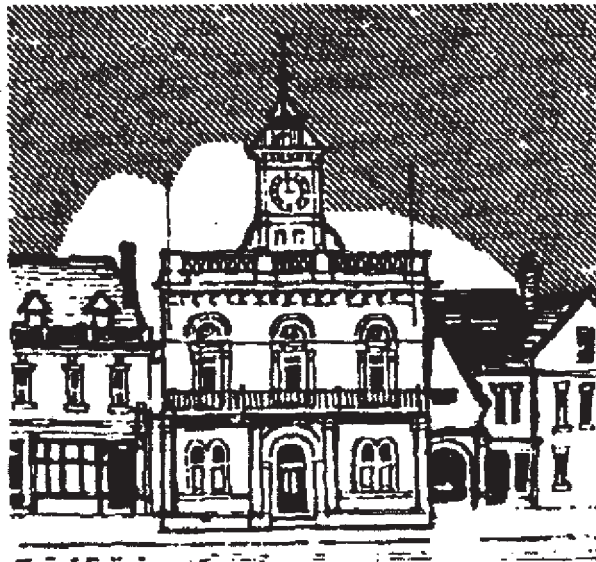


Newsletter

DUNSTABLE & DISTRICT
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

N° 1

February 1994



... from the Chairman

Dear Member,

Your committee felt that it was now time, after two years of existence, to produce a newsletter, following the practice, although not necessarily the pattern, of several other societies. So here is the first issue. Future editions will not be tied to any rigid date, but will be produced when it is thought applicable. We very much hope that other issues will include articles and items from our members - we know that many of you have something interesting to say and to share.

Because of the development of our Society over the past two years and a bit and because we have had new members join as we have gone along, this edition, for the benefit of those members and perhaps as a reminder to others, dwells a little on the water that has flowed under the bridge. But in these newsletters we shall not only talk about the past, but refer to the present and look ahead to the future.

Our Society began with a "public interest" meeting called by John Lunn and Joan Curran on September 20th 1991. The aim was to revive a local history society that had been formed in 1961, but ceased to function three years later, mainly due to the prime movers leaving the area. A letter was sent out to friends and acquaintances and a good number of people attended the meeting, at which also Martin Lawrence, of Harlington Heritage Trust, talked briefly on the formation of that Society. John Lunn had earlier come to see me, explained the background and the objects in view and asked me if I would take the chair «as a neutral person». I misheard him at first and thought he said «neuter», but we got over that little difficulty and I accepted, on the understanding that it would be for that meeting only

There was a good response and a steering committee was formed, which reported on November 19th. Their recommendations for the proposed Society were accepted and Mr. Richard Walden, Town Clerk of Dunstable, gave a talk about the activities being undertaken by the Town

Council to promote awareness of the heritage of Dunstable. Our inaugural meeting, as the Dunstable and District Local History Society, took place on January 22nd 1992. 28 members were present to hear Barry Horne give a talk on the reconstruction of an iron age house at the Chiltern Open-air Museum. Barry was an appropriate first speaker with all the work he had done with both the Manshead Archaeological Society and the Dunstable Museum Trust. It was also appropriate that our second speaker was our Secretary, Joan Curran, on the history of Totternhoe quarries. In early March the first General Meeting took place, at which the Constitution was agreed and the officers and committee elected.

Our aim was to create an informal, pleasant atmosphere where members, at a modest subscription, would be able to come and enjoy listening to talks of a good standard about Dunstable and the surrounding villages, to participate as well and to feel that their membership was worthwhile. We hope in some way that has been achieved. We try to have a good range of subjects, to have interesting visits in the summer and it is our hope that we shall continue to do so. We are flourishing, we have become a valued part of the local community and our membership stands on the 90 mark.

We value your support and thank you for it. We welcome any suggestions and ideas for speakers or particular evenings, or events. If, in the quiet hours or even in the busy moments, a shaft of brilliance enters your thoughts, do let us know. We shall be pleased to listen and to discuss it.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely

The sketch on the front page

is of the old Town Hall in High Street North and is taken from a drawing published in the 1961 Dunstable Official Guide and Directory (p.10). Built in 1880, this typical Victorian building stood on the site of a former Town Hall which was destroyed by fire.

It was a landmark for all Dunstablians and visitors to the town, with its big four-sided clock which could be seen for miles around and from which local citizens always told the time. To the left of the building is "The Crown" public house and to the right is the "Anchor" gateway. A much beloved building used for many events of all descriptions and with the Council Chamber at the rear, it was demolished in 1966, and has been missed ever since.

The Society's activities 1992 / 93

1992

Building an Iron Age house : Barry Horne
The Story of Totternhoe Quarries : Joan Curran
Early Paintings of South Beds. Buildings : Alan Cirket
The Roman Watling Street . . . : Omer Roucoux
The Final Years of the Dunstable Priory : John Lunn

Visit to Cockayne Hatley Church
Visit to Pitstone Farm Museum
Visit the Dunstable Almshouses

Old Dunstable Inns and their Guests : Vivienne Evans
100 Years of Eaton Bray in Pictures : Peter Mayne
English Heritage and its Work : Maxine Miller

1993

The 1851 Dunstable Census : Barry Horne
Dunstable Items in the C. R. O. : Chris Pickford
Heritage of Houghton Regis : Pat Lovering
The Parish Chest & its Records : Norman Holding
Putting Dunstable Gazette to Bed : John Buckledee

Outing to Chicksands Priory
Summer Evening at Stockwood Park Museum
Visit to Woburn Heritage Centre

The Work of a Church Architect : Pam Ward
The Story of Whipsnade Village : Isobel Randall
Luton Peace Celebrations of July 1919 : Ken Cooper

Bedfordshire Local History Association.

This Association was set up last year for all those people in the county who are interested in local history. Membership is open to individuals and to local history societies and other interested organisations. If you belong to a local society which is a member, as the Dunstable Society is, then you are automatically a member of the county Association and can go along to any of its meetings.

The BLHA is planning to organise two events each year, some of which will be lectures and some of which will be exhibitions and workshops. Some of you will have been to the very successful local history exhibition held at Houghton Conquest last September and seen the Dunstable Society's impressive display there. In addition the AGM will be held at a venue of local interest and a top-class speaker will be invited to address the meeting (business being kept to a minimum).

Our next event will be a talk on February 26th at the Weatherley Centre, Biggleswade, by Dr. Mark Bailey on «Medieval Bedfordshire». Don't be put off by his title of Doctor, he is a very entertaining and enthusiastic speaker who can make the past come alive for his audience, well worth listening to.

The AGM will be at Chicksands Priory on May 21st and the subject of the talk will be «The writing and publication of local history in the 1990s».

We are also encouraging everybody to support the Bedfordshire Festival which is being held at Old Warden Park, Shuttleworth, over the August Bank Holiday weekend this year. It is to be «A celebration of country life from the 1920s», with participants wearing clothes of the twenties and all sorts of activities and displays typical of life in those days.

J. C.



*Grove House was built in the mid-18th century as "The Duke of Bedford's Arms" Inn. It is a well proportioned Georgian style house which now houses the offices of Dunstable Town Council, the Registrar's Office, the Marriage Room and the Citizen's Advice Bureau.
[Drawing signed "N" from the Dunstable Official Guide & Directory 1961, page 23]*

THE THOMAS FISHER PAINTINGS

As a proof of the Society's practical interest in all aspects of the community's heritage, during the past six months it has co-operated with the Town Council in the purchase of a number of pictures of some of Dunstable's more important buildings.

These are watercolour paintings of the Ashton and Cart Almshouses, The Ladies' Lodge, the Priory House and Chew's House.

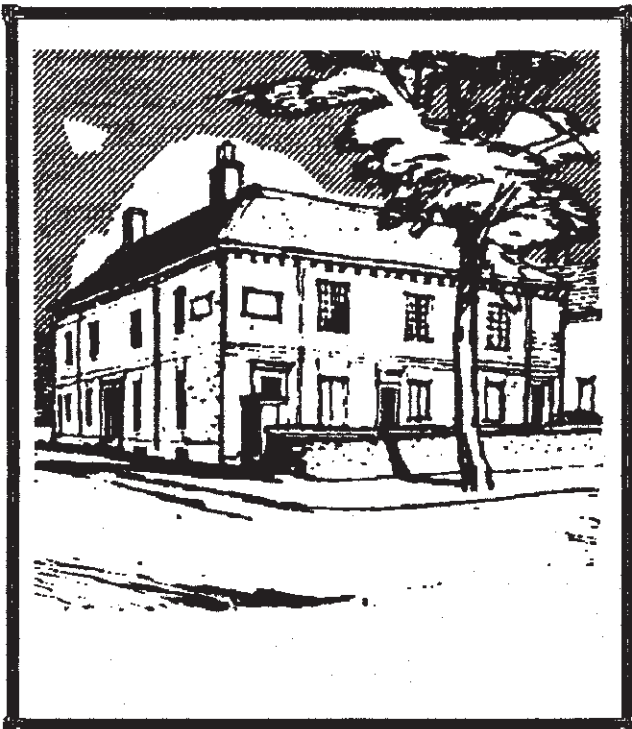
Painted c.1810 by Thomas Fisher they have now been hung in Dunstable Council Chamber where they can be seen by members of the public.

An important off-shoot of this venture has been an agreement with Luton Museum whereby Dunstable and District related pictures in the collection held there have been loaned for display for a six month period. These can be seen in the Committee Room adjacent to the Council Chamber. It is planned to exchange these pictures for a further selection at the end of the six month period.

Dunstable is particularly fortunate in having Grove House, which is ideally suited, both aesthetically and environmentally, for the display of such pictures.

Thomas Fisher was born in Rochester on 24 Feb. 1772. From the age of fourteen until his retirement in 1834 he worked for the East India Company at India House, London. In 1816 he was made Searcher of the Records. He died in 1836. Fisher devoted much of his time and energy to drawing antiquities, particularly in Bedfordshire, where he considered the County's monuments had never been properly recorded. Most of his Bedfordshire drawings were made between 1812 and 1822, many being published in his «COLLECTIONS HISTORICAL, GENEALOGICAL & TOPOGRAPHICAL for BEDFORDSHIRE & MONUMENTAL REMAINS & ANTIQUITIES».

J. L.



A limited number of sets of colour reproductions of the five Fisher paintings has been produced by the Town Council at £20 the set. Sets are available from the Tourist Information desk in the Library. Ludun of Liscombe Road will frame them at the special price of £12.50 each.

DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE FROM DUNSTABLE LIBRARY

Dunstable Library has just produced two lists giving details of their holdings of census lists, parish registers, cemetery records, etc. for researchers.

They are available on request at the information desk. There is also a street index for the Dunstable 1891 census.

I also hold copies of these lists.

J. C.

The Ashton almshouses, subject of one of the Fisher paintings. They stood on the corner of West Street and Ashton Street (now Ashton Square) and were demolished in 1962. With the money from the sale of the site Frances Ashton House was built in Bull Pond Lane in 1969.

[A drawing from the 1961 Dunstable guide, p.11]



A Logo for the Society

The executive committee has given much thought to the design of a suitable logo for the Society's note paper, newsletters and other publications. Here is one suggestion - members' comments would be welcomed.

The illustration (left) is the arms of the Church and Town of Dunstable used from medieval times until the granting of a Charter in 1864. It shows the three main elements

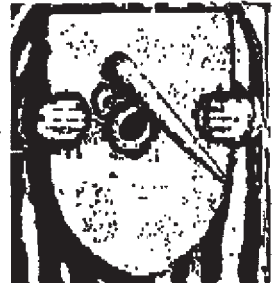
1. A stake (or heraldically, a pile) signifying a market place. Such a stake was also called a Staple.
2. A staple (a U-shaped piece of metal) driven into the left side of the stake, a pun on the name Dunstable.
3. A gold ring hanging from the staple, indicating royal protection.

Illustrations of this version of the arms are to be found:

* on the shield held by a carved wooden figure in the roof of the Priory Church above the pulpit (right).

* in the illuminated border of a page in the Register of the fraternity of St. John the Baptist housed in Luton Museum. A photograph of the page can be seen in the Museum display in the Dunstable library.

* on the title page of Dunstable's first Parish Register, kept in the County Record office at Bedford. The page is reproduced in "Old Dunstable, a Collection of Photographs" by W. Twaddle, reprinted in 1989 by The Book Castle, page 56.



A Different Title ?

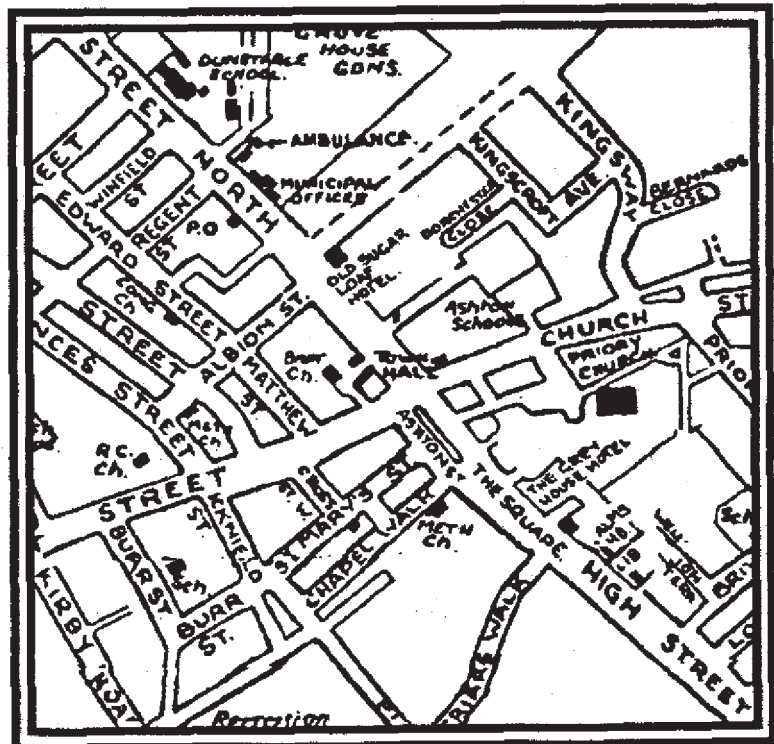
We have called this production simply «Newsletter» because that is what it is. However we would quite like to have a different name, but so far we have not come up with one we think is suitable. Any ideas ? A prize will be given for a suggestion which becomes reality.

C. B.

If this suggestion does not appeal, have you another one ?

J. L.

Can you mark the changes in the Dunstable Centre since 1945 ?
(From the Town Street Map)



Mid-Bedfordshire Local History Conference

Exploring a Village
A practical workshop.

Saturday, 18th June 1994 at
ICKWELL Village Hall, 10 to 4.
Cost £5, including lunch.

The morning will commence with an introduction by Dr. Mark Bailey, staff tutor at the Board of Continuing Education Cambridge University.

To enrol contact our secretary,
Mrs Joan Curran, by Friday Feb. 25th

The contributors for this issue are Colin Bourne (C.B.), John Lunn (J.L.), Joan Curran (J.C.). DTP - Ovation- by Omer Roucoux