

Newsletter

DUNSTABLE & DISTRICT
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

N°14 *

September 2000



From the Chairman

Much has happened since the last newsletter. At the AGM, Bernard Stevens stepped down from the post of Treasurer to our Society and I would like to record the debt which we owe to Bernard for his careful husbandry of the Society's finances during his years of office. We started off with no resources at all. The fact that we now find ourselves in a sound financial position is entirely due to his efforts. As you will know, Bernard remains a member of the Committee and we are still able to benefit from his wise counsel.

After the AGM, John Buckledee talked to us about *The Changing Face Of Local Newspapers*. He gave a fascinating account of their development over the years and indicated some of the ways in which they may contend with newer methods of information distribution.

In April, Viv Willis paid us a second visit and gave a wonderful talk about 'How Leighton Buzzard Won The War'. I suggested to the audience, that night, that we should put together the Dunstable version, but no one has so far taken up the challenge.

Allan Cox gave a stimulating talk on 'Brick making in Bedfordshire.' I am sure that, like me, that night's audience have looked at our local buildings and tried to identify the types of bricks they contain.

June saw the first of our outings. We went to the British Schools in Hitchin for a most enjoyable evening trip. Our knowledgeable guides explained the development of Education in this country and gave us a taste of what it was like to be on the receiving end. Many memories of our own educational experiences were revived, some more pleasant than others.

We enjoyed a memorable day during our August outing. At Peterborough, we were given an excellent guided tour of the Cathedral. We saw the grave of Katherine of Aragon and the initial burial site of Mary Queen of Scots. There was time to take lunch and wander around the pedestrianized city centre before we set off for the Bronze Age reconstructions at Flag Fen. We were given a most instructive talk and saw, amongst other things, the recently excavated Sea Henge, which had caused so much heated debate. The homeward journey was marred by the fact that our coach broke down, due to its ancient batteries. You can guess at the embarrassment which was felt by the organisers of this outing. I would like to

thank all my fellow passengers for the good humour which they brought to bear on this quite inexcusable event. It has been the Society's policy to charge as little as possible for our outings, conscious as we are that some of our members live on tight budgets. We will have to review this, as we must make sure that such an occurrence does not happen again.

There was much discussion around the time of the AGM concerning the proposed change of venue from the Methodist School Hall to the Salvation Army Hall. I subsequently went to negotiate dates with the booking officer at the Salvation Army. Upon checking her Hall diary, she found that she could not offer us a straight run of dates in 2000 - 1. We considered running a mixture of venues but concluded that it would be too confusing to meet on the first Monday in some months and on the second Tuesday in others. We decided, therefore, to book a full winter programme at the Methodist Hall for 2000 - 1 and to book the Salvation Army Hall for our winter venues from September 2001. We shall, therefore, need our dedicated team of chair movers for one more season.

Hugh Garrud



**For the latest
book published
by the Society see back page**

John Lunn.

I am sure you will be pleased to have recent news of John. After his stroke during his holiday in France, he was brought back to England by special plane and stayed in the Luton & Dunstable Hospital for 7 weeks where he recovered enough to be transferred, at the end of August, to a nursing home. He is now in Fidora House, room 19 at Capwell Grange Nursing Home (BUPA).

Addington Way, - off Oakley Road - Luton. LU4 9GR.

John has started walking slowly with some help, eats and drinks on his own, understands very well what is said but has great difficulty in expressing himself. He is happy to have visitors and receive post. *ORx.*

Ford End Mill — Ivinghoe

David Lindsey is to give a talk on 'Mills, Milling and Ford End Mill' at the meeting on January 9 next year. I have included this short article as an 'appetiser'.

The watermill is half a mile from Ivinghoe church down Station Road, the B488 to Leighton Buzzard. It can be found on the left hand side at Ford End Farm. In the last century the mill played a vital part in farm life. Not only was wheat milled for bread, but animal feed was also produced by mixing milled oats with straw cut into chaff.

It is not possible to ascertain the age of the mill. The 'Victoria County History' records that "the Watermill at Ivinghoe was held in the 14th century by the Spigurnel and Alberd families", but this may be a reference to Brookend (or Beesley's) Mill a quarter of a mile upstream. It was however well established by 1767 when it was referred to in a deed. In 1798 William Heley was recorded in the 'Posse Comitatus' (a survey of men who could be called upon for military service in the event of a French invasion) as being the miller grinding 16 sacks (about 2 tons) of corn a week. In the mill are his initials 'WH' and the date 1795. The mill was used until 1963 after when it began to deteriorate. At the end of 1964, an appeal was launched and with some financial help from the farmer, Mr Arthur Jellis, the Pitstone Local History Society was able to do sufficient repairs to ensure that it would work again. The Society now leases the mill, which is a listed Grade II building, and money from admission charges and school and other parties helps to pay for the continuing restoration work.

Springs half a mile away near Pitstone Windmill form a small stream, the Whistlebrook which flows into the mill pond, the moat of the original farmhouse, and maintain the head of water

necessary to drive the 11 foot diameter overshot waterwheel. This provides the power to turn two pairs of stones (one millstone grit, the other French burr), the sack hoist and chaff-cutter.

Sheep were also washed at the mill. This was done before they were sold to obtain a better price for the wool. They were penned at the front of the mill and then, one by one, were dropped into a temporary pool some 5 feet deep created by boards placed across the tail-race just below the mill. A farmhand, suitably dressed for this wet job, stood in the iron 'pulpit' and held them under the water falling from a chute above the tail-race until they were clean. They then made their way along a brick-lined channel, out into the field to dry off.

The mill is the only watermill still working with its original machinery in Buckinghamshire, and it retains all the atmosphere of a farm mill of the late 1800s. The water supply to the mill is still reasonably good, and this has enabled the Society to mill again.

There is a small collection of milling equipment and millwright's tools, and a simple display illustrating the principles of milling for the benefit of children. An Indian hand operated quern has been acquired which has proved to be very popular with children.

Next year the mill will be open between 2.30 and 5.30 on some Sundays (including National Mills Day) and the Bank holiday afternoons between May and September, with milling demonstrations on certain days. Full details are to be published later. There is a car park but no toilets or refreshments and disability access is limited.

Further information about the mill and next year's opening and milling times can be obtained from David Lindsey on Dunstable (01582) 600391.

Doolittle Mill, Totternhoe

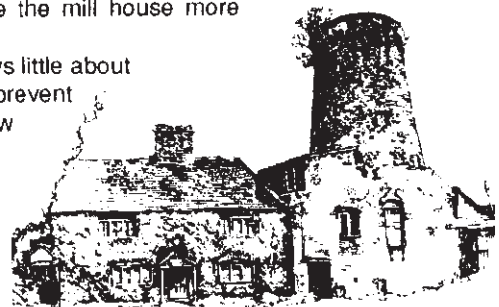
At long last, after being on the market for the past 5 years, this combined wind and watermill, a listed II* building, has a new owner, Mr Alan Harman. He has already moved into the mill house.

Although still early days, his plans are firstly to transfer his publishing business from Hemel Hempstead into the former grain barn opposite the mill which had been used by a model making firm. He has obtained planning permission for a change of use to convert the barn into offices and refurbish it. The work includes preserving the structure and enhancing its appearance. His second objective is to make the mill house more comfortable to live in and to tidy up the surrounding area and outbuildings.

After which he intends to set about preserving the mill itself and, as he knows little about mills, he has sought the advice of a consultant. The first phase will be to prevent further weather damage by fitting a new cap to the tower, putting in new windows and replacing damaged brickwork as well as general cleaning. However, this requires money and Mr Harman is looking into ways of raising the necessary funds.

So after a long night with several false dawns, Doolittle has now emerged into the daylight and its future looks bright.

David Lindsey



The British School at Hitchin

After the March lecture by Brian Limbrick to the Friends of Luton Museums

Our first outing this summer was to the British School at Hitchin. We were introduced to its history by Brian Limbrick. As it happens the same Brian Limbrick gave to the Friends of Luton Museums, last March, a lecture on the school. Angela Gregory of the Luton Society, has written a summary of the lecture for their Newsletter. I thought that our members would like to see in writing a summary of this history full of details difficult to assimilate during a guided tour but nevertheless interesting to know.

Here is the original text as prepared by Angela.

O.Rx

In the 18th Century as the Industrial Revolution, which began in Coalbrookdale, spread across England, it became clear that there was a need for the working classes to become literate.

Joseph Lancaster, who was a Quaker, loved children and longed to help every child to learn to read. He opened a schoolroom in Southwark in 1798 with the principle that "All may come freely". Many turned up and soon there were too many boys for Joseph to teach on his own. In 1796 Doctor Andrew Bell who was teaching orphans of the East India Company in Madras, wrote a book describing his methods of training bright pupils to teach others. Joseph Lancaster read this book "Experiments in Education" and took the idea of training boys to be Monitors. Each Monitor was given a specific task to teach to a group of 10 boys. Joseph could not afford books for every child so he had reading lessons printed in large letters on big sheets of paper, pasted them on boards and hung them round the school room. The boys stood on a semi-circle painted on the floor to read the pages.

Joseph, unfortunately, had little money sense. He bought books to lend to his poor children and he was soon in debt, a state that he was to be in for most of his life. He asked for help from his Quaker friends, including Elizabeth Fry, who were very impressed by his achievements and raised funds for him. He also had support from Lord Somerville, the Duke of Bedford, Samuel Whitbread and William Wilberforce.

In 1803 Joseph Lancaster published his book "Improvements in Education". This laid out his ideas for training teachers and for a basic curriculum. This was very successful and schools using the Lancasterian System were soon being established in many parts of the World. In America the system was almost universally adopted in the big cities and the Lancasterian Schools became the state system in Russia.

In 1805 Joseph met King George III who expressed his wish that all the children in his Kingdom should be able to read the Bible. He gave Joseph £100 and promised him the same sum every year. The Queen, Princesses and the Royal Dukes also contributed.

In 1810 Colonel William Wilshere founded a Lancasterian School in Hitchin in an old malt house which he owned. He had attended a lecture given by Lancaster and decided that the poor children of Hitchin should have an opportunity to learn. The school became very popular and in 1837 the Great Lancasterian School Room was built to Lancaster's design and one master and 30 monitors taught 330 boys.

In 1811 the National Society was founded following a campaign by Mrs Sarah Trimmer. In the National Schools the Anglican Creed and Catechism were compulsory subjects whereas Lancaster believed in non-sectarian education. The National Society and the Royal Lancasterian Society became rivals and this resulted in many more schools being opened. The majority were National Schools as the Anglican Church had more resources. As the competition from the National Schools grew Joseph found the pressures too great and left the Society that bore his name.

At a meeting in 1814 the Royal Lancasterian Society changed its name to the British and Foreign Schools Society.

Lancaster himself went to the USA. He spent the rest of his life in the Americas and Canada, dying in poverty and obscurity in 1838.

In Hitchin in 1853, following a Government Inspection by Matthew Arnold, a galleried classroom was built to improve the accommodation for boys. The ancient malt house, which had been damaged by fire, was pulled down and a new two-storey building erected on the site. Infants were taught on the ground floor and girls above. The houses for the Master and the Mistress were demolished and new ones built. The site has remained little changed since that time.

In 1990 a working party was set up to find a suitable location for the Jill Grey Collection of Elementary Educational Memorabilia and with the help of the Townsfolk of Hitchin and many gargantuan struggles the building was obtained to become a Living Museum. It is the only Lancasterian classroom still existing in its original form and is a wonderful insight into our educational heritage.

Angela Gregory

For those who missed this fascinating visit here are the opening hours :

The Benchmark Experience for Schools is open every Tuesday 1st. February to November 30th. 10a.m. until 4p.m.
Sunday 2nd April to 29th October 2.30p.m. until 5p.m.

Admission £2 each.
Schoolchildren accompanied by an adult: £1



Memories of Middle Row

Two of our members, Denise Barber and Philip Buckle, spent part of their childhood in Middle Row, living 'over the shop', and they recall for us some of their memories of living there.

In September 1931 my family moved from a small semi-detached house in a quiet Welsh seaside town and settled for a short while in No.22 Middle Row in Dunstable. The shop and house, in comparison, seemed to my eight-year-old self to be very gloomy and unfriendly, in spite of the fact that the shop run by my father was a sweet shop. However, it was not my kind of sweet shop (though I was not averse to putting a hand in the Milk Tray selection on my way out) and I spent my Saturday penny at a shop near Britain Street where there was a good selection of sherbet dabs, liquorice bootlaces and fairy whispsers.

No 22 Middle Row, now F.L.Moore's Record Shop, and for many years Stott's Furniture, was on four floors and we lived mainly in the small room behind the shop and the scullery leading off it. There were seven of us, my parents and five children ranging from nine years to six months, so it was quite a tight fit. Most of the living room was occupied by a table where we had our meals, played draughts and ludo, and where my father counted the takings each evening, covering the surface with little turrets of copper and silver coins, and woe betide anyone who interrupted his calculations or shook the table.

From between the shop and the living room an open staircase went up to a large open space covered in linoleum (there was a lot of lino in this house) which had probably been a cafe, and indeed there was still a sign over the door advertising this. Leading from this space was our sitting-room which had a large bay window overlooking the main road, currently displaying an elegant bride and her bridesmaids. In my time it had a wide window-seat which gave an excellent view of all that went on in the centre of the town, all the day-to-day comings and goings, with highlights from time to time such as the annual visit of the Statty Fair, with its stalls spilling along the High Street, and the occasional flooding of the road after torrential rain. Our other entertainment was a wind-up gramophone, His Master's Voice, with a small

collection of records, including the Laughing Policeman, whose laugh slowed to a strangulated wail when the machine needed winding. The bathroom was also on this floor and another staircase went up to the three bedrooms. From the landing yet another staircase took you up to the attic, emerging through a wooden casing into the centre of the whole roof space. This was an excellent play area and we used an old tricycle to career round the central casing, cornering wildly, until the tricycle could stand no more.

There was a small yard at the back of the building opening on to Ashton Square, or Back Street, large enough to dry the washing and turn a skipping rope.

The main road was something we were definitely not used to and for a while I became a 'geographical Methodist', as my mother thought the road far too dangerous to cross (on Sundays, in 1931 !) and so enrolled those of us who were old enough in the Methodist Sunday School.

We were very well placed for all the necessities of daily living. Mr.Tilley's butcher's shop was on the corner of West Street and Mr.Gadd, the greengrocer, was next door. There was a small grocer's shop about two doors away and Redrup and Starking's displayed a tempting array of cakes nearby. Although most of what we ate was cooked at home occasionally, on a Saturday evening, I would be given sixpence to go to Redrup and Starking's where little fancy cakes would be sold off at seven for sixpence - one each. Unfortunately this selection never included the delicate choux buns filled with cream and drifted with icing sugar which were the objects of desire. Next door to us, across the narrow alleyway, was Mr. Buckle's menswear shop, where the family also lived over the shop. Philip was the same age (two) as my brother, Eric.

Behind us, in Back Street, was a pub on the corner of St.Mary's Street and also a fish and chip shop, which we did not patronise as my mother cooked chips that were far superior.

Around the corner, in West Street, was Dr.Lathbury's surgery, and as Eric was seriously ill at this time the doctor, and sometimes his partner as well, would call daily and stand looking solemnly at the two-year-old in his cot and



MIDDLE ROW (West side of High Street North) drawing by Lewis Evans in 1985

shaking their heads. I don't think we ever knew what was wrong with him but he suddenly and spontaneously began to improve.

Across the road was Mr. Bale's tobacconist's shop, where my father would buy St. Bruno flake for his pipe, and we had a choice of the Home & Colonial Stores, on the corner of Church Street, or the International Stores, for the provisions needed to feed a family of seven.

And, of course, there was Moore's shop, much smaller than nowadays, displaying in the entrance a collection of penny bags of pieces of ribbon and lace for decorating dolls' clothes.

Mr. Stoten on the corner of the Square cut our hair – bob or shingle – though my father went round the corner to Gus Ellis in West Street for his short back and sides. Also in our row Mr. Sewell presided over a good selection of wet fish, spread out on crushed ice.

I went to Britain Street School and on market days there was the excitement of the animals in their pens on the Square as I crossed it on my way to school.

By the time we left Middle Row, after about two years, and moved to the quiet of Princes Street – whips and tops down the centre of the road and games of rounders running across from one pavement to the other – I missed the busy-ness of life in the centre of the town and the daily pageant viewed from the front window-seat. As I glance up at it now when I pass by I can almost hear the dying gasp of the Laughing Policeman.

Denise Barber

I am one of the few people in Dunstable who was actually born 'over the shop' on May 8th 1929, where I lived with my parents at 24 High Street South until moving in 1937 to 16 Downs Road, where my father had bought a plot of land and had a house built. The price of land in those days was £5.00 per foot frontage for a building plot.

The living accommodation at No.24 was typical of that of a local trader in the 1930s, with an outside toilet and scullery at one side of the back yard, and kitchen on the other side. The dining room was downstairs at the back of the shop, lounge and bedrooms upstairs. Goodness knows where the bathroom was, even if it existed. I suspect we all washed in the scullery.

Memories of my early days that come back to me are of playing in the lounge with my Gauge 'O' Hornby train set when I had my arm in a sling as a result of a sprained wrist and of walking up to Miss Whitworth's school in Burr Street from the age of five until I was eight. After we moved to Downs Road I went to the Grammar School until I passed my School Certificate in 1946, not staying for Higher School Certificate as my mother was terminally

ill and I helped in the house and my father's shop until National Service, in 1947.

From the war years I remember the black-out curtains that were hung round the shop door so that no light would escape, and the U.S. Military Police who used No.27 High Street South, near Moore's, as their base and who used to ride their Harley-Davidson motorbikes up and down the main road, wearing their white 'snowdrop' helmets. They adorned their bikes with a leather fringe on the back of the seat, I recall. Then there was the occasion when, coming out of the Grammar School one dark night, with Roger Hazell, we heard a doodle-bug going over with the wavering note of its engine echoing down High Street North. I remember saying to Roger "If that stops we get down on the ground". Luckily for us, it didn't. For some time after the war there were still prisoners of war in the camp at Dunstable Gliding Club, and in the winter of 1946 / 47 they were employed to dig up the packed snow in High Street South and take it away on lorries.

Other shops in Middle Row were Mr. Saunders' grocer's, with bins of dried lentils and peas, Mr Gadd's greengrocer's, with wood bins for the potatoes and wooden barrels for imported grapes, which were packed in cork granules, and Redrup and Starking's, the baker's with a tea-shop on the first floor. Hooton's penny bazaar, a long, narrow shop, with a single counter all down the left hand side, was a haven for a young boy,

Other shops I remember were James Walkers, the jewellers, managed by Ron Witherall's father, Sketchley's dry cleaners, Stott's furniture shop, the Singer Sewing Machine shop, Eastman's, the butchers, and later Baxter's, also a butcher's. It was while Eastman's shop was there that Mr. Cawcutt, the manager, cut himself badly while preparing joints and came rushing in to my father's shop for first aid. A more serious incident happened when Blindell's shoe shop was demolished in the sixties, and one or two members of the demolition gang were buried when the roof caved in.

A vivid early memory, though, is of Mr. Stoten's, men's and ladies' hairdressers. The men's part was in the front of the shop, with wood panelling all round and coloured glass backing part of the main window. It was heated in winter (if heated can be considered the word) by a one-bar electric fire, which stood in a tin tray in the fireplace aperture. The tray was full of cigarette ends and could only have been emptied about once a week. The two chairs were of oak, with the seats and arms covered in leather, and when small boys came to have their hair cut a plank was placed across the two arms so that they could sit at a reasonable height. This emporium was presided over by Bill Stoten and Bill Todd, whilst to the rear of the premises, along a narrow corridor, was the ladies's department, run by Albert Stoten. And how much did a haircut cost? Fred Moore says it was 3d. for boys and 6d. for men!

Philip Buckle

NEW BOOKS

Bagshawe's and Cross's

This is the fourth book in our series of books on the old trades of Dunstable and is due to be published in November. These two firms both came to Dunstable in the first decade of the 20th century as a result of a campaign by the Town Council to bring industry, and much-needed employment, to the town.

The first part of the history of Bagshawe's was contributed by Nicholas Bagshawe, whose grandfather founded the firm. The second part, and the history of Cross's, is written by Colin Bourne, who chaired the original Trades Evenings about these two firms.

As usual, there are many personal reminiscences from former employees and many illustrations to add interest to the story of two companies whose factories were familiar landmarks in Dunstable for nearly a century.

We have managed to keep the price down to a very reasonable £3.50 and **the book will be on sale at the November meeting**. You can also buy it afterwards at the Book Castle. Copies can also be obtained by post, price £4.00 (including packing and postage), from Bernard Stevens, 12 Friars Walk, Dunstable, LU6 3JA.

“Take up Slack” : A History of the London Gliding Club 1930 - 2000

by Edward Hull, who, members will recall, gave a very interesting talk on the gliding club in March 1997. He has now put together a whole series of anecdotes to produce this fascinating history of the club from its inauguration in 1930 to the present day. He covers all its various activities, for example aerobatic competitions, problems with aircraft flight-paths and numerous (mis)adventures like landing in Whipsnade Zoo, having to be 'retrieved' and meeting a rabbit at 4,500 feet !

A must for all interested in local history of which the gliding club is a part. Amply illustrated with black and white photographs. Paperback published by Woodfield Publishing at £9.99 obtainable from The Book Castle.

Riseley: our village

If you know this village in the north of the county, (home of the Riseley singers who have entertained us at Christmas socials), you may be interested in this production compiled by the members of the Riseley History Society. It is due out in December. Price to be announced.

The History of St. Mary's Church, Everton-cum-Tetworth

The author is Bernard O'Connor, the speaker who came to talk to us about the Tempsford Airfield during World War 2. The book is not just about the church but is a history of the village of Everton from Norman times until the present day. Among the topics it covers is the lord of the manor who ordered the execution of nine women as witches, Henry VIII's connections with Everton, and the story of a huge stately home and gardens that once stood on the Greensand Ridge. The book is out now and costs £5.00 (£5.50 incl. p&p) from Bernard O'Connor, 69 Sandy Road, Everton, Sandy, Beds. SG10 2JU.

From much further away comes a whole list of books on Oldham, so if by chance anyone has Oldham connections or is interested in the history of the cotton industry, we have a list of books published by the Oldham Central Library you might like to look at.

Further information on all of these is available from the Secretary.

RECORD OFFICE OPEN DAY

Saturday 14th October

If you have ever wondered what they keep in the Record Office and haven't liked to ask, or felt a bit daunted at the prospect of going there, here is a chance to go and hear a series of short explanations of all sorts of material stored there for you to consult. There are parish registers, school log books, maps, plans, photos, rating lists, sale catalogues, prison records; and many other sources of information useful for family historians and local historians alike. The talks take place from 11.00 am to 3.30 pm, (with a break for lunch, of course). Admission is free and car parking is available in the County Hall car park.

The Record office itself is in the Riverside Building, which is the smaller building behind the main County Hall, next to the river. You do need to book for this visit, so please give your name to the Secretary before 9th October if you wish to go.

FRANCE AND FLANDERS TOURS

This firm, from Silsoe, specialises in arranging visits to the Battlefields of France and Flanders. Trips last four days and travel is by coach, visiting The Somme, the Thiepval Monument, the visitors' centre at Delville Wood, Ypres, and Vimy Ridge. Accommodation is at a hotel in Lille or the Arras area.

Information provided by Joan Curran and David Lindsey

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