

# NEWSLETTER

Dunstable & District Local History Society  
No. 52 September 2019



## Chairman's Notes

**Reported in our last newsletter the bombshell news that Dunstable Council wanted to use our research room at Priory House for other purposes.**

### GROVE HOUSE

The good news was that the council had found us alternative rooms at Grove House and would pay all the removal expenses.

So, we've just gritted our teeth and adapted to the change. In the event it has all worked out rather well, with more space available and a chance to reorganise our ever-growing collection of research material. Somehow, our shelves and furniture have all fitted into new positions and the removal men even managed to cope with the very large metal cabinet where we keep our exhibition panels and old maps.

The council staff at Grove House have been enormously helpful and members of this society have readily volunteered to deal with the packing and unpacking. There's now a team of people (headed by Hugh Garrod, Rita Swift, Pat Larkman, June Byrne and Jenny Dilnot) working regularly in the research rooms preparing a searchable asset register and improving our photo collection.

If any members wish to visit our new HQ they will be very welcome but, because Grove House is a working council office, they'll need to make an appointment. Just contact me or any member of the committee, or use the contact form on our website.

### DUNSTABLE GAZETTE FILES

Unluckily, just as we were in the middle of our move to Grove House, I was told that the Luton News was moving out of its offices in Upper George Street and would no longer have room to keep its vast archive collection. This was serious news indeed, because the collection included all the Dunstable Gazette files – an invaluable source of local information.

The Dunstable material was mixed up with archives and

cuttings files from other newspapers including Luton, Leighton Buzzard and Biggleswade so I've met with former Luton News sub-editor David Ainsbury, now a volunteer worker with Luton Museum, to spend many days trying to retrieve what we can.

David Underwood came to Luton with his large van and with the additional muscular help from John Pratt we have transferred the Gazette archives to an unused attic room at Grove House. Better than some vast warehouse in Luton!

### SUMMER OUTINGS

A major disappointment during the summer was the need to cancel our three planned summer outings. We had made a special effort to give members plenty of notice and to deliver details to everyone along with our last newsletter. We had also kept costs to a minimum and covered what we thought was a wide variety of interests. Alas, less than 20 members booked tickets so we would have lost hundreds of pounds if we had gone ahead. Your committee has decided not to arrange outings for next summer apart from one event when we can travel using our own cars. We'll think again about this when we gauge members' feelings. Meanwhile our thanks and apologies to Gordon Ivinson who had worked very hard on these three projects.

### NEW MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

David Underwood has volunteered (if that's the right word!) to undertake the job of membership secretary. His first major task has been to arrange the distribution of this newsletter, edited once again by David Turner.

### DAVID PREEST

It was a great shock to hear of the death of David Preest, who provided the new, complete, translation from the Latin of the Annals of Dunstable Priory. He attended the launch of the book last November and it was good to hear that he looked back on that visit to Dunstable with particular pleasure.

**John Buckledee**



*Farewell Priory House! Joan Curran and David Underwood pictured as the society prepared to move to a new research room at Grove House*

# Banking in 19th Century Dunstable



**T**he old history of Dunstable by Charles Lamborn mentions, very briefly, the great stock market crash of 1825 when there was a run on the banks and, in Dunstable, 'only Messrs Bassett withstood the pressure'.

But where was the Bassett bank? History society member David Fookes gives the background to the story and the growth of our high street banks.

## ORIGINS IN ENGLAND

The origins of English banking are found in the activities of the London goldsmith bankers during the latter half of the 17th century. Following the seizure of gold held at the Royal Mint in the Tower of London by Charles I, the goldsmiths extended their services to gentry and aristocracy as the Royal Mint was no longer considered a safe place to keep gold.

During the 18th century they developed the basic principles of accepting deposits on which interest was paid, made loans from funds supplied by these deposits, issued their own promissory notes (bank notes) and allowed depositors access to their funds by means of 'drawn notes' (later cheques).

The Industrial Revolution and the growth in international trade increased the number of banks, not only in London but in growing cities such as Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle and Liverpool. By 1784 there were more than 100 banks in the provinces.

## THE 1825 STOCK MARKET CRASH

In 1825 there was a stock market crash, which has been named as the first major economic crisis in England. Speculators had been borrowing large amounts of monies to invest in mining operations and commodities, particularly in South America. A lot of these monies were loaned without what we today would call 'due diligence'. In late 1825 the market began to turn, triggering panic. Six London banks failed and a further sixty in the country. The stock market fell by 80% and the Bank of England was nearly brought down.

## FIVE QUAKERS ESTABLISHED A BANK

In 1812 five Quakers of high standing in the Leighton Buzzard area, with backgrounds in the linen trade, established a bank in Leighton Buzzard. The five were Peter Bassett, John Dollin Bassett, John Grant, William Exton and Joseph Sharples. In 1813 they extended the business into Ampthill through an agent.



A Bassetts cheque from the Trustees of the Puddlehill Turnpike Trust in favour of Mr Benning, the Town Clerk.

## BRANCH OPENS IN DUNSTABLE

In 1815 a branch was opened in Dunstable under the name Bassett, Grant & Co.. The premises were on 'the north east side of the Great Street of the London Road' (High St North) on part of the site of the original White Hart Inn – possibly on the northern part of the land now occupied by today's Barclays Bank. It was later numbered 79 High St and then as a result of renumbering became 16.

As far as is known Bassett's Bank was unaffected by the 1825 crisis, probably due to its local reputation, confidence and Quaker background.

By 1854 the firm became known as Bassett, Son and Harris, the partners being John Dollin Bassett, his son Francis and Theodore Harris.

In 1855, John Dollin Bassett built Cedars House in High Street, Leighton Buzzard, which later became Cedars School and is now part of Leighton Buzzard Middle School. In 1866 John Dollin Bassett moved to live with his son Francis in The Heath, Plantation Road, and Theodore Harris, the other partner, moved into Cedars House. As befitted a firm of bankers doing business in the heart of the Whaddon Chase, the partners were always keenly interested in hunting. There is an amusing story that one day a stag, pursued by Lord Rothschild's hounds, ran into the town of Leighton and found his way inside the bank, and was only removed after some difficulty!

It would appear that the Dunstable branch was managed from Leighton Buzzard in the early days, as until 1870 it was only open on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Fair Days. In 1890 Francis Bassett was also Treasurer to Dunstable Corporation.

A list of managers includes (dates are approximate):

- 1850s & 1860s – William Biggs
- 1870s & 1880s – Frederick Howell
- 1890s – Frederick Girling. He later became manager at Leighton Buzzard
- 1900s – Aubrey Collier

None of these were local men.

In 1884 a sub-branch was opened in Toddington.



Bassett's Bank was perhaps part of this building, the present Barclays site 1870

### BARCLAY & CO.

It remained essentially a family firm until 1896 when it amalgamated with Barclay & Co.

The second bank to open in Dunstable, next to the Red Lion Hotel, was a branch of London & County Banking Co sometime between 1845 and 1850. This was possibly a sub-branch of Luton as the manager in the 1850s, a Mr W Bigg, is shown on the 1851 census living in Luton at the branch of London & County Bank in Market Hill.

Like Bassett's branch it only opened on Wednesdays and Saturdays until in 1865 it became a 'daily branch with an independent account'.

In 1909 London & County Banking Co. merged with London & Westminster Bank to become London County & Westminster Bank.

### WESTMINSTER BANK

A further merger took place in 1918 with Parr's Bank to become London County Westminster & Parr's Bank, which in 1923 became known as Westminster Bank.

Some of the managers were:

- 1850s & 1860s – William Bigg
- 1876 – Benjamin Griggs
- 1880's – Thomas Williams
- 1890 – Hugh Lanaway
- 1898 – WEJ Rigge
- 1910 – Stanley Charles Hanham

### NATIONAL PROVINCIAL BANK

In 1928 National Provincial Bank Ltd. opened a branch close to the Sugar Loaf Hotel. This, like London & County, was a sub-branch of Luton. The original manager's name is not known. In 1953 it became a full branch.

In 1968 Westminster and National Provincial Banks merged to become National Westminster Bank.

The National Provincial branch closed on 12th November 1971.

In November 1923 Lloyds opened a clerk-in-charge branch in the town under Luton. This was made a full branch in January 1927. Apart from a move to a temporary address in West Street in 1973 and 1974 it has remained at its present location in High St North and is now part of the Lloyds - TSB organisation.

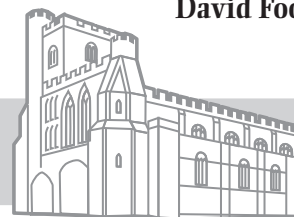
Luton Savings Bank opened a branch in Dunstable in January 1939. In 1975 it became part of the TSB South East. Its original location is uncertain. It could have been in High Street North opposite the Union cinema or the more recent location on the Square before it was taken over by Lloyds in 1999.

### MIDLAND BANK

Midland Bank (now HSBC) opened a branch in West St on 14th March 1955. Mr Percy Wainwright of Priory Road was clerk-in-charge. The original location was on the opposite side of West Street to its present location. The branch crossed the road in 1993.

Sources: Barclays archives, RBS archives, HSBC archives, Lloyds TSB archives.

David Fookes



## Dunstable Priory Church

**Francis Alick Fowler was born in 1891 in Dunstable and lived here for most of his life. He was secretary of the Parish Council for many years, edited the parish magazine and was a local historian, following in the footsteps of Worthington G Smith. Alick Fowler was writing these personal reminiscences about his childhood in his late 70s. He also researched the Dunstable Annals and the history of the Priory Church.**

### REMINISCENCES BY FRANCIS ALICK FOWLER

'My chief love, and always has been was architectural drawing and sketching, the medium usually pen and ink or pencil. I grew up to love church architecture. It fascinated me. It may have been a re-action against the unadorned meeting-houses of strict Calvinism, where all that is beautiful and smacks of sensualism is cast out. My first recollection of the interior of the Priory Church was being taken there for a Harvest Thanksgiving service. I was about six. I was familiar enough with its north side and beautiful west front seeing it daily, but I had never been inside. All my people came originally from Northall and were Calvinist and attended the Bethel, set back from the road through the village, standing by itself across the fields. When they removed to Dunstable they, of course, attended the Ebenezer in St. Mary's Street. 'I don't remember much about the service which was all Greek to me but I do remember the vergger with a long pole at the end of which was a lighted taper, lighting the naked gas jets which at the level of the triforium went round the north and south sides

of the nave. What a smell of escaping gas before all were lighted! I had never been in an ancient church before and the massive Norman architecture impressed me. The beautiful west front was very much decayed and its open gallery positively dangerous. I remember the clock face being hauled up in position on the north side of the tower as a memorial to commemorate Queen Victoria's Jubilee (1897). 'The churchyard grazed sheep as did also the Priory meadow which in those days was private property and belonged to a Mr Munt who owned and lived in Priory House.' The clock face was installed in 1899. The clock was still wound up by hand. Jane Cart, in her 1737 will, had allowed the Vergger £1 a year for undertaking this task.

Hugh Garrod

## Greeting New Members

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

**Karin Kaye**

**Jana Veyres**

**B Church**



## Sad Farewell



We are very sorry to announce the sad loss of  
**Rex Sanders**

# Dunstable Schooldays



## MORE RECOLLECTIONS BY FRANCIS ALICK FOWLER

I attended first of all the C of E Infant's School, now the parish Church hall which adjoins the churchyard at its north-west corner. I later crossed the road to the Ashton Schools, which in those days were for boys and girls in separate buildings – a rather nice Gothic group now spoiled and 'modernised'. It had a bell turret on its centre building and a boy was detailed to ring the bell. We always started with a hymn and prayer, usually followed by a scripture lesson. During my time at the school the Headmaster was a Mr Knight who was a strict disciplinarian but fair and just. I loved school and the teachers were nice. Occasionally the proceedings were enlivened by incidents involving troublesome boys who were dealt with swiftly by six strokes of the best, always administered by the Headmaster with some ceremonial before the whole school. One afternoon sticks in my memory. One of the !!! boys had to be punished. It took several teachers to hold such a wriggly customer down over a desk for Mr Knight to cane his bottom. In the proceedings Mr Knight's detachable starched cuffs flew off.

Immediately the caning was finished !!! mounted a desk, jumped out of an open window and made for home. When his father learned what had happened he got a parental wacking as well. The only time I was punished was during a Scripture lesson when I received chastisement for not being able to repeat the 'Apostles' Creed' correctly, which considering that I had been brought up as a Calvinistic Baptist and attended the Sunday School there, I thought very unfair. One of our teachers, Mr 'Billy' Bandy was a rather corpulent person and like most fat people, was always kind and friendly. Needless to say, all the boys loved him.'

Alick Fowler was recalling his school days when he was nearly 80. James Knight was Headteacher of Ashton Elementary Boys' School from 1878 until 1915. It is interesting that Alick Fowler spends so much of his time remembering punishment in his school days. I have used !!! to protect the guilty.

Hugh Garrod



## James Turney 1857 - 1861

**We have been involved in producing a number of interpretation panels that will be installed in the West Street Cemetery which has recently been awarded a Green Flag – the scheme that recognises and rewards well managed parks and green spaces.**

### THE FIRST PERSON BURIED AT DUNSTABLE CEMETERY

One of the panels featured the grave of James Turney, aged 4, the first person to be buried there on 22nd October 1861. The much damaged memorial stone states that James was the son of Thomas and his wife Eliza who lived in Church Street, Dunstable. So we thought it would be good to expand the story a bit.

### ACUTE HYDROCEPHALUS

On the 1861 census return, his father, Thomas is shown to be an omnibus driver (horse-driven at this time of course – he is also listed as a groom on James' death certificate). I managed to obtain a copy of the death certificate which showed he died on 20th October 1861 of acute hydrocephalus after being ill for 2 weeks.



The damaged Turney family memorial stone

I contacted a friend, a retired paediatrician, who was intrigued by the story and readily agreed to use his sources to investigate the diagnosis further.

He thought it unlikely it would have been congenital hydrocephalus which is a chronic condition that would have been obvious for years and his death certificate shows he had only been ill for 2 weeks.

Meningitis can cause this condition but it is unlikely as in 1861 meningitis would have been fatal in 2 or 3 days. It's quite possible though he had a brain tumour, which would have been impossible to detect at that time. This would prevent the flow of cerebral fluid, leading to acute hydrocephalus, but we'll never know for sure.

I was grateful for this professional detective work which helped to tell the sad story of the young boy who became the first person to be buried at the new cemetery.

The memorial stone shows his parents and brother, James, and sister, Emily, are all buried together.

### OTHER PANELS

The other panels relate to some notable people who are also buried in the cemetery including the historian and naturalist Worthington G Smith, Arthur Bagshawe, who founded Bagshawe & Co., John and Lucy Dales of Dales' Dubbin, both town mayors and the Tibbett family, who published several local newspapers including the Dunstable Borough Gazette. Another panel covers some of the town mayors also buried there including John Langridge, who was a money lender and a colourful character. He made frequent appearances in local courts after being 'assaulted' by his clients when attempting to secure payment from them.

The panels will be installed in the next few weeks and the cemetery is well worth a visit.

David Turner



James Turney's death certificate showing death caused by acute hydrocephalus

# Demolishing the Porch, 1770



**It all started at the book launch of the Dunstable Annals, on Saturday 24th November 2018.**

Somebody had left cards, at the back of the church, for Romanesque Sculpture, 'a complete on-line record of all surviving Romanesque sculpture in Britain and Ireland'. I went on [www.crsbi.ac.uk](http://www.crsbi.ac.uk) to see what it said about Dunstable's Augustinian Priory.

I was very impressed by what I found but was puzzled by the mention of a porch outside the West door, of which I had no knowledge. Luckily, there was a reference to Lincoln Archives and a copy in Bedford (BLARS). The text quotes Nichols Topographical Survey of 1790 that the 'horrid wooden porch is now removed' but adds 'boys in quest of birds which breed in the carved mouldings now destroy the beauties which were before concealed'. I contacted Bedford, giving the reference, but they could not trace it so I then emailed Lincoln Archive, who found two documents and, for a consideration, sent me photocopies of them.

## PETITION FOR THE REMOVAL OF CHURCH PORCH

The first document is a petition from the Rector, Churchwardens etc for the demolition of the porch. The rector at this time was the newly appointed Revd Samuel Judd Collins, who was in post until 1800. There are 50 signatures on the petition. Many of them are well known local names and many were Trustees of our Georgian charities. John Green was Bishop of Lincoln from 1761 to 1779 but the matter was dealt with by his Vicar General, Pulter Forester. It reads:

*'To the Right Reverend Father in God, John, Lord Bishop of Lincoln We, the Minister, Church wardens and Principal Inhabitants of the Town of Dunstable, desirous of taking down the porch at the Entrance of our Church, which to us is quite useless, and so justly excites Reproach from all Strangers, as Eclipsing and Spoiling the beauty of the Arcades, Beg your Lordship's Permission for it. John Freestone*

Written at the bottom of the petition, it says:

*'24 May 1770 Let a faculty pass pursuant to the above written petition and also to take down the tiled Covering over the Gateway of the Entrance into the Churchyard, We having taken a View of the permission.*

*P Forester, Vicar General'*

## SECOND DOCUMENT FOR THE REMOVAL OF THE PORCH

The cost of the Faculty was calculated at £2.16.6d. This is about £372 RPI. No doubt, the parish was charged the full amount.

The second document is the permission and faculty for the work to be undertaken. The 'gateway of the entrance into the Churchyard' is not the current gateway but a lych-gate which no longer exists. It reads:

*'Dunstable Faculty for taking down the porch at the West end of the Church etc*

*'Pulter Forester, Doctor in Divinity, Vicar General and Official Principal of the Right Reverend Father in God, John, by divine Permission, Lord Bishop of Lincoln, lawfully Constituted. To all Christian people to whom this permission shall come, Greetings. Whereas it hath been represented to me and our Office by the humble petition of the Minister, Churchwardens and principal Inhabitants of Dunstable in the County of Bedford and the Diocese of Lincoln that there is a porch at the Entrance of the Parish Church of Dunstable*

*aforesaid which is entirely useless and doth intercept the View and spoil the Beauty of the Arcade of the West Front of the said Church, the said petitioners have therefore humbly prayed our Licence or faculty to take away the said useless porch, also the tiled Covering over the gateway of the Entrance into the Churchyard and whereas We the Vicar General and official principal aforesaid in the course of the late triennial Visitation held at Dunstable having taken a View of the premises and being satisfied with the reasonableness of the said petition Do therefore by Virtue of our Power and Authority Ordinary give and grant as far as by the Ecclesiastical Laws of this Realm and Temporal laws of the same we may and can our Leave and Licence or Faculty to John Shelton and John Keene, Churchwardens of Dunstable aforesaid to take away the said useless porch at the West end of the parish Church of Dunstable aforesaid and also the Tiled covering over the gateway of the entrance into the Churchyard. In Testimony whereof we have caused the Seal of our office to be hereunto affixed this twenty fourth day of May in the year of our Lord One thousand seven hundred and Seventy.'*

## PULTER FORESTER

I could not, initially, decipher the name Pulter so I searched for Mr Forester and found him on the list of Cambridge University alumni. He was born in 1720 and baptised on 20th December at St. Andrews, Holborn, Camden. He was the 4th son of Pulter and Agnes Forester of Bradfield, Hertfordshire. After school at Bury St Edmunds he attended Peterhouse, achieving his MA in 1744. He was a priest in London and then Knapwell in Cambridgeshire before become Rector of Cosgrove in Northamptonshire and then moving on to St Paul's and Salisbury. He married Mary Moore at St. Martin in the Fields on 15th December 1759. At this time he served in Stoke Golding as well as being Chancellor of the diocese of Lincoln. It was in this last capacity that he dealt with the Dunstable petition. He also had overlapping careers as Rector of Passenham, Northamptonshire, Rector of Skinand, Lincolnshire, a Chaplain to George III and Archdeacon of Buckingham. He was also, 1769-78, a JP in Northamptonshire. He died on 20th July 1778 and was buried in Cosgrove churchyard.

**Hugh Garrod**

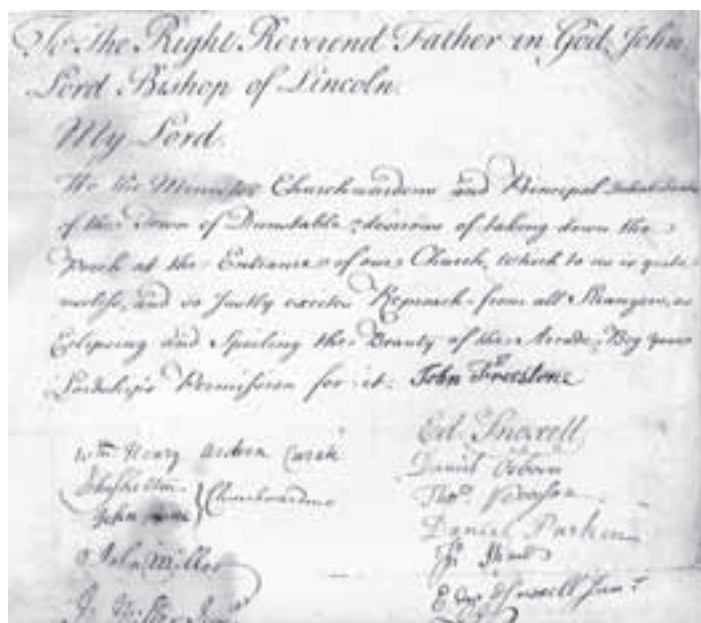


Photo of the petition for the removal of the porch

# Victorian Times



**Dunstable's local newspapers in Victorian times covered the town's events, both big and small, in minute detail.**

RITA SWIFT has assembled a vast selection of extracts from some of the stories published in those early weeklies which provide a vivid picture of life in the town. Here are a few of the items but you can read thousands more on the History Society's website, [www.dunstablehistory.co.uk](http://www.dunstablehistory.co.uk)

## 1856

'The Judge and Jury' from Coal-Hole Tavern, London, perform at Samuel Sherlock Collis's Saracen's Head, High Street South.

At 4 am the Priory bells ring out as a reminder of the 6 am excursion train to London to see the firework peace celebration display. Between 200 to 300 people take advantage of the excursion.

Troops of Artillery (returning from the Crimean War) travel through the town. The Hussars arrive and there is a scarcity of beds and stabling for the horses. Mr H Brandreth gives hospitality to the officers at Houghton Park.

A portion of the front page of the Dunstable Chronicle is missing as the type was accidentally spilled. The missing section is later reprinted at half the price.

## 1857

Mr Pinnock, a business man, stops for a meal at the Sugar Loaf Tap. A piece of meat lodges in his throat suffocating him. Only the quick action of Dr Farr, who has never witnessed such a narrow escape before, saves his life.

Whilst a boiler engine is being lowered at the new Corn Mill belonging to John Williams, the rope breaks and the engine falls on William Kette, son of the foreman, breaking his leg.

Henry White, whiting manufacturer, is loading the goods at the railway station when a train being shunted is forced against another, trapping and killing him immediately.

Mrs Janes visiting her daughter feels ill and calls on Mr Billington, grocer, a friend. Asks for water then suddenly collapses and dies. The event of such sudden death causes a sensation in the town.

## 1858

The cellar covering at the Swan Inn, High Street South, is roughly repaired by a thick board but is causing a serious stumbling block to children and all persons.

At the grand wedding of Miss Elizabeth Elliott, daughter of William Elliott, to Mr Thomas Grove of Quebec, Canada, between 2,000 to 3,000 people waited to wish the couple well. The Hungarian Brothers Slapoffski provided some musical entertainment.

Ginnett's Mammoth Circus arrives and special trains put on from Luton.

William Goddard and George Janes, both 12 years old, steal a brush from Rev G Rowe. Sentenced to be privately whipped.

A little girl staying at Hampton Court, (new cottages in St. Mary's Street) Dunstable with her family is playing 'sweeping the chimney' with friends when her dress catches fire. There is little hope of her recovery.

## 1859

Beer House for rent, formerly Sawyers Arms now the Royal Oak, lower end of Church Street, established for 24 years and doing excellent trade.

William Stapleton, a sweep, assaults John Bryant also a sweep whom he accuses of setting loose his mule from his cart for which he has given him a 'walloping'. Case dismissed.

Mr John Franklin, White Horse, Church Street, has a four-legged chicken which may be viewed.

## 1860

The body of Lady Fanny Elizabeth Bolton, wife of George Ives, 4th Lord Boston, arrives at the Red Lion from London. Taken from the hearse it is laid in state in the parlour overnight before departing to Northampton.

Some labourers digging cellars for new houses in a field in West Street, property of Mr Joseph Darby, find four skeletons.

At Dunstable Railway Station the engine of a train starting for Luton bursts with great force. Passengers alarmed but uninjured. A new engine quickly replaced the old and the journey continued.

James Hood shoots himself in a field near the Windmill because the mother of Mary Carter, the girl he is to marry, takes her away.

Auction of a building occupied by London and County Bank in High Street North, opposite Town Hall. The rear of the building is entered from High Street by carriage through Nicoll's, otherwise known as Houghton Lane.

## 1861

George Kempston, 18, is accidentally poisoned in Luton Workhouse when given disinfectant instead of medicine by a nurse unable to read or write. His mother, without any assistance, carries him back to Dunstable where he dies.

A party of 25 members of the Rifle Volunteers marched to the Butts on Dunstable Downs which required reshaping and levelling. It took a great deal of physical work including digging but everyone did their bit including officers.

The late Duke of Bedford's cortege passes through Dunstable to Woburn Abbey en route to the family vault at Chenies, Bucks. The hearse stops at the Red Lion to refresh the four horses. The Priory bells toll for an hour.

Mr Gutteridge is about to open a new street in Albion Road, being a continuation of Edward Street and Matthew Street through his farm premises into West Street.

## 1862

The Gift Team - an old fashioned English custom revived. Mr Stevens of Park Farm purchased some land adjoining Kensworth Lane and his brother farmers from the neighbouring areas brought their teams to plough every area to make the land ready for seed.

Complaints about the lack of street lighting in Church Street from the corner of the Horse and Dragon and the railway station making it impossible for pedestrians to avoid the heaps of mud along the route.

## 1866

A race over 200 yards between Jim Boyce and a horse, with Mr Green, butcher, driving the cart. The course is the Toll Bar to Half Moon Lane with a prize of two sovereigns. The man led the first half but loses ground with the stronger animal winning by 10 yards. The sporting fraternity are out in force to witness the race.

**Rita Swift**

# Memories of old Dunstable



**Bradley Walsh, now one of the biggest stars on television (Doctor Who, The Chase), has a mysterious connection with Dunstable.**

## BRADLEY WALSH - DUNSTABLE TOWN PLAYER?

For years, it has been a local story that Bradley, before beginning his show-biz career, was a top-scoring footballer for Dunstable Town, netting no less than 50 goals in 25 games. Earlier this year, to help Alex Alexandrou get ready for his very well-received talk on the history of the club, we spent some days hunting through back files of the Dunstable Gazette for photographs of the great man during his Dunstable days. We drew a blank.

Then, Dunstable man Matt Carrington appeared on television in an episode of the quiz show, The Chase, and mentioned that he liked watching football. Bradley asked if he supported Dunstable Town and the conversation led Matt to talk about that goal-scoring record.

'I never played for Dunstable Town,' said Bradley, adding that the references on the internet to his Dunstable career were wrong. 'It's mad that,' he said.

Matt, a shop manager, was part of a team chasing £70,000 in the quiz show. Alas, they failed to win the prize.

## A MISSING MEMORIAL

We received a query about a missing memorial to boys from Dunstable Grammar School who served in the world wars, but our investigations have led us to believe that no such list has ever been compiled.

The names of former pupils who died in the wars were commemorated in the school's specially built memorial library on wooden panels which were an integral part of its beautifully carved fabric. Thanks to the efforts of the Central Beds Council's conservation officer and the goodwill of the developers, the whole library has been preserved intact.

Incidentally, the lists of scholarship medal winners inscribed in gold on the walls of the grammar school hall have been preserved in situ.

## THREE SOLDIERS KILLED

A previous newsletter mentioned the efforts to find out about a war-time accident in High Street North. The Dunstable At War volume records that some soldiers, marching in formation, were run down by a bus during the blackout, and three of them were killed. Details were sketchy and it was thought that there had been some kind of censorship in operation.

One theory which the history society investigated was that the soldiers were from the 6th Battalion, Beds and Herts Regiment, based at the old drill hall in High Street North. Three of them were killed on the same day, in 1942, but we then found that they died during an air raid at Lowestoft, where they had been on home defence duties.

It was then thought that locals had confused the incident with an accident at Eggington Turn when an army truck carrying a group of soldiers overturned, killing one man (Gunner Charles Mawby of Leicester) and injuring 14 others. First-aid volunteers from Dunstable had rushed to the scene.

But I think we have now got to the bottom of this and perhaps the memories of witnesses have been playing tricks.

There WAS an accident at 2 o'clock in the morning of September 19, 1939, just over a fortnight after the beginning of the war, when some marching troops in the high street were struck by a lorry, not a bus. One was killed and three seriously injured. The dead man was John James Morton, aged 23, of Leighton Road, Northall. The three injured were Harold Golding, of High Street South, Arthur Denton, of St Michael's Avenue, Houghton Regis, and Leonard Dickens, of Chalk Hill, Dunstable.

John, brother of the well-known Luton Town footballer Bob Morton, is buried in Edlesborough churchyard, so he is remembered on the Edlesborough war memorial. He is one of the very few servicemen who died in uniform here in Dunstable while on war-time duty.

## US AIRMEN PARTY AT LOCAL PUB

Brian Mendes has sent us an article written by American air force veteran Forrest S Clarke for a tourist brochure intended for Americans visiting the UK in July 1992. They were here to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the arrival of American air force personnel during the war.

Forrest arrived at the airfield in Cheddington and became part of 'a party to remember' in Dunstable.

'The first place we went to was a pub in the middle of the town. A group of us crowded up to the bar...and asked the bar keeper if she could tell us what the entire stock of liquor and beer in the pub was worth.... We said we had just that day arrived in merry old England and were heading for combat duty. We wanted to have a party.'

The pub owner worked out how much the liquor in the pub was worth and the airmen passed around a hat.

'That'll do it lads' said the landlord, adding that the place was theirs for the party.

They stayed until closing time and Forrest recalls running to catch the tailboard of the last convoy truck out of town back to the base. They left the next day for their combat base at Shipdham and never saw Dunstable again.

Alas, Forrest doesn't mention the name of the pub. Anyone know?



*Sharing a few pints with the locals – mostly middle-aged and pensioners; the young men were in the services*

*continued overleaf*

# Memories of old Dunstable continued



## QUEENSWAY HALL MEMORIES

We helped to provide information about some events in Dunstable's Queensway Hall which we'll print here so that they're not forgotten.

### HAROLD WILSON

Prime Minister Harold Wilson was at a very rowdy General Election meeting in the hall in 1966, back in the days when elections were very exciting events. He was well and truly barracked by a noisy Dunstable audience, so much so that the meeting made headlines throughout the world. The very impartial Dunstable Gazette journalist, however, reported that Wilson dealt with the situation with considerable skill and humour. Wilson was in Dunstable in support of the Labour candidate Gwilym Roberts who went on to win the election, ousting the sitting Conservative MP Norman Cole.



*Harold Wilson campaigning for Labour at the Queensway Hall in the 1966 election (behind Gwilym Roberts, the MP who won the seat but sadly died last year)*

### PRINCESS ANNE

Princess Anne came to the Queensway Hall in April 1984 to attend a special concert arranged by Dunstable councillor Mary Biswell which raised about £3,000 to help send British athletes to the Olympic Games in Los Angeles. The Princess, president of the British Olympic Committee, had personally asked Mary to head up an Olympic fund-raising campaign in Bedfordshire. Mary was already well known at the palace for numerous fund-raising efforts, particularly for the Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital. The Princess flew in by helicopter and later attended a buffet reception.



*Princess Anne with Mary Biswell at the Queensway Hall in April 1984*

## A HOST OF STARS

Singer Janie Marden starred in a variety show televised from the Queensway Hall. She was very well known at the time...one of a whole host of stars who are now almost forgotten because their shows were live and never recorded. Another important show at the Queensway was the BBC's Friday Night Is Music Night, with the orchestra conducted by Sidney Torch. The principal singer at the Dunstable broadcast was Stephanie Voss, who starred in a number of big West End musicals.

### WORTHINGTON SMITH'S ERROR

It's taken over 100 years, but a couple of errors in Worthington Smith's History of Dunstable have just been spotted. The Victorian researcher produced, for his 1904 book, a timeline of great events in the town and mentioned that in 1603, 1625 and 1661 cholera was 'very fatal' in Dunstable. These entries were faithfully copied into the history society's current Timeline volume but Tony Woodhouse points out that cholera did not spread across the world from India until the early 19th century. We'll alter the entries to 'the Plague' when Rita Swift's book is reprinted.

## KINGSBURY PALACE

Joan Curran and I have been helping to produce a new brochure to be given to visitors to the Old Palace Lodge Hotel in Church Street. It has led us to think very hard about the local legend that the hotel stands exactly on the site of a palace built by King Henry I.

King Henry, son of William the Conqueror, built a residence (probably a hunting lodge) in the forest on his land around Dunstable crossroads (kingsbury means 'royal land'). The residence became big enough to house his court and to entertain foreign visitors.

He subsequently gave much of his land to the canons of the newly built Priory monastery, but he reserved for himself nine acres which contained 'his house and gardens'.

We know fairly precisely where this land was because, in 1204 (some 100 years later), the building seems to have fallen into disrepair and King John presented the site to the canons of the Priory. John described his gift as 'All that place and garden where King Henry...once had houses in Dunestaple, in front of the cemetery of the church of the Blessed Peter, northwards...to build on them or dispose of them as they will.'

So it seems clear that the land was on the opposite side of the road to the Priory. The question is: how far away from the main thoroughfare was the royal residence? Was it in the middle of its nine acres with a driveway leading to the building? It does seem unlikely that it would have been next to the road, with no area for the king's guards, which would explain why archaeologists have not found any traces of Henry's building during numerous conversions and extensions to the present hotel and its predecessor, Kingsbury Farmhouse.

Nine acres in medieval times was not an exact measurement, but the modern version is based on the old land divisions. Imagine something slightly larger than Bennett's Rec stretching from Church Street towards the college and you'll have some idea of the area involved. John Crawley, head of Dunstable Council's Grounds and Environmental Services, tells us that the Rec in Bull Pond Lane measures just under 7.7 acres.

**John Buckledee**