

NEWSLETTER

Dunstable & District Local History Society
No. 57 February 2021



Chairman's Notes

Congratulations to our member Tony Woodhouse on the publication of his magnificent book:

DUNSTABLE - A VISUAL HISTORY

This is a compilation of an enormous number of his drawings of Dunstable as it has existed throughout the ages, combining his expertise as an artist together with his knowledge of archaeology and local history.

Elisabeth Pynn, also a member of our Society, began assembling the drawings with the help of some WEA members some years ago, initially with the aim of printing a souvenir birthday present for Tony, but the project has grown into the present volume. Support came from Dunstable Town Guides and the Friends of Priory House and Gardens, as well as this society, and then a little committee was formed to see Tony's manuscript through publication.

I know that Kay Kempster, together with Elisabeth, Shauna Dyke and Rita Swift, have spent many hours making sure that the artwork and captions were in apple-pie order, and then (crucially) the editor of this newsletter, David Turner, used his expertise to have the results made ready for the printer.

I am glad to hear that the initial printing of the book sold out before Christmas and a reprint had to be ordered. There were generous donations from individual subscribers and, because the income has been sufficient to cover the costs, your History Society's offer to provide some funds was never required.

The illustration on this page shows Tony's visualisation of Dunstable in stagecoach times, when there were ponds in the middle of the high street, including the one seen here outside the old White Hart, and buildings straddled the crossroads.



Tony Woodhouse's illustration of Dunstable in stagecoach times

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

The previous newsletter included a membership renewal form which we asked you to return to David Underwood, our membership secretary. We did not ask for the normal £8 annual subscription fee because we haven't been holding our normal meetings, but we did hope for your continued support and, perhaps, a donation of any amount to help meet our ongoing costs. I am delighted that so many of you have rejoined, and that many of you have sent us rather more than £8! Thank you too for the encouraging messages and Christmas cards. Some of you haven't rejoined, but you are receiving this newsletter anyway, together with another renewal form, just in case you had forgotten.

ZOOM ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

In normal times we would assemble at the Methodist Church on the second Tuesday in March to hear a talk and hold, what is usually, a very brief annual general meeting. Alas, there will be no speaker to entertain us this year but we still ought to hold an annual meeting. We will do this on the internet via Zoom, where you can log in to listen to a very brief annual report, hear about our financial situation and appoint society officers and committee for another year. The meeting will begin at 7.45 on Tuesday, March 9, and must end at 8.15.

The meeting ID is 761 1934 5973 and the passcode is QRjWc6. Be careful to copy the upper and lower-case letters exactly! I know that some of you do not have internet or that you have not yet downloaded Zoom, but this is the best we can do in these peculiar times.

Despite the lockdown the Society continues to be very busy, and our contribution to the Dunstable High Street Action Zone is taking a lot of time. I will be able to give you brief details about this at the annual meeting.

It would be complicated to hold a vote online so I will be simply asking on Tuesday night if there are any objections or queries about what will be presented to you. The current committee is: chairman, John Buckledee; vice chairman, Hugh Garrod; treasurer, Patricia Larkman; membership secretary, David Underwood; committee, June Byrne, Jenny Dilnot, John Stevens and Rita Swift. I regret to tell you that June Byrne has not been very well and has decided to stand down. Nominations for additional committee members would be most welcome. Can you send them to me by email: johnrbuckledee@hotmail.com.

My phone number is 01582 703107 (answerphone).

POPPY APPEAL

Many history society members help every year with the Royal British Legion's Poppy Appeal. I am glad to report that, despite all the difficulties and restrictions caused by the Covid virus, we still managed to collect £20,691.83 last year. That figure does not include amounts raised separately at Sainsbury's and Aldi, where the stores organised their own collections.

John Buckledee

Nurseries In Dunstable



Commercial horticulture developed from cottage gardens and the excess produce from stately homes.

The earliest centre of horticulture in Bedfordshire was Sandy. This was a small pocket of rich soil which was far from any large towns, such as Bedford or Luton. The development of turnpike roads enabled vegetables to be 'exported' to the markets where new housing provided little in the way of gardens. The building of the Great Northern Railway enabled produce to be taken to London as well as to York and other northern cities. Subsequent railway lines enabled access to Leicester and other parts of the Midlands.

The development of metalled roads and the advent of the lorry meant that produce, mainly onions, peas, carrots, cabbages and particularly sprouts, could be delivered within a radius of 50 miles or more. Before the First World War, Bedfordshire was one of the main vegetable producing areas in England and Wales. 30% of domestically consumed onions were grown in Bedfordshire. The figure for Brussels sprouts was 40%. The development of market gardens in and around Dunstable happened later than it did in Sandy, but the causes for its increase were the same, good soil, the coming of the railways, the ever spreading road network and more reliable vehicles.

DUNSTABLE DIRECTORIES

The earliest reference to horticulture in a Dunstable directory is for James Bateman, in 1839. He is described as being a seedsman established in West Street. He appears in the directories for 1853, 1854 and 1861. In the one for 1854 he is described as a market gardener. There is also a William Bateman, a brother or a son, who is called a jobbing gardener.

The next major development is in the 1876 directory where we have **William Brightman**, nurseryman of Regent Street **Joseph Hobbs**, boot and shoe maker and nurseryman of Victoria Street

Levi Horn, seedsman and florist of 126 High Street

Others to appear in the 1870s are:-

Samuel Baldock, greengrocer and seedsman of 20 Edward Street

John Woods, nurseryman of Lovers Walk

George Spurford, seedsman and gardener of Ashton Street

In the 1880s the famous name of Seamons first appears. This firm started in West Street and had a major influence on the town. Seamons Close is named after William Seamons, who was Mayor of Dunstable in 1920/21. The horticulture and nursery trade continued to develop in Dunstable.

David Jeffs

The History Society was sad to hear of the death of one of its stalwart members, David Jeffs, whose funeral took place on January 4. He was 74.

David, born in St Albans, moved to Dunstable when he became a teacher at Ardley Hill School. He was very active in Dunstable life, particularly at the Priory Church where he had been a server, a bell ringer and a tender of its garden.

His interest in music ranged from the Rolling Stones to Gustav Mahler. "I Have A Dream" by Abba was one of the songs featured at his funeral service.



He loved walking in the Lake District, had a life-long fascination for steam railways, and enjoyed following football (particularly Spurs).

In recent years he and his wife, Jackie, were active supporters of the Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal in Dunstable and they would spend the best part of a fortnight selling poppies at the entrance to Sainsbury's.

They regularly attended the monthly talks at the History Society and provided the tea and coffee at the end of each meeting.



LATE VICTORIANS

In the late Victorian era we had:

Jesse James of Edward Street

Ebenezer Worsley of Lovers Walk

Joseph Eustace of Victoria Street

Robert Bunker of High Street North

THE EDWARDIAN PERIOD

In Edwardian times the directories additionally list:

Burch and Co. of High Street North,

Joseph Burch and **William Burch** of Downs Road,

John Brown of Icknield Street

J Schofield of Great Northern Road

Robert Butcher of Great Northern Road

Silas Mobley of Great Northern Road

Sidney Aish of 28 Church Street

William Robert Dale of Lovers Walk

Garton Albert Armand Demarre of 78 Victoria Street

Robinson and Headey of Princes Street

Alfred George Headey of Chiltern Road

Colonel Armitage and Co. of Houghton Road

CPF Castle of Lovers Walk

HW Chapman of 78 Victoria Street

Frederick Robinson of Princes Street

After the First World War, the hat trade went into steep decline and the nurseries flourished. In the directory for 1940 there are 18 nurseries listed with addresses in Dunstable. Of the longer established firms, Joseph Burch and Sidney Aish added 'and Sons', while Alfred George Headey became L Headey.

BETWEEN THE WARS

Other nurseries established in Dunstable between the wars include:

Samuel William Petitt of 28 Church Street

Edward J Horton of Blows Road

Barker and Larking of 157 Victoria Street

Frank Goodson of 10 Downs Road

Learmouth Robert Young of 78 Church Street

Leonard Wilfred Edwards of 18 Dale Road

Johan Marinus Hagen of Houghton Road

William Stanley Harris of Dale Road

Albert Hubbins, salesman, of 81 Great Northern Road

Fraser Lock of Moira Nurseries, Elveden, Luton Road

Mooring Bros. Gilpin Nurseries, 42 Chiltern Road

Kenneth George Wilkins of Elveden Way, Luton Road

The total number of nurseries which had existed in Dunstable between 1839 and the outbreak of the Second World War stood at 43.

Hugh Garrod

St Fremund



In June 2017 we moved to the village of Harbury, near Leamington Spa, in Warwickshire.

I didn't realise at the time that there was a link between Harbury and Dunstable: that of St Fremund, (which Hugh Garrod, who kindly assisted with this article, reminded me about). There are many variations of the legend of St Fremund, but basically it is as follows:

Fremund was reputedly a relative of King Offa of Mercia. Fremund renounced his royal status and wealth to become a hermit on an island, possibly Lundy. When the Danes invaded Mercia in 865, messengers were sent to find Fremund to ask for his help. Fremund and 24 soldiers, helped by angels brandishing swords, defeated the Danes in a great battle near or around Harbury in 866. His friend and second in command, Oswi, was so angered when Fremund announced he was returning to his island that he decapitated Fremund with his sword. Oswi, spattered by the saint's blood, immediately repented. Whereupon Fremund's corpse picked up the head and walked off.

HOLY WELL

Between Harbury and Long Itchington, he touched the ground with his sword and a spring of water appeared (thought to be the Holy Well at Southam). Fremund washed his wounds in it and then expired. Oswi buried Fremund's body at nearby Offchurch (allegedly the seat of King Offa).

Sixty-three years later three virgins, one deaf, one dumb and one crippled, walked through Offchurch and were struck by lightning: they didn't have a lot of luck did they? They saw an angel who told them to dig up Fremund's body and move it to a spot north of Banbury, the present site of Prescote Manor. When this was done they were healed. Some years later in Jerusalem, a pilgrim called Edelbert, had a vision of an angel who told him to go to a chapel near Prescote, locate the grave of Fremund and move the remains to a different site.

He refused to comply and wrestled with the angel in his dream. Upon waking he found that his shoulder had become dislocated and this convinced him to undertake the task.

After travelling to Prescote, he found the grave and moved the remains to a nearby location where he built a shrine, whereupon his shoulder miraculously recovered. Later, it was discovered that sick animals would become well if they were grazed near to the shrine.

When large numbers of pilgrims began to arrive at the shrine seeking a cure it was decided to move Fremund's body yet again to the nearest



A page from John Lydgate's manuscript 'Lives of St Edmund and St Fremund'

monastery which was at Dorchester-on-Thames in Oxfordshire. The remains were loaded onto an ox cart. The cortege travelled only a short distance to the village of Cropredy when the ox refused to go any further, so the local people built a chapel to house the saint's remains there. Sick cattle continued to recover when put to graze in the field next to the chapel.

ACQUIRED BY DUNSTABLE PRIORY

About 150 years later, when the villagers needed money to repair their chapel, Richard de Morins, Prior of Dunstable, paid the villagers a large sum of money in exchange for Fremund's bones. He needed to raise revenue at the Priory and acquiring a relic would help him achieve that and, after obtaining permission from King John, Fremund's remains were transferred to Dunstable. The villagers of Cropredy had reluctantly parted with their saint but they did manage to retain a few bones at the Chapel and miracles were said to continue there. At the Dunstable Priory an altar

was dedicated to St Fremund in 1205 for the relics.

This did wonders for the commercial life of Dunstable as the inns and the market were busier than ever. The pilgrims, who previously passed through on their way to or from the shrine of St Alban, stopped in Dunstable for a while and prayed for a miracle there as well. In 1213 his bones were moved to a shrine east of the high altar and re-dedicated by Bishop Hugh II. The bones of St Fremund remained in Dunstable until the Reformation and miracles continued to be reported. After the Reformation, however, both the shrines at Dunstable and Cropredy were destroyed and the bones lost.

St Fremund was venerated both at Prescote and Dunstable, but the dates are unknown.

THE SOURCE OF THE LEGEND

In 1433 King Henry VI, aged 12, spent Christmas until Easter 1434 at the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk. To celebrate this royal visit, the abbot commissioned one of his monks, John Lydgate, a renowned poet, to write a history of St Edmund (the Abbey's patron saint) and St Fremund, in Middle English verse. Lydgate's poem is largely based on an early 13th-century version of the story by the chronicler, Roger of Wendover. It took six years for the scribes at Bury St Edmunds to create a spectacular copy of Lydgate's poem, which they presented as a gift to the king in 1439. The manuscript, kept at the British Library, is considered one of the most important illustrated Middle English manuscripts in existence, because of its amazing illuminated pages.

SHRINE

In 2013, to celebrate 800 years since the dedication of the Priory, the pupils of Weatherfields School made a 'shrine' of St. Fremund which is at St. Fremund's Church.

David Turner



The Holy Well at Southam reputed to be where Fremund bathed

Sad Farewell



We are very sorry to announce the sad loss of
David Jeffs (whose obituary is opposite)
Gaynor Martin (who for 38 years was a teacher at Manshead School)
Barry Wolsey (whose wife, Pauline, was a former mayor of Luton)

The Story of Kingsbury



The Old Palace Lodge Hotel, Dunstable, asked the history society for details about its building and its famous connections for possible use in a brochure. John Buckledee assembled this article using various sources, particularly from research undertaken by Joan Curran.

The Old Palace Lodge Hotel stands on one of the most historic sites in Dunstable, in an area which had been royal land since the time of King Edward the Confessor (1042-1066).

It is close to the crossroads of two ancient highways, the Watling Street and the Icknield Way, where the Romans built a town called Durocobrivis. The skeleton of a Roman woman was found buried underneath the car park behind the Old Palace Lodge in 2018.

The Roman town had disappeared by the time of the Norman conquest in 1066, and the area was covered by forest.

King Henry I (William the Conqueror's son) created a royal residence in the woods here in around 1107. He owned the land stretching towards the crossroads from Royal Houghton (Regis means Royal). It probably started as a hunting lodge but it became large enough to house his court and visiting foreign dignitaries. The royal building and its gardens were on nine acres of land (about the size of six football pitches) alongside the Icknield Way (Church Street). The Old Palace Lodge hotel stands on part of the land today. But it is likely that the king's residence would have been set back some distance from the main thoroughfare and archaeologists have not yet been able to find traces of the building.

KING HENRY I & KING HENRY II

King Henry spent Christmas at Dunstable in 1122 and 1131 and his son, King Stephen, also stayed at the palace for Christmas in 1137. Stephen had a brief meeting at Kingsbury in 1154 with Henry, Duke of Normandy, whose rival claim to the throne had caused a long-running civil war. The meeting was just before Stephen's death, after which the Duke became King Henry II.

King Henry I had encouraged the building of a monastery on an area opposite his royal residence, using stone from a quarry at nearby Totternhoe. He also laid out plots of land to create a 'new town' around the crossroads. Today's Priory Church, opposite the hotel, is a remnant of the once-great monastery, most of which was demolished in 1540 during the reign of King Henry VIII.

Many years previously the old hunting lodge had fallen into decay and in 1204 the site was given to the canons of the Priory by King John. His document recording this provides the sole indication about where the building had stood: 'All that place and garden where King Henry, grandfather of King Henry our father, 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.'



Kingsbury Museum photo in Luton Pictorial April 12 1927

The land became known as Kingsbury and eventually buildings were erected on it, alongside the road. The first traceable reference to this is in a will of 1631 when William Yorke left money for the poor 'out of a house called Kingsbury House'.

TOURNAMENT

Prior to this there was an intriguing event in the town which might have involved Kingsbury. An invoice exists detailing the amount of money spent in 1329 to make ready for a royal visit over six days for a tournament in Dunstable. The bill was for the repair of derelict houses which had belonged to the late John Durrant, a wool merchant who had been one of the richest men in the area. Some historians have guessed that he lived at Kingsbury, although no document has yet been found to justify the theory. The royal party included the young King Edward III, his mother Queen Isabella and her lover, Roger Mortimer. They would have stayed at royal apartments which had been specially built at the Priory in 1277 for the use of King Edward I, a frequent visitor to Dunstable when it was a licensed venue for tournaments.

Most tournaments in those days were mock battles covering large areas of open land, and these would have taken place on the slopes of the hills around Dunstable. But Roger Mortimer had hosted a more-ceremonial jousting event prior to his 1329 visit to Dunstable and historians are wondering if this kind of chivalrous gathering could have been held in a smaller, enclosed, venue at Kingsbury.

Whether or not this was so, Dunstable was an extraordinary choice. Roger and Isabella had deposed the Queen's husband, King Edward II, who had been imprisoned and then murdered. Some men who had tried to rescue him had subsequently been arrested in Dunstable and held in the Prior's gaol. In 1329 a rebellion by the Earl of Lancaster had reached Bedford and an army led by Mortimer and the queen, in full armour, had marched through Dunstable to meet the threat.

Subsequently, an inquisition was held to discover whether people in Dunstable had colluded with Lancaster. After so much turmoil, perhaps the town was particularly anxious to make a good and peaceful impression during the tournament!

EDWARD I & EDWARD II

King Edward I, who was enthralled by the excitement of the gigantic tournament-mêlées of his time, would have been accompanied to many of these events in Dunstable by his wife, Queen Eleanor of Castile. When she died in 1290 her body lay for a night in Dunstable Priory and, in remembrance, her grieving husband ordered a lavishly decorated stone monument topped with a cross to be erected on Dunstable crossroads. The Dunstable Eleanor Cross, one of a series, was demolished during the Civil War.

Edward and Eleanor's son, later Edward II, was in Dunstable for a tournament in 1293 when an armour-bearer was killed. Their daughter, Mary of Woodstock, born in 1279, was a nun at the Grove Priory in Leighton Buzzard, near Dunstable, from 1305 until her death in 1332.

She was a colourful character, a compulsive gambler, who spent vast sums of money given to her by her indulgent father and brother.

Another historical figure connected with Dunstable, and perhaps with Kingsbury, was George Cavendish, whose first-hand biography of Cardinal Wolsey is one of the most important sources of information about events of the time. He served in Wolsey's court from around 1520 until the cardinal's fall from power in 1530. Cavendish rented land in Church Street, Dunstable, and was President of the Dunstable Fraternity of St John the Baptist in 1525.

GEORGE CAVENDISH

After the death of Wolsey, Cavendish decided 'to return to my own country' and King Henry VIII provided him with six cart horses and a cart to carry his belongings back home. But where was home? Dunstable people like to believe this was at Kingsbury but there is no document to prove this. He is mentioned as undertaking various responsibilities in Dunstable between 1530 and 1539 before moving to Suffolk.

There's an intriguing reference to Cavendish in a list prepared in 1542 detailing Dunstable property which had been owned by Dunstable Priory before its dissolution. They include: 'Tenement in the corner of the graveyard (in angulo juxta stecimitor)' and 'Tenement on the other side of the street (ex altera parte via) opposite the said tenement, next the principal tenement of Geo Cavendisshe.'

It's not clear whether that means Cavendish had been residing there, or whether the location was at Kingsbury or a little further down the street. George Cavendish would have been in Dunstable when Archbishop Cranmer set up his famous court in Dunstable Priory in 1533 to declare the king's marriage to Catherine of Aragon null and void.

King Henry VIII kept away from Dunstable while the proceedings regarding his marriage were continuing at the Priory but he would have been a familiar figure here and his family's local connections have inspired the Tudor Walled Garden at the Old Palace Lodge Hotel. Henry had visited the town with Queen Catherine in 1526 but had pointedly stayed at a local inn rather than the Priory in 1537, just before taking his decision to dissolve the monasteries. Dunstable was included in the route of his 'great progress' between July and October 1541, when he travelled through his realm accompanied by a procession of 4-5,000 horsemen. He came to Dunstable again in 1540 with a new queen, Catherine Howard, and brought another new queen, Catherine Parr, to the town in September 1543. This time his daughter, Princess Mary, joined the honeymoon progress. It is likely that the king, in his younger days, had frequently stopped for the night at Dunstable Priory on the way to Ampthill, where he had a favourite hunting lodge.

THE MARSHE FAMILY

The first private owners of Kingsbury, whose details can be traced from around 1722, were members of the Marshe family, whose descendants endowed many charitable foundations in the town. Blandina Marshe who inherited Kingsbury from her brother John Marshe, is still remembered today as a result of her bequests. A later member of the family, Marshe Dickinson, was particularly influential in local and national affairs, and served as Lord Mayor of London in 1756.

Kingsbury had become a farm by at least 1744 and the Marshe family carried out substantial rebuilding, using bricks from a nearby quarry at Caddington. These, seen on the hotel frontage today, have an attractive glistening look when new. Some blocks of Totternhoe stone rescued from the old monastery were added at some date to the farmhouse including a single piece (still visible) placed near the western wall on which the arms of Dunstable had been carved. An illustration of the carving was published in 1887 but the details have weathered away in recent times.

The landlord of Dunstable's Sugar Loaf Inn, James Oliver, bought the farm in 1789 and after 1893 there was a succession of tenants and tenant farmers. One farmer, Mr Henry Brown, moved into Kingsbury House in 1906.

ARTHUR & THOMAS BAGSHAW

Shortly after the First World War the whole property was bought by Mr Arthur Bagshawe, founder of the engineering factory further down the road in Church Street. The company made iron chain for the original tanks used in the First World War and tracks for Bren gun carriers in the Second. The pontoons towed across the English Channel in June 1944 to form an artificial 'Mulberry' harbour on D-Day were made at Bagshawe's.

Arthur's son, Thomas, lived at Kingsbury from 1926 to 1934 and became one of Dunstable's most distinguished residents. Between 1920 and 1922 he was part of an expedition exploring the Antarctic. He and a companion were the first people to live through an Antarctic winter when they became stranded and had to survive in an upturned whaling boat.

Back in Dunstable he became Dunstable's youngest councillor at the age of 22. He converted the old farm barn at Kingsbury in 1927 so it could accommodate the town's first library and museum. He also refurbished much of the interior of the main building introducing a great deal of wood panelling. In 1928 he founded Luton Museum, where much of his Dunstable history collection is now housed.

In the 1930s Kingsbury was put up for sale but it proved impossible to find a buyer for the whole property. As a result it was divided into three. The west end, renamed Kingsbury Court, was purchased by Dr and Mrs Gerald Ashton and a surgery was added. Behind Kingsbury Court is a curious circular construction, made almost entirely of flint, with a thatched roof. The building, about nine feet in diameter and nine feet six inches in height to the eaves, was once a focal point in the middle of a garden but it is now surrounded by new development. Its purpose has not been satisfactorily explained. It has been called an icehouse, but there is no cellar underneath, and it is too small for a dovehouse. Other suggestions are that it was a bath house, a game larder or even an outside toilet.

OLD PALACE LODGE & NORMAN KING

The main part of the building became a separate home and was renamed Old Palace Lodge in 1936. In 1959 it was converted into a hotel by a well-known local personality, Walter Creasey, who became Mayor of Dunstable in 1965. He established the hotel's reputation for fine dining. The hotel was sold after his death to Andrew Weir Hotels and then to Hanover Hotels who in turn sold it to the present owners, MGM Hotels, in August 2004.

The farm's barn and stables at the east end became Kingsbury Stables in the 1930s. These were converted into the Norman King public house in 1961 and the barn wall, which included stonework recycled from the ruins of the old Priory monastery, was incorporated into the new pub. The 1961 conversion added stone from a 12th century castle at Bourn near Cambridge as well as clunch blocks from a 12th century cottage site in Cambridge and panelling from a former medieval inn, the George, at Caxton in Cambridgeshire.

Disastrously, the pub burned down in August 2011. A great deal of trouble was taken to preserve the ancient stones of the old barn wall in their original position, when the Tudor Garden was built.

John Buckledee



Kingsbury House 1876-1882

Town Criers



Oyez, Oyez, Oyez.: Let's hear it for the Dunstable Town Criers.

Appointed by the Vestry it was the job of the crier or bellman to inform the townspeople of the latest news, proclamations, bylaws and any other important information ending with 'God save the King' or 'God save the Queen'. Having read out his message, the Town Crier would then attach it to the door post of a local inn, or in Dunstable to Priory Church. The reason newspapers are often called 'The Post' is because of this act. Usually a crier is depicted as a large man elaborately dressed, in a red and gold coat, white breeches, black boots, a tricorne hat and ringing a bell, a tradition dating to the 18th century. Unfortunately there is very little information about the men themselves, but I have culled the following from a number of local newspapers.

1777: Originally our Bellman/Watchman was allowed twenty shillings per annum to see that no beggar or vagrant stopped or begged in Dunstable and he could escort them out of the town.

1782: A further 4 shillings was granted.

1786: A Vestry meeting was held at the Swan with Two Necks as a complaint had been made that Bellman Daniel Hudson was not doing his duty and Francis White was appointed and given a new coat.

1793: Thomas Highid took over the duties.

1804: Thomas Cole to be paid a salary of £18.5s per year as Watchman of the Parish and to cry the hours of the night during the year from the 1st day of September at the hours of 11 and 2 and from the 30th day of April hours 10, 12, 2 and 4. A reward of 10/6 to be paid to him on conviction of every rogue he apprehended and a reward of 2/6 be paid for every rogue apprehended, brought to justice though not convicted. He must regularly attend Divine Worship as sexton and fulfil all the offices that have usually been undertaken by the Watchmen of this Parish.

1859: Dunstable Fire Brigade Fete/Holiday included visiting fire brigades and a long procession which was lead by the Town Crier. That same year John Hickman, Town Crier and Letter Carrier, was very ill and the ladies of the manufactories collected money for him.

1860: Plait was known to be sold occasionally in short measure so Mr C Young was directed to read aloud the following:

"This is to give notice, that plait made by Mrs. Richard Flockney, whose residence is on The Green, Houghton Regis, was on Wednesday, the 28th November sold for twenty yards to the score, whereas it only measured seventeen-and-half yards. Her plait has been repeatedly found short measure before this, and plait dealers are requested for the future when they buy plait, (known to be hers) and have it measured. This is further to give notice, that all found guilty of such dishonest practices, will for the future be exposed in the same public manner.

By order of the Straw Hat Manufacturers Association."

1861: The warning was not heeded as "This is to give notice, that some plait sold in this market, on Wednesday, October 9th, measured only just over 17 yards to the score, and was made by Mrs. G. Waller, whose residence is near the church, Houghton Regis. All plaiters found guilty of selling plait of such short measure, will be publicly exposed in



The town crier in 2015

the same manner."

1868: Albert Archer was charged with feloniously assaulting and beating William Allen, Town Crier, but the case was dismissed in consideration of the prisoner having been locked up one night. Town criers were protected by law as anything they did was in the name of the monarch so attacking one was an act of treason. A necessary safeguard as they often had to announce unwelcome news such as tax increases.

1873: However not all announcements were doom and gloom and this one must have caused great amusement around the town.

Two friends were returning home from the local fair, when their horse suddenly bolted and fell causing minor bruises and scratches to the gentlemen. On checking they found not only a gap in the hedge, but in their jaws as both had lost their upper set of artificial teeth. No trace of the missing sets was found either then or the next day so the Town Criers of both

Luton and Dunstable were paid one shilling each to cry the following:

LOST: On Wednesday night, between Dunstable and Luton near the Half-Way House, Two Top Sets of False Teeth. Whoever finds the same, and takes them to the Bull Inn, Park Street, Luton, will be well rewarded.

1883: It had been customary for the council to provide the Town Crier with coat, hat and bell. But when William Allen requested a new coat and bell it caused quite an argument at the council meetings. At first it was suggested that the Town Hall bell be used for the present. Mr Derbyshire thought the application was reasonable as other boroughs supplied these articles and did not know why it had been discontinued in the last few years. Mr Taylor argued it was an unnecessary expense if William Allen should discontinue his office, his coat and hat would not fit his successor. Mr Derbyshire reacted by saying it was a life appointment and uniforms were supplied to three police officers and fourteen of the fire brigade, the Town Crier should not be excluded. No final decision was made although some agreed that a bell was sufficient but not a coat and hat.

1883: At the next meeting the subject was again raised about providing the Town Crier with a suitable uniform to be worn when on duty at least once a week or more. The expense to the ratepayers would probably amount to a lump sum of fifty shillings. Still no decision was made but it was noted that the fur on the Mayor's robe was moth eaten and should be repaired although this garment was only worn about once a year.

1883: The local Pound appears to be the responsibility of the Town Crier for when 4 black-faced sheep were found straying, the owner could reclaim them by applying to the Town Crier and paying expenses. William Allen drew the corporation's attention to the state of the fence round the Pound, which would soon fall down unless attended to.

1886: Sadly the death was announced of William Allen, well respected Town Crier, Bill Poster and Sergeant in the Volunteer Fire Brigade.

1893: John Brown of Church Street, Dunstable, fulfilled the duties of Town Crier.

1899: John Brown was fined 2s. 6d and 7s. 6d. costs for being drunk and disorderly. He offered his resignation having held the office for several years but agreed to stay until a new appointment be made.

20th century: By now the duties of the Town Crier are more of a ceremonial nature.

1903: The Mayor proposed George White be appointed and understood that the appointment carried with it the duties and privileges of bill-poster. Notices were posted on the church door but in future a better position would be the Town Hall. An unforeseen problem now arose as the council found they had a new crier but no bell as the one used by George Brown was his own personal property. Was one really needed and more importantly who would pay for it?

1903: Mr Worthington Smith having heard of the dilemma wrote offering to donate his bell which would then belong to the Council in future. At the same time Messrs. J Cumberland and Sons also offered one. The decision was made to accept both bells which would relieve the Council of some financial responsibility but they should be inscribed by the donator's name.

An interesting fact is the Town Crier/Bellman was entitled to a loaf of bread, provided out of one of the bread charities, to be had at the church every Sunday morning but must be collected in person.

1906: Mr Leonard A Waterfield of 'Cordova' West Street, was summoned for non-payment £3. 14. 6½. of rate tax. He had declined to pay as a protest about the terrible and dangerous condition of the road and path outside his property in Kirby Road. Residents had protested to the Town Council but all that happened was two or three loads of stones had been deposited in front of his property in Kirby Road, remaining there for six months. The Town Crier had been sent round, and he 'cried' the rate in the front and back of the house. Mr Waterfield said he

was quite prepared to send the Town Crier to the Borough Surveyor to give him notice to remove those stones. Mr Waterfield having made his point paid up so the Town Crier was not required.

1909: Frank Langley proprietor of a travelling theatre was summoned for using threats towards George White concerning an unpaid bill. George White charged 1 shilling for each notice, 3 in all, and made announcements in front of the principal inns advertising the theatre. Frank Langley said he had already paid the bill and the argument got quite heated with threats of the account being 'cried all round the town that night.' The missing receipt was eventually found and the case dismissed.

1915: George White of 10 Matthew Street resigned his post owing to ill-health and passed away the following year aged 59 years after a long and painful illness. A well-known and greatly respected figure in the town, having formerly served the Corporation for about fifteen years as Town Crier and Manager of the Town Hall, he was the last to hold this office. A life-long Primitive Methodist, his family is one of the oldest associated with the Dunstable Church, and for some years he acted as caretaker at this place of worship.

2014: The council introduced a New Town Crier scheme to be implemented during first quarter of 2014/15. Financed by the Dunstable Joint Committee a 'Town Crier' was engaged for two future town events.

2020: In the Mayor's Parlour is a very heavy hand-bell said to belong to the Town Crier but not engraved. Was it used by him or is this the Town Hall Bell suggested in 1883?

Did you know: a group of town criers is known as a 'a bellow of criers'?

Rita Swift

Memories of old Dunstable



Ken Cooper, who died on Boxing Day, was better known in Luton than in Dunstable, but I thought society members might be interested to hear about his contribution to local history.

A reporter on the Luton News, where I was editor, was writing about the efforts by conservationists to save a 'pudding stone' on the site of what was to become Luton Crown Court. He discovered that Ken, an employee of British Aerospace, had a postcard showing the stone and visited his home to ask to borrow it. The reporter was amazed by the vast extent of Ken's photo collection and suggested that it would make an interesting feature in the paper.

As it happened, a frequent problem at the time was finding material at the last minute to fill spaces on the classified advertisement pages when the number of ads fell short. In the pre-computer days when type had to be cast in lead – a time-consuming process – we needed to have some large photos standing by, already etched on to metal.

Ken's historic photos were just what was needed, and they were copied to full-page size to fill any unexpected gaps. In the days when newsprint was expensive, this kind of 'wasteful' space-filling would not normally have been permitted.

The photos when enlarged were a revelation, showing all sorts of interesting detail which had previously been overlooked. Readers loved them and Ken Cooper's pictures, under the title Scene Again, became a valuable part of the paper. He was invited to give film shows all over town, and eventually many of the photos were gathered together into a book, published in 1990.

When Ken ran out of material, it was unthinkable that the series should end, so retired newspaper photographer George Gurney, a familiar figure in Dunstable and Luton, stepped into the breach with

a selection of his most memorable pictures and an interview (usually written by me!) containing anecdotes about his adventures.

YESTERYEAR

This evolved into the Yesteryear series in both the Dunstable Gazette and the Luton News, where it is still running. The detailed captions written each week now amount to many thousands of words.

By coincidence, the week before Ken's death a rare photo of George Gurney in action was published in Yesteryear. The picture, reproduced again here, shows George next to film star Margaret Lockwood about to enter Luton town hall. She had starred in the enormously popular film *The Wicked Lady*, and crowds turned out to see her making a tour of Luton. There must have been two photographers covering her visit, and George (in his trademark trilby) was caught accidentally in one of the shots.



Margaret Lockwood with George Gurney on February 16 1948. She visited Skefko, Vauxhall, Electrolux and Palace Cinema in Luton

Memories of old Dunstable



AWARD

Congratulations to the History Society's membership secretary David Underwood who was thrilled to receive an award for his article about Dunstable aircraft factories, published in a recent edition of this newsletter. A slightly more detailed version of the article appeared in a specialist magazine which has presented David with its very handsome Skywriters trophy.



David Underwood's award

EDWARD JOHN EYRE

Ken and Chris France were due to give the Society an illustrated talk in March about Whipsnade village. Alas, this looks as though it will have to be postponed, but I don't think I will be spoiling any surprises by writing about a man, born in Whipsnade, who became both famous and notorious.



Edward John Eyre

Edward John Eyre was born on August 5 1815, shortly before his parents, the Rev and Mrs Anthony Eyre, moved to Hornsea, Yorkshire.

John, tough and adventurous, was expected to join the army after leaving school but instead went to seek his fortune in Australia. Even before he was 18 he became a successful sheep farmer. His experiences driving flocks over hundreds of miles to market led him to undertake a series of famous expeditions exploring the interior of Australia.

On one, his co-leader was killed by Aborigines who made off with most of the supplies. The rest of the expedition survived by chance when they managed to reach the coast and were spotted by a French whaling ship.

Eyre returned to England where he published books about his adventures and about the Aborigine people of Australia.

In 1848 he was appointed a Lieutenant-Governor of a province in New Zealand and from 1854 he became Colonial Governor of several Caribbean islands, including Jamaica.

He ruled there with great severity, and brutally suppressed a slave uprising in 1865. He ordered the hanging for treason of a mixed-race member of the island Assembly who had been openly critical of him. This, and other events, caused great controversy in Britain where unsuccessful efforts were made to arrest Eyre for murder. Supporters of Eyre, who believed that he had acted decisively to restore order, included Charles Dickens, Thomas Carlyle, Charles Kingsley and Alfred Tennyson.

Eyre died in 1901 in Devon.

It is perhaps surprising that with all the current misgivings about Britain's colonial past, the extraordinary life-story of Edward Eyre is so little known. We here in the Dunstable area just have the parochial interest in trying to discover more about his Whipsnade connections. He is not on the list of Rectors of Whipsnade but has been described as a curate. Can any history society discover more?



Arthur Henry Neumann

ARTHUR HENRY NEUMANN

Another famous explorer with local connections is Arthur Henry Neumann, whose book *Elephant Hunting In East Equatorial Africa* contains descriptions of his childhood in Hockliffe.

These days, few of us admire people who kill animals for fun, but times have changed. And Neumann, born in 1850, was a celebrated figure in his day.

After travelling to Africa, he eventually settled in Swaziland where he learned to speak several native languages and the

skills needed to survive. He had numerous adventures in the Zulu wars and in opening-up East Africa for British-built roads and railways.

PROFESSIONAL ELEPHANT HUNTER

During this time he developed an increasing passion for big-game shooting and became a professional elephant hunter. On one notorious occasion in 1891 his hunting party was attacked by Maasai tribesmen in retaliation for the theft of cattle by a previous expedition, and 38 of Neumann's party were killed. In his profitable search for ivory he led expeditions into unexplored parts of Africa, where his personal servant was killed by a crocodile and he himself was badly injured by an elephant when his rifle misfired.

Back in England he became celebrated after the publication of his lavishly produced book, illustrated by three well-known wildlife artists.

But here in Dunstable, we want to know more about his local roots. He was the seventh son of the Rev John Stubbs Neumann, whose time here is easily traced through the list of Rectors displayed at Hockliffe Church. He was Rector from April 1842 until he resigned on September 30 1869. Apparently, he came from a wealthy family of Liverpool salt merchants and left his church in Bedfordshire to live in Italy. His decision to emigrate was the spur for his son to go to Africa.

THE INFAMOUS REV WILLIAM DODD

Incidentally, on that same list of Hockliffe Rectors is the name of the Rev William Dodd, who was hanged at Newgate in 1777 for forgery and whose unhappy story has been well recorded elsewhere. Hockliffe church is full of interest!

John Buckledee