

NEWSLETTER

Dunstable & District Local History Society
No. 63 September 2023



Chairman's Notes

Hard to believe that it was back in June 2019 BC (Before Covid!) that this society became involved with Historic England and the High Street Action Zone.

HISTORY TRAIL

This led us to create the History Trail QR stickers now on display on 30 shop fronts in Dunstable. It has been a long journey.

Researching and writing the scripts was an ongoing process as possible sites for the plaques were investigated. David Turner was kept busy throughout the lockdown on the designs and we learned about the intricacies of linking text, audios and photographs with sets of QR codes loaded on to our website. Few of us had heard about QR codes when we began but now they are commonplace.

My grandson, Joshua, started work on this as a GCE computer project in his school's sixth form and as the years passed he found himself continuing with the input while at university in York.

The recording sessions with the actors of Dunstable Rep were conducted at the Little Theatre by Richard Hornsey who overcame an unexpected snag when his microphones picked up sounds from the theatre's central heating system.

Finally, with the stickers manufactured at last, Katharine Brown and I took them round the individual shops in the hope that they would be displayed. We were delighted to find that no-one refused and we were even invited to view some of the ancient and rarely visited cellars in Middle Row.

BRITISH NEWSPAPER SOCIETY

The British Newspaper Library has begun placing scanned pages of the Dunstable Borough Gazette online, which is going to make research into Dunstable's recent history very much easier. So far the library has covered editions for the years 1873, 1879, 1884, 1889, 1898, 1900 and 1912.

DISPLAYS AT EVENTS IN THE AREA

The society has been busy throughout the summer with a series of displays at various events in the area. We were invited by the council to have a gazebo at the Coronation market on the Square, and Jenny Dilnot and David Underwood brought along some special souvenirs to put on show. Thanks to everyone who supported our effort on what was an extremely cold day. We also had adventures at

the Sealed Knot's Civil War re-enactment at Houghton Regis, where a particularly strong gust of wind blew down our tent.

A MYSTERY

There's a little mystery at Dunstable Methodist Church where a package has been found stuffed behind pipework in the church kitchen. This contains some war-time documents relating to Sgt John Bailey who seems to have lived at East Grinstead and Croydon. Your society has traced a few details about Sgt Bailey but why his personal papers have been left in Dunstable remains a puzzle. Do any of our members know the answer?

PAT LOVERING

Pat Lovering, who died in January this year, was a great friend of this society and had visited us many times. Her main interest was the history of Houghton Regis and she assembled a vast collection of photographs of the village. She would always remind us that large stretches of Dunstable were once part of Houghton parish before boundaries were changed, so her collection included pictures of streets in what is now north and east Dunstable. She published a number of books about the village.

When Pat became ill she asked this society to retrieve her collection and we moved it to our research rooms. Later on, with the permission of her family, we transferred it into the care of Houghton Regis Heritage Society where it is available to view on the society's splendid website.

Pat, who grew up in Southampton, worked in the French sector of Germany after the war, looking after children. She later qualified as a teacher and spent many years at Beecroft School in Dunstable. Her funeral was on February 14 at All Saints Church, Houghton.

PAULINE WOLSEY

It was also very sad to learn of the death of Pauline Wolsey, a former Mayor of Luton. She often attended our meetings and helped her husband create talks for us about the dog in the HMV logo and the county's Festival of Britain village signs. She had been a nurse and a worker with the WRVS. As a football fan, her proudest moment was to host the civic welcome to Luton Town after they defeated Arsenal in the Littlewoods Cup Final.

John Buckledee



Pat Lovering

More on Dunstable's Coat of Arms



Fig 1 Dun the robber horseshoe



Fig 2 Staple ring and link



Fig 3 Horseshoe and King's ring



Fig 4 The current coat of arms

Further to my article, 'The Legends of Dun The Robber', Newsletter No. 62, page 470, I have found more references to the origins of our town's Coat of Arms and I offer them for your consideration.

DUN THE ROBBER

In the Bedfordshire Magazine, page 35 of volume 3, there is an article about our coat of Arms by Frederick William Kuhlicke FSA, 1893-1979. He was senior modern languages Master at Bedford Modern School and an authority on Bedfordshire history, archaeology, heraldry and monumental brasses. He also contributed to the BHRS series.

Kuhlicke says that our Arms are armes parlantes, or punning arms, on the theme of Dun the Robber. In Dunstable/Dunstaple, stable refers to Dun's horse, while staple refers to a market. He describes the original as a silver shield which has an 'ordinary' otherwise known as a pile (an inverted isosceles triangle) in black (sable). To this a golden horseshoe is attached by a golden staple. We have, therefore, the pile, or post, to which Dun's horse, represented by the horseshoe, was tethered (fig 1). At the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the Priory's rights, along with many others, passed to the Crown and were incorporated into the Honour of Ampthill. Dunstable eventually became too important to remain in the Honour and so, in 1864, obtained a Charter of Corporation with full civic status and Arms based on those of the Priory. To the silver shield was added a black border engrailed, meaning a scalloped edge. The broad triangle of the Priory shield shrank to a wedge-shaped staple, to which a ring and link were attached, all sable (fig 2). He dismisses any allusion to an ale-warmer.

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WORTHINGTON G SMITH

In James Tibbett's 1905 edition of his 'Dunstable Directory' there is an illustrated article by Worthington G Smith. According to Smith, the original coat of Arms, granted by Henry I, was shown on the Prior's seal. He interprets it as follows, 'Henry, of his royal favour, gave a golden cupful of good luck to the market town of Dunstaple.' It shows a horseshoe, or golden cup, the emblem of good luck, attached to which is the King's ring, a mark of his royal favour (fig 3). He adds that, in Dunstable Council's Arms, the horseshoe is replaced by a mere loop, which is on its side, allowing all the luck to run out (fig 4). He concludes that prosperity will not return to our town until this is put right.

FRATERNITY REGISTER OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

Neither Kuhlicke nor Smith makes any reference to the motto. This only appears after the 1864 Charter of Corporation.

There is also a representation of the post, staple and ring in the border of the Fraternity Register of St. John the Baptist. Omer Roucoux dated the page it is on to about 1521 (fig 6).



Fig 6 Part of the border of the fraternity register page

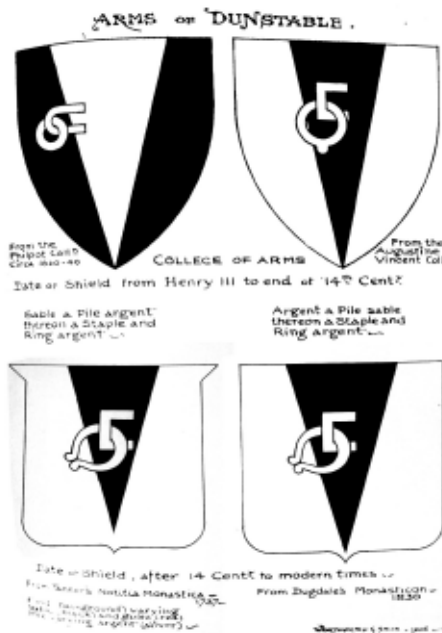


Fig 5 Four versions from Bill Twaddle's book

OLD DUNSTABLE COLLECTION OF 110 PICTURES

Bill Twaddle in his 'Old Dunstable a Collection of 110 Pictures', (W Twaddle, White Crescent Press 1975), shows on page 11, four coats of Arms. The page is entitled 'Arms of Dunstable' (fig 5). This prompted me to email the College of Arms, asking if they had the original, as I had found so many varieties of the same thing. I received a very prompt and courteous reply. It points out that 'coats of Arms belong to individuals and corporate bodies, so there can be no coat of Arms for a place in general.' Also 'No Arms have ever been granted to a local authority for Dunstable.' He is not sure that Henry I granted Arms to the Priory as, 'until the 15th century, coats of Arms were not regulated by the Crown. Indeed, in 1131 heraldry was not really in existence as a system.'

Hugh Garrod

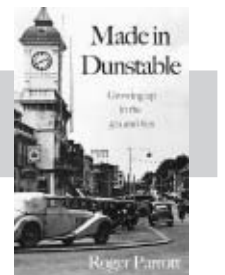
Made in Dunstable

Roger Parrott, whose recent talk to the history society was very well received, mentioned that he was writing a book, Made In Dunstable, about his early life. This has now been published (price £11.99 at Priory House) and is a feast of 1950s and '60s nostalgia, with Roger enthusiastically describing the high-street shops of the time and a host of local personalities ranging from Coal Black Charlie to his father and grandfather, Haydn and Harold Parrott.

Both men were very influential councilors during a period of immense change in the town but there is not much about local politics in Roger's book, which is more revealing about his rather strict upbringing.

Politeness, table-manners and good behaviour were very much expected.

He writes with particular affection about Mrs Hope Pratt, his favourite teacher at Ashton Primary School, and Miss Eileen Payne, the lovely and caring librarian in what is now the Little Theatre. There's much about Roger's time at Dunstable Grammar School and just a little about his career as an actor. Fascinating to read that he took the Peter O'Toole role in a school production of The Long And The Short And The Tall and that, in another play, he was criticised for over-acting by the adjudicator at Dunstable Drama Festival.



Dunstable Photographers continued



At the beginning of the 20th century photography was still a relatively new art.

Trevor Hunt has been researching the history of Dunstable's pioneer photographers and has collected many examples of their work. He has written a series of articles, concentrating on the photographers who began operating here in the decades before the First World War. We continue the series of his research.

FRANK KNIGHT

Frank Knight was born on 22nd June 1871 at Gothic Cottage, Benslow Hill, Hitchin, Hertfordshire to parents George and Annie Knight. His father was a florist and seedsman.

On the 1881 census Frank was living with his parents and family at Hillside House, Hitchin Road, Luton. His father, George, was recorded as a lime and whiting manufacturer. From the details on the 1881 census it seems the family had moved to Luton around 1872.

AN ARTIST IN OILS AND WATERCOLOURS

Ten years later, in 1891, Frank was living with his parents at 81 Chapel Street, Luton. His father was now described as an accountant. Frank was now 19 and was recorded as an artist in oils and watercolours.

On 3rd March 1898 Frank married Carrie Cobb (born around 1880) at the Register Office, Luton. Frank was recorded as an artist living at George Street, Dunstable. Carrie was residing at Baker Street, Luton, at the time of the marriage.

Frank was recorded in a trade directory of 1898 as a photographer at 2 George Street, Upper Houghton Regis. Following boundary changes and re-numbering this is the property now known as 1 George Street, Dunstable.

In 1899 the couple moved to Castle Street in Luton as Carrie was pregnant with their first child.

FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES

A conveyance at the Bedfordshire Records Office dated 12th May 1899 mentions Frank Knight, a photographer of Upper Houghton Regis, as one of the parties. From the documents it seems Frank Knight was purchasing 19 Castle Street, Luton, from a Mr William Boddington of Luton. He seems to have purchased the property with a loan from the London & County Banking Company Limited but ran into financial difficulties. In August 1899 the London Gazette recorded a proposed hearing before the Official Receivers and in November of that year a further conveyance of the property is recorded whereby the proceeds of the sale were paid to London & County Banking Company Limited to settle the debt. At this time Frank was recorded as an artist and photographer.



George Street, Dunstable today where Frank Knight first lived and worked as a photographer

The couple's first child, Elsie, was born in Luton in late 1899 around the time of these proceedings. By 1901 the family had returned to Dunstable and were living in High Street, Upper Houghton Regis.

The future Dunstable photographer, Chas Smy, was living at 75 High Street, Upper Houghton Regis after his marriage in June 1897. This would have been very close to where Frank Knight was trading as a photographer in George Street in 1898 and, given Chas Smy's interest in photography at this time, it is certain that Chas Smy knew and probably learnt from Frank Knight.

Chas Smy's first child was born at 75 High Street, Upper Houghton Regis, in late 1899 around the time Frank Knight ran into financial difficulties. Chas Smy moved from 75 High Street around this time to a property in Chiltern Road. Given the timing and the fact he knew Frank Knight it seems reasonable to conclude that Frank Knight and his young family in fact moved to 75 High Street, Upper Houghton Regis.

It appears Frank Knight continued to trade as a photographer at High Street, Upper Houghton Regis, until around 1903. In that year Chas Smy started to trade as a photographer after giving up his job at Waterlow's. Chas Smy's first business premises were 75 High Street, Upper Houghton Regis, the same property where he and his wife had first lived when they came to Dunstable and probably the same property where Frank Knight had traded after his return to Dunstable. All evidence therefore suggests Chas Smy took over the business of Frank Knight around 1903.

In 1906, another daughter, Effie, was born to Frank and his wife in Dunstable and a son, Percy, was born in Dunstable in 1908.

A Bedfordshire trade directory of 1910 shows Frank as a florist at Park Street, Dunstable.

FLORIST MARKET GROWER

On the 1911 census Frank Knight was recorded as a florist market grower at 9 Park Street, Dunstable, with his wife and the three children mentioned above. The census records him and his wife had been married for twelve years, the number of children born alive were seven but four had died.

A Bedfordshire trade directory of 1914 shows Frank as a florist at Park Street, Dunstable. Frank's son, Percy, died in 1914.



An unknown family group outside a cottage taken around 1899

The first photo below shows the property in George Street, Dunstable as it is today where Frank Knight first lived and worked as a photographer. The second photo shows an unknown family group taken around 1899 when Frank Knight was working from George Street, Dunstable.

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HERBERT A STRANGE

Herbert Augustus Strange was born in early 1872 at High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, to parents Matthew and Rebecca Strange. His father was a chair manufacturer. He was still living in High Wycombe at the time of the 1881 and 1891 census returns.

He married Emily Oliver, born in Theale, Berkshire, in the September quarter of 1900 in Bradfield, Berkshire.

By 1901 he was living at 6 Bath Villas, High Street, St Mary Cray in Kent and was employed as a photographer.

Around late 1901/early 1902 he moved to Dunstable and he took over the business of Percy Vlako Turner at 23 High Street North. He was listed in a trade directory of 1903 as a photographer at 23 High Street North. He took many of the photographs for Worthington George Smith's book, *Dunstable Its History and Surroundings*, which was published in 1904. In that book he had an advertisement for his business.

His daughter, Madeleine, was born in Dunstable in November 1902.

Herbert placed various adverts in the *Dunstable Gazette* in 1902-1904. He described himself variously as an artist photographer, a photographer and as a photographic dealer. He supplied picture frames, cameras and accessories. He appears to have made a special effort to diversify the previous business of Percy Vlako

HERBERT A. STRANGE,
23, High Street, Dunstable,
Photographic Artist,
And Dealer in Photographic Materials.

Children's Portraits a speciality.
Enlargements of every Description.
Flashlight Photos of Evening Parties.

Personal Attention given to Groups.
Photos by Day or Night.
The Largest Selection of Local Views in the District.

CAMERAS and ACCESSORIES,
AND EVERYTHING FOR THE AMATEUR.

ENGRAVINGS. PHOTOGRAPHERS. CHROMOS.
PICTURE FRAMES. ALUMINIUM NOVELTIES.

An advert for Herbert Strange

Turner by also supplying the photographic trade and the growing band of amateur photographers.

He seems to have left Dunstable around 1904/1905 when Thomas Morgan probably took over his business at 23 High Street North.

By the time of the 1911 census he was living at 93 Woodfield Road, Ealing, Middlesex with his wife and his daughter, Madeleine. At this time he was described as a tailor's traveller.

He died on 9th April 1926 aged 54. His home address was still 93 Woodfield Road, Ealing. He left an estate of just over £2,500.

Madeleine died on the Isle of Wight in 1956 and her mother, Emily, died on the Isle of Wight in 1964.

Below is a photograph of The Excelsior Silver Prize Band taken by Herbert Strange in 1902. This photograph is reproduced courtesy of the Bedfordshire Records Office. If you compare this to the earlier photo of The Excelsior Band (reproduced in an earlier article in this series) taken by Percy Vlako Turner around 1900 you will see some of the individuals are shown in both photos.

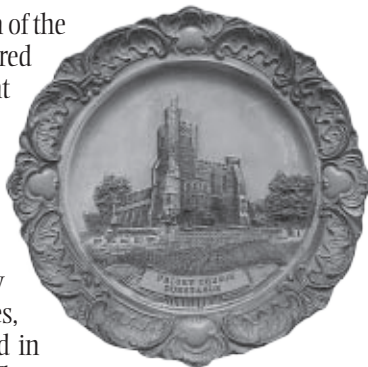
Trevor Hunt



A photo of the Excelsior Silver Prize Band taken by Herbert Strange in 1902

Made In Austria 2009

In the January 2nd 1989 edition of the *Dunstable Gazette*, there appeared an article on page 6 called, 'Hunt is on for more rare Priory plates'. It tells how an Austria-made plate, created a lot of interest for historians of Dunstable's Priory church, in particular, John Lunn. John subsequently acquired two of these plates, which he describes as 'moulded in relief in a kind of hard plaster.' They are 19cm in diameter. One is more brightly coloured than the other. On the back of each it says, 'Made In Austria 2009', with the '9' reversed and on one, the rim has been pierced and a wire inserted for hanging.



POSTCARD

John says the view of the West Front of the Church is similar to a postcard on sale in the early 20th century. He says it was number 12921 in the Wrench series, printed in Saxony. The main difference is that, on the plates, the Norman entrance has been given a pointed arch. The plates also show the iron railings which ran along the top of the west boundary wall and those along the path at the north side of the building. I have been unable to find this postcard in our archive. If anyone has a copy, I would be pleased to see it.

Ian T Henderson published 'Pictorial Souvenirs of Britain', (David & Charles 1974). In Chapter 7 he says the plates are porcelain. European porcelain 'was first developed at Meissen in Germany in the

early part of the eighteenth century'. He is fairly sure that, prior to World War I, pictorial souvenir wares were only produced in Germany and Austria. To be commercially viable, the plates would need to have been produced in some quantity. Dunstable around 1900 was not a noted tourist destination and there would be little interest in these souvenirs beyond the town's boundaries. The population at the time was less than 6,000.

WRENCH SERIES

John Wrench was born in 1882 and, during a long and varied career, was an author, journalist and editor of *The Spectator*. Between 1900 and 1904, upon leaving Eton, he published thousands of postcards of places all over Britain. He was knighted in 1932 and died in 1966.

FURTHER SOUVENIRS

John Lunn subsequently bought further pictorial souvenirs. The collection contains four other plates, Arundel Castle, Colchester Castle and two of un-named churches. One has 'Wartburg' on the back and the other 'Lichtenstein'. There is an oval dish depicting Salisbury Cathedral and quite a few plaques with illustrations of Nelson's 'Monument', St. Paul's Cathedral, Ripon Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, Lichfield Cathedral, St. Martin's in the Field, Chichester Cathedral, Ludlow Parish Church, Worcester Cathedral and Buckfast Abbey. The Society will keep the two Priory plates, but may sell the others for the Society's funds.

Hugh Garrod

Tramp Ward



During lockdown I received an email from a lady researching her family history with a slight connection to Dunstable.

It seemed that she had discovered a gypsy in her family tree whose son was born at the Dunstable Tramp Ward. Having read the article in our Newsletter she was puzzled as her relative, according to the birth certificate, was born in 1886 but the ward closed in 1885. Were gypsies now camping on the site or nearby? Could it be a date error?

After finishing the research, sometime later a very interesting article came to light in the British Newspaper Archive which could possibly solve the date question.

A ROMANCE

The story starts in about the 1883/4 period when Robert Page, a gypsy travelling in the Kent area, was sharpening knives and turning his hand to various odd jobs. Whilst working at a large manor house he met a maid named Elizabeth Silvester. There was obviously a strong attraction as when he left, she went with him. Her family who lived in Epping, Essex, immediately disowned her. Life on the road was not easy, work and food were scarce and there would be little money to spare for lodgings for a night. One had to be penniless to stop at a tramp ward or workhouse so the only other alternative was sleeping under the stars. Just walking from place to place was hazardous and dangerous as roads were rough, muddy and full of holes but obviously somehow the pair survived.

THE PROBLEM

In 1886 they had their first child naming him Robert Page after his father. According to his birth certificate he was born on the 21st of March 1886 and where it says "where born" was written Dunstable Tramp Ward. "Rank or profession of father" was given as a travelling tinker and the mark by the father, records his abode as the Tramp Ward Dunstable.

Now the building closed in 1885 so how could a baby be born there the following year 1886? Although closed to inmates the superintendent and his wife stayed on as caretakers to keep the property safe from vandals who would have stolen anything, including the bricks from the buildings.

A POSSIBLE ANSWER

Luton Reporter - Saturday 27 March 1886

The Vagrant Ward at Dunstable, which has been closed for some time, was re-opened the other night to receive a rather unexpected visitor. A young woman, the wife of a travelling gypsy, while in the neighbourhood was taken ill, and an application was made to the Relieving Officer for a medical order. This being obtained, a messenger was dispatched on foot to Markyate Street for the Parish Medical Officer, who attended, and finding the woman squatting for shelter under a hedge recommended her removal to the Workhouse at Luton. To this, however, the husband of the woman objected, and she was removed carefully to the tramp ward at Dunstable where Dr. Murphy attended sometime after, and a very fine addition was made to the number of Her Majesty's subjects. Mother and child are reported to be doing well.



The location of the Tramps Ward behind the site of Greyhound pub

SUMMARY

As a traveller Robert would have been familiar with workhouses and tramp wards and probably have been an inmate at some time. The former was not to be recommended as a place to have a baby as on entering he would have been separated from his wife and child. When the Tramp Ward, just off High Street South, was built it met with the approval of the local inhabitants as it stopped all the begging in the town. Previously if a person was desperate enough, they would break a window in order to be arrested and have a bed for the night. Although followed by a week in prison it was considered a small price to pay, particularly in the winter.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The 1901 Ilford census showed the family was working and living on a farm but Robert Page senior went to the Boer War at some point. Robert Page junior, the son born in Dunstable, married, had a family but enlisted in WW1 and went to Turkey. He died a few weeks before the English retreated from where he was deployed. Elizabeth in 1918 went to look after her daughter-in-law who had the Spanish flu which she also sadly contracted and died leaving a large family. The youngest child died soon after Elizabeth apparently of a broken heart. Altogether she had given birth to 10 children, one born in a workhouse, but not all the children survived.

CONCLUSION

After all the hardships, tragedies and tears seen in that building a happy event such as the birth of a baby is a fitting closure..

Rita Swift

Greeting New Members



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

Stephen Allen
Jacky Hockey

Amanda Crosdil
Marita Hopkinson

Claire Dowsing
Stephen Morris

Sad Farewell



We are very sorry to announce the sad loss of

Joan Mackinnon

Derek Morgan

Pauline Wolsey

The Tilsworth Murder



The savage murder of a woman in a wood near Dunstable is still remembered today, thanks to a tangible reminder of the crime on a gravestone at Tilsworth churchyard, where the 'unkown' woman was buried.



The grave of an unknown woman at Tilsworth churchyard

It says: 'This stone was created by subscription to the memory of a female unknown found murdered in Blackgrove Wood on Aug 13 1821.'

A poignant verse then follows, beginning:

Oh pause my friends and drop a silent tear

Attend and learn why I was buried here...

But who was the unnamed victim? The best guess, after all these years is that she was Mrs Janet Eastaffe, named Janet Lynch before her marriage.

HUSBAND ACCUSED

Her husband, who had reason to want her dead, was accused of the crime some seven years after the body was found. But he was acquitted, principally because Janet's mother was not present at the trial. It seems probable that the prosecution had expected her to say that physical peculiarities on the unidentified corpse matched those of her daughter. Without the mother's evidence, the judge and jury were left with an awful dilemma: What if the husband were convicted and executed, and then his wife turned up, alive and well?

With death and burial records throughout the land now being transcribed on to the internet, it is becoming much easier for family historians to search the documentation. So far, a death record for Janet Eastaffe has not been traced, which supports the theory that she is the unidentified lady buried at Tilsworth.

There have been numerous stories written about the crime, but very little about the apparent breakthrough in the case, seven years after the discovery of the body, when law officers became convinced about the identity of the victim, and that the murder had been committed by her husband, John Eastaffe.



The ancient Blackgrove Wood today

The subsequent events can be traced in great detail by anyone with the time and patience to hunt through the archives.

BLACKGROVE WOOD

The ancient Blackgrove Wood still exists (private property today) isolated in the fields almost opposite the church, between the village and Leighton bypass. The woman was found, her throat cut, in a spot 'peculiarly secluded and secret', under a tree which became a morbid attraction for ghost-hunters and which was eventually 'felled and made into a sideboard'.

The body was carried on a stable door, used as a make-shift stretcher, to a pub (presumably the Anchor) in the centre of Tilsworth where it was viewed by numerous local people. But her identity remained unknown despite a reward being offered and details of her clothes and appearance being published in many newspapers.

PROTRUDING TEETH AND A CROOKED FINGER

It was reported that she had protruding teeth and a crooked finger on her right hand - details which became important after March 1828 when Eastaffe was accused of her murder and brought before two Dunstable magistrates. The fact that someone had been charged with the crime after such a long time was a sensational development and the preliminary hearing at Dunstable Corn Exchange was attended by a large crowd. The prisoner was remanded in custody at Bedford Gaol until his trial at Bedford Assizes in July that year.

EASTAFFE MARRIED AN IRISH GIRL IN LONDON

Eastaffe, who came from Leighton Buzzard, had moved to London in 1819. In that year, at St James's Church, Piccadilly, he married an Irish girl named Janet Lynch - without the consent of her mother. They lived 'very uncomfortable with each other' for just a short while and she became 'so acquainted' with the soldiers at Knightsbridge barracks that he could not stay with her and went back home to live 'in the hay country'.

Later he met another woman but was warned by a friend not to think about taking a second wife 'otherwise they will transport you'. The prosecution claimed that a letter was written on his behalf to his wife asking her to come and see him.

By March 1828 he was living with another woman who passed as his wife at an address given in court as George Street, Battlebridge. He told law officers that his previous wife was dead and was buried in Knightsbridge.

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A footpath in Blackgrove Wood

MOTHER GAVE UNSATISFACTORY EVIDENCE

Janet's mother, Mrs Downey (formerly Mrs Lynch) gave unsatisfactory evidence at the preliminary Dunstable hearing. She was said to be a very infirm woman, upwards of 70 years of age, and spectators remarked that she did not take the slightest notice of the prisoner. Mrs Downey said she did not know anything at all of her daughter, or whether she was dead or alive. It was six or seven years since she had seen her. It could not be as little as four years – yet perhaps it might 'her memory being very bad'.

CHARGED WITH MURDERING JANET LYNCH

When the trial began at Bedford, Eastaffe was charged specifically with murdering Janet Lynch rather than 'an unknown woman'. But the prosecution failed to prove that the dead woman was actually Janet Lynch/Eastaffe. The evidence against Eastaffe largely depended on a series of witnesses who said they had seen him and someone resembling the dead woman at various places around Dunstable on August 13. The couple had visited the Plough Inn (a pub, now disappeared, which stood somewhere near the Packhorse on the Watling Street near Kensworth), had been seen walking down the road by someone working 'in Mr Gutteridge's field', had gone to the statty fair that night at Dunstable, had sought accommodation in Dunstable, had called at the Black Horse (a pub which was once in West Street) where there had been dancing on the night of the fair, and had been seen at the stile leading into Blackgrove Wood, where the man had apparently threatened the woman with violence.

Eastaffe, on the other hand, denied all this. He said he had been reaping wheat in a field at Gads Hill, Leighton Buzzard, during the days of the Dunstable fair and had no knowledge of the woman found in the wood. He had not been among the vast numbers who had travelled to see her corpse at the Tilsworth pub.

Defence witnesses said that a Jane or Janet Lynch had been working in London, either as a shop assistant or a street walker, as late as 1824. This woman did not have the protruding teeth and crooked finger which had been noticed on the corpse of the victim. Eastaffe had said that his wife had died in Knightsbridge but a solicitor instructed by the prosecution said he had searched through the burial records of the parish church of Knightsbridge and Chelsea from January 1821 to January 1826 and there was no record of the death of Janet Lynch or Janet Eastaffe. And another solicitor, examining at the trial the clothes of the dead woman, made the previous unnoticed discovery that her shoes had, inside, the initials JE. The woman had unusually small feet.

MOTHER NOT PRODUCED AS A WITNESS

However, the trial judge said that clothes could be stolen or passed on. He commented that it was most regrettable that Mrs Downey, who had been examined in London and had given very important evidence, had not been produced as a witness. The crucial difficulty faced by the trial was that there did not appear to be satisfactory evidence that the woman found murdered was the daughter of Mrs Downey. He added: If Janet Lynch should be still alive, and should, after the conviction and execution of the prisoner, appear, what a dreadful condition would he and the jury be placed in!

NOT GUILTY

The jury took just ten minutes to find Eastaffe not guilty of killing his wife and he was freed.

It means that the identity of the woman buried at Tilsworth remains unresolved. But, so far, no-one has discovered any records showing that Janet Lynch died elsewhere. Her aged mother, who might have settled the matter to some extent, apparently went back to Ireland before the trial.

John Buckledee

Memories of old Dunstable



The popular tv programme The Repair Shop contacted the history society asking if we had a photograph of the Dunstable artist Edwin Aldous.

EDWIN ALDOUS



Edwin Aldous in 1936

Indeed we had, and the programme's researcher became particularly interested when we mentioned that our collection included a picture of Mr Aldous with a model which he had created using matchsticks. It was not too difficult to guess what the programme's experts were being asked to tackle!

Six months later we saw one of our photographs screened as part of an episode featuring Edwin's tall model of the Big Ben tower, made with 5,520 matchsticks in 1953. Today, the model is owned by his great-granddaughter Charlotte Fisher.

Mr Aldous, who was manager of the Foster Brothers shop in Dunstable, was particularly famous for his extraordinary ability to paint two identical pictures at the same time, one of which was upside

down. A cinema newsreel feature still survives with the comedian Richard Hearn ('Mr Pastry') watching 'the upside-down artist', occasionally standing on his head to check the work in progress.

Coincidentally, the society has been asked for information about two paintings, stored at Dunstable Council's offices at Grove House, showing a warship called HMS Dunstable. We instantly recognised the artist's signature...Edwin Aldous. The real puzzle has been: What happened to HMS Dunstable? There's no mention of a ship of that name on the navy lists.

One thought was that the painting might be a scene from the Battle of Matapan, which was a major victory for the British navy in March 1941 when many ships from the Italian fleet were destroyed. The decisive moment came when the British carried out a surprise night attack, illuminating the Italian fleet with searchlights carried by a number of small ships (one of which included in its crew Philip, later the husband of Queen Elizabeth).

That certainly looks like the scene in the painting, but detailed accounts of the battle, and the ships which took part, are readily available, and these do not mention an HMS Dunstable.

Another theory was that perhaps this was the name of a ship which might have been 'adopted' by Dunstable during the

continued over

Second World War. A clue was found, extraordinarily, in a newspaper cutting from the Holloway Press which featured a weekly bulletin from Dunstable provided by Acland School, whose scholars had been evacuated during the war to Britain Street school. In March 1941 the bulletin mentions that the pupils from London had been taking part in a huge Dunstable effort to raise money to build a warship to be called HMS Dunstable. Part of this was creating window displays in Dunstable shops to encourage the fund-raising.

Our best guess is that Mr Aldous had created these two paintings, inspired by the Matapan battle, as part of a display or a poster.

Dunstable succeeded in meeting the target to provide an HMS Dunstable, but then heard the disappointing news that the Admiralty had decided that there were practical difficulties in naming ships in this way.

Dunstable went on to adopt HMS Burwell, a United States destroyer provided to Britain by the US under the war-time lease-lend agreement. HMS Burwell undertook Arctic convoy escort duties. After the war she was decommissioned and broken-up in 1947.

ALMA THEATRE IN LUTON

The weekly research into captions for the Gazette's Yesteryear series often involves a trawl through old copies of the paper which usually provide all sorts of extra nostalgia.

For instance, looking for an item in the Gazette of May 1951 it was fascinating to see an advertisement for the weekly attractions at the old Alma Theatre in Luton.

The star of the variety show there, twice nightly at 6.15 and 8.30 all week, was comedian Derek Roy. Remember him? Also on the bill was someone whose name is more familiar: 'The phenomenal juvenile singing star' Julie Andrews.

The previous week's variety included, low on the bill, the comedian Max Wall. The show's star, whose photograph dominated the advert, was Nellie Lutcher, described as 'radio's biggest attraction'. She was an American jazz and R&B singer whose records had been enthusiastically promoted in England by the influential dj Jack Jackson. Fame is a fleeting thing...

WHALE ON A TRAILER

Anyone remember the whale on a trailer? A visitor to the history society's stall at Ashton Square on June 11 was wondering if we had a photo of that unusual event which he remembered seeing when he was a boy. We don't have a record of this, which would have been in about 1964. The whale was an attraction on the car park alongside Queensway on what had once been Dunstable's old fire station.

SKELETONS IN WILKO'S CAR PARK

John Cox was another visitor to our stall, looking at the photos of the Manshead Archaeological Society's excavations on the site of what became what is now called the Wilko's car park. John was general foreman in the highways department of South Beds District Council, and answered an urgent call from Les Matthews, site director of the archaeological society, to use council machinery to uncover the top strata of the area before the developers started work. John very soon began uncovering old skeletons, so projected building work had to be put on hold.

JACK HORNE,

We were very sorry to hear of the death of Jack Horne, of Edlesborough, father of Barry Horne, the noted local archaeologist and historian.

Jack was awarded the Legion d'Honneur by France for being among the troops who fought to liberate that country in World War Two.

Award holders were invited to an event in the Tower of London during the King's Coronation but a few days before this Jack had to go to hospital for tests. He was very disappointed at being likely to miss the big occasion, but the Royal British Legion made special arrangements for him to be taken to London where he was thrilled to find he was an honoured guest.

Alas, a few days later Jack was found dead in his home in Edlesborough.

Jack lived opposite Edlesborough Church and was featured in the Dunstable Gazette a year or two ago when he discovered an upturned gravestone which commemorated Private James Tibbett, a villager who had served in Wellington's army at the Battle of Waterloo.



The engraved paving of Queen Eleanor

QUEEN ELEANOR

One of the ideas suggested during the recent refurbishment of Dunstable high street was to engrave an image of Queen Eleanor in the pavement outside the entrance to the shopping precinct named in her honour. The history society was asked if we could provide a suitable likeness. Not that easy!

There is an effigy of the queen on her tomb in Westminster Abbey and that would seem to be the most accurate depiction of her appearance. David Turner obtained photographs and used his artistic and computer skills to reduce the image to a few sharp lines suitable for carving on stone. All this research was done in the middle of the Covid lockdown and we heard nothing more from the people laying our smart new pavements. But it hadn't been forgotten and it has now appeared, unheralded, just outside the Subway shop. Have a look!

CHAIN OF OFFICE

What is the history of the splendid chain of office worn by Dunstable Mayors? Cllr Liz Jones, elected in May as the town's first citizen for the second successive year, asked the society for information.

The chain dates back to 1898 and was the brainchild of Alderman Fred Garrett, who was Mayor of Dunstable that year.

He ran a jeweller's shop in Dunstable and used his expertise to obtain a chain of the highest quality. He then wrote to former Mayors or their relatives asking them to contribute towards a set of links on each of which a former Mayor's name was inscribed.

He also donated a central badge and link featuring an English rose surmounted by a royal crown, emblematic of the fact that Dunstable was a royal borough, and a raised shield with the arms of the borough enamelled in colour.

He wore the new mayoral chain at a ball in 1898 given by the Lord Mayor of London at the Mansion House.

Ald Garrett was Mayor a number of times (1897, 1898, 1913, 1914, 1915 and 1918) and was made a Freeman of the borough in 1921. His shop was at 15 High Street North which is the large building next to the Town Hall Chambers. It seems to have been split into two at some stage and is used today by Household Estate Agents (15b) and the Prestige convenience store (15).

John Buckledee



Ald Fred T Garrett