out before the engine reached them!

At least this is firm evidence of the existence of the engines from some time before 1783, but how long before must remain a mystery. It is very unlikely to have been 214 years before this entry. Even at that date it must have been very unusual for a parish to have had its own fire engines.

John Lunn



## Jane Cart (née Chew) 1653 - 1736

I have now completed a biography of Mrs Jane Cart, the wealthiest woman Dunstable has ever had and who was very generous to the Priory Church and the town. This is a factual description of her life, details of her generous gifts during her life-time and the bequests she made in her will. For those who are genuinely interested, a limited number of copies are available from J. Lunn, 23 Pipers Cof, Dunstable LU6 3JZ (01582 - 661967) — Price £1.25

# 67 Years of the London Gliding Club

Those members who were present at our March meeting of this year will recall the excellent talk we had on the history of the London Gliding Club from Ted Hull. At our request, for the benefit of members who were not there and for general interest, Mr Hull has written a brief synopsis of the early days of the Club. We welcome the article.

In 1929, encouraged by reports of gliding achievements in Germany, a luncheon party was organised in London and 56 people attending formed the British Gliding Association. Of these, 37 got together to form a club for the London area and the London Gliding Club was inaugurated 20th February 1930. By this time, two or three very basic gliders had been constructed and these were borrowed for the first meet at Stoke Park Farm, Guildford, in March 1930.

A search for a hilltop site to launch from resulted in the Club setting up at Down Farm on the Ivinghoe to Aldbury road, but after a month it was asked to move on the grounds that the noise was disturbing the birds on the adjoining Ashridge Estate.

By the middle of May, the Club had secured the use of Ivinghoe Beacon and enthusiasm was intense. An instructional week was organised and a charge of £2.10.0 covered instruction and tent accommodation. By now, there were five single seats and one two-seat gliders being used. A competition was set up between the London Club and the Lancashire Aero Club, the aggregate times of alternate launches being logged. The contest came to a halt when the Lancashire glider roosted in the tops of a stand of fir trees at the foot of the Beacon. London Gliding Club had totalled 12 minutes 52 seconds and the Lancastrians 8 minutes 5 seconds.

A demonstration by the German ace Robert Kronfeld with his beautiful 'Wein' glider in July attracted a visit by the Prince of Wales. All this activity brought crowds of onlookers, the LMS Railway even running excursions to Tring from Euston. When local roads got blocked by cars, the police forced the Club to move on.

It was then that the Club was befriended by farmer Tom Turvey of Totternhoe village, who offered free accommodation for gliders in a barn (where, incidentally, a cow calved on a wing) and the use of his farmhouse for Club teas. Initially a field to the west of the Tring Road was used, but then the present field was rented from farmer Pratt.

By 1932, three hangars had been erected and a sectional First World War army hut assembled as a clubhouse. The chore of hauling gliders up the hill for launching soon palled and a pulley and rope system was devised. Launching was carried out with an elastic rope called a bungee.

Three or four people pulled on each side of the bungee vee rope hooked onto the nose of the glider. They ran down the slope and when the elastic was at full stretch the glider was released and off it went. Later, a cable drum was bolted to the jacked up back wheel of an old but powerful American car and winch launching was introduced, pulling the glider up into the air like a kite. The next development was launching by a tow from an aircraft — expensive, but offering much longer flight times.

The ace British pilot of these early days was Eric Collins, an instrument maker from Flamstead. In a short career of only 3½ years he mastered the art of using thermal air currents for soaring and made several cross country flights from the Downs, one of them setting a two-seater record distance. He earned the first British international Silver Badge for Gliding, but was tragically killed in 1935 when doing glider aerobatics in Alan Cobham's Air Circus.

The simple primary gliders, looking like a flying 5-bar gate, were superseded by much higher performance craft, but were still used for solo instruction. It was not until after the war that training on two-seat gliders was introduced. The spruce, plywood and fabric construction was used until the 1960s when modern glass fibre techniques became the norm. Performance increased dramatically over the years. Whereas primary gliders could only fly some 12 feet forwards for every foot of height loss, present day machines are achieving 60 feet at much higher speeds. This enables a glider to cover great distances in the course of a soaring day, flights of over 500 km having been completed many times from Dunstable.

In 1935, the Club's wooden hangars were replaced by the present building designed by a club member, renowned architect Kit Nicholson, who became National Gliding Champion in 1938 and 39. The clubhouse was rated by Niklaus Pevsner as a significant breakthrough in '30s design and is now a listed building.

The period 1939-45 saw the Club become a prisoner of war camp; the workshop and tractor shed (camp prison block) are remnants of those days. In the late '70s, a new complex of tug hangar, office and bunkhouse accommodation was built, greatly enhancing the facilities, and over the last forty years the airfield has been enlarged by the addition of adjoining fields with overhead power lines being buried.

The story of how the Club bought its field is worth relating. Farmer Pratt, seeing the Club expand with new buildings and flourishing membership, sought to increase the rent. A club member, Espin Hardwick, was a Birmingham stockbroker and moreover owned a Rolls Royce car. One fine Sunday, taking with him his young daughter, he visited Farmer Pratt, told him who he was and that he fancied speculating by buying the land that was being used for gliding. Pratt, playing for time, admitted he might sell but stated that he never did business on a Sunday. "Fair enough", replied Espin, "can my little girl look round your farm?" Presently, coming across a litter of sheep dog puppies, she appealed to her daddy to let her have one. Daddy pointed out that it belonged to Mr Pratt who when approached offered to let them have it for £1. "Ah Ah", said Espin, "I thought you never did business on a Sunday, so what about that land?" The deal was done. Espin rented the site to the Club for 5% of his outlay with the option to buy it from him when the money could be raised, and this duly happened.

Membership fluctuates between 350 and 450 of which about 10% are women. The Club operates 4 tug aircraft, 6 two-seat and 5 single seat gliders and there are some 90 privately owned aircraft on site. The most exotic of these competition crafts can cost as much as £100,000, so most of these tend to be owned by groups of three or four members.

The Club welcomes visitors and anyone wishing to try gliding can have a trial instructional flight. Alternatively 1, 2 or 5 day training courses can be booked for those wishing to take up the sport seriously. On summer evenings, a group booking can be made for members of works, schools or clubs, an experience not to be missed!

Ted Hull, June 1997

