

NEWSLETTER

Dunstable & District Local History Society
No. 64 February 2024



Chairman's Notes

We are almost at the end of the time allotted by Historic England for the Dunstable High Street Action Zone, which began in 2019.

Your history society will be manning a stall at Ashton Square on Saturday, March 9, which will be our farewell to the project.

THE CULTURAL CONSORTIUM

Dunstable's previous town clerk, David Ashlee, persuaded the society to become part of what became known as 'the cultural consortium', which was set up to try to create further interest in Dunstable's history. The formation of the consortium was part of the requirement by Historic England before granting the town a considerable sum of money to spend on repairs to buildings in the high street.

RENOVATIONS

Much of the money has been used on Priory House, where work (still continuing) has proved to be more considerable and more urgently needed than expected. And renovation has started, after much negotiation, on repairs to the Moores building, empty since 2008. Disappointingly, there has been no progress in finding a way to tackle the increasingly derelict Tilley's shop in Middle Row.

But while the representatives of Historic England have been trying to tackle these problems, members of the cultural consortium, under the leadership of Kay Kempster and Joanne Bowes, have pressed on vigorously with their part of the deal.

There have been numerous history and art events, market stalls, competitions, town centre walks and the history society's Talking Plaques heritage trail operated by QR codes. Particularly spectacular have been the chain of decorated straw hats above Ashton Square, a (short-lived) clay model of the Priory Church and the paintings decorating the passageway in Middle Row. The initiatives have also led, indirectly, to the publication of *They Came To The Crossroads*, the splendid new book edited by Jean Yates which gives almost encyclopaedic coverage of the town's past, and my own picture book for schoolchildren about Dunstable Tournaments. Soon to come will be a new signage board featuring 'Lost Streets' in the



Dancing In The Rain. The history society took part in the 1940s Day on The Square in October when our stall, featuring photos of the period, was next to performers dancing to Big Band music. As this photo shows, a downpour didn't dampen anyone's spirits. Our stall spotlighted some of the music stars of the period. Who knew that Tommy Trinder singing All Over The Place was a best-selling record of the time? But lots of people remembered that Elsie and Doris Walters (Gert and Daisie) lived in the Blue House at Ashridge.

Action Zone area, and a new online App created by Katharine Brown which will enable folk at home to access the Talking Plaques Trail. Coincidentally, the creation of the consortium has coincided with the much-appreciated revival of the meeting rooms in the old club buildings in Manchester Place by the Rural Communities Charity.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Here's a reminder about the history society's annual meeting, to be held on Tuesday, March 12. It will take place immediately after the talk by Elise Naish, Head of Heritage and Collections at Luton, about George Mossman's collection of horse-drawn carriages preserved at Stockwood Park. We will be using email to send out agendas, committee nomination forms and reports by the chairman and treasurer. Those members who do not have a computer should find the documents inserted within this newsletter.

DAVID AINSBURY

Many local people are unaware of the enormous contribution to our knowledge of Dunstable's history by David Ainsbury, who died in October.

David was a meticulously accurate sub-editor on the Dunstable Gazette and Luton News for many years. When he retired he became a volunteer worker at the museum at Wardown Park, where he became fascinated by the huge collection of News-Gazette photo negatives stored there.

He spent countless hours studying them and undertook the tricky task of scanning hundreds of images into digital formats. Many of the photos now appearing on social media or in the Gazette's weekly Yesteryear pages are the result of his work.

He had a vast knowledge of local buildings and personalities. This was invaluable in identifying the locations of pictures taken in the days when the same photographer covered both Luton and Dunstable, and had stored negatives together in the same boxes. David made regular visits to Dunstable to deliver the results of his labours, his only reward being a glass of wine at the Old Palace Lodge!

John Buckledee

Wartime stories



Rita Swift has been busily searching through back copies of the Dunstable Gazette preparing for a new edition of the history society's Time Line book.

Some of the news items which she has found have now been added to the Time Line section of the society's website. But there are lots of the off-beat stories in the paper's Local Lines column, as published during the early days of the Second World War, which are probably unsuitable for the book. We print a selection here.

16 February 1940

You may not believe it but this story is really true. Walking down a narrow street in the dusk a non-motorist saw a man lying half on the footpath and half in the roadway. His face was contorted as if he was in great pain and the passerby automatically thought he was another road hog victim thrown carelessly to the roadside. Recalling all he ever knew about first aid the pedestrian hurried up to the prostrate man and asked whether he was badly hurt. 'No' gasped the writhing man on the pavement 'But don't they put these ***** stopcocks in an awkward place'.

14 July 1940

From a greengrocer's shop in High Street North a queue 50 yards long and 4 deep trailed round the corner into the Town Hall yard and up to the side entrance to the Baptist Church. These were Strawberry Hunters who had been invading Dunstable during the three weeks that the fruit has been coming to the town in tons. A woman proudly carrying two baskets of strawberries walked into the police station and asked the police to take charge of the baskets of fruit until her mother could collect them. She said she was unable to remain in Dunstable until the arrival of her mother from London, but her mother would know where to collect them 'cause she phoned to tell her they would be at the police station.

18 October 1940

A new order stipulates that all horses must be tied up during air raids in order to protect the public from bolting horses and to prevent roads being obstructed by vehicles dragged by frightened animals. No horse may be on a road where the 30-mile speed limit is in force unless it is wearing a halter with a rope attached.

12 December 1940

Police helmets to be standardised with special markings. Officers from inspectors upwards have white helmets with their different ranks denoted by markings on the front. Chief Constable has crossed batons surrounded by a laurel wreath. Superintendents have a crown and Inspectors one star. Chief Inspectors two stars (Dunstable does not have a Chief Inspector). Sergeants have blue helmets with two white bands and police constable have plain blue helmets.

20 December 1940

An appeal has been made to the public not to interfere with what are known as Balisage Lamps belonging to military units. The military authorities are concerned with the disappearance of many of them. In appearance they look like a small box camera, cube shape with sides about 6 inches in length. They have a black metal frame and a glass front, and the illumination is provided by an ordinary electric torch battery and a small bulb. They are put down by the military at the side of roads to mark the route when troops are engaged on night exercises and have been so designed that no light can be seen by aircraft.

17 January 1941

Householders were asked to leave a bucket of water outside their house to be used by stirrup pumps in case of a fire or damage to the water mains during an air raid. Unfortunately, children have been emptying these buckets of water. Some salt in the water will stop it freezing over in the winter.

7 February 1941

Now that the carrot has assumed the new dignity of being one of the first and foremost wartime foods, all sorts of camouflages and disguises are being thought of in order to present it in a different and appetising guise. The carrot's latest role is an alternative to sweets and in many cases as a substitute. Neat, clean carrots wrapped in a cellophane paper are being sold at a penny each on railway refreshment room counters and in the trays of cinema attendants. A suggestion to cook the carrot gently in a cinnamon or ginger-flavoured syrup and coated with pastry has now been made.

25 April 1941

Owing to the paper shortage and for other reasons few of the usual Ordnance Survey Maps are available but, even if they are, maps on a scale of more than an inch to the mile cannot be sold without a police permit. Anyone buying any kind of map may be asked to produce an identity card. It is advisable also to carry this proof of identity even when one is on a short hike for a stranger consulting a map is apt to arouse suspicion nowadays.

4 July 1941

Ministry of Agriculture are not encouraging the formation of Sparrow Clubs whose sole object is to exterminate anything that looks remotely like a house sparrow because, when rewards were offered for dead sparrows children, sometimes even adults, killed hedge sparrows and other useful birds. Hedge sparrows eat caterpillars, green flies and crane flies but on the other hand it is claimed they are also harmful to crops. The most useful solution is to destroy only the eggs making it easier to kill the right kind of sparrows. House sparrows breed throughout the summer and their eggs are grey, white spotted brown or black whereas the eggs of the hedge sparrows are plain blue.

8 August 1941

Whipsnade has just received the last survivors of the Royal Cream horses of this country. They are a stallion and 2 mares, and they have been presented by Sir Gerald Tyrwhitt-Drake who bred them in his private zoo at Maidstone. In the 17th century the breed was used for royal ceremonies in Spain. Queen Isabella of Spain presented various German Knights with a horse apiece, but these were all eventually seized by the King of Hanover and used as the Royal Horses of Hanover. When George I came to England he brought some of these royal horses with him and since then they have almost continuously been used on state occasions. In 1921, however, King George V decided to give up the cream horses and to use other breeds for state occasions.

5 September 1941

Dunstable men will soon be able to buy a standard War Suit which should be in the shops within the next few days. The suits which cost between 65 shillings and 75 shillings, are being manufactured to supply the needs of the 'not so wealthy man' and also to help the trade in wartime difficulties. The suits bear a special trademark: 2 circles minus the sector in the right hand side with the figure 41 representing the year of production in one of these spaces. The mark must be woven or printed in black and white until there are enough of the official labels issued by the Board of Trade when the sewing on of these labels will become compulsory.

14 April 1942

In order to provide for the needs of vegetarians the Food Ministry is prepared to make a special distribution of nut kernels to be sold to them primarily through the Health Food Stores.

12 April 1942

One place where there is no queue is at the bus stop outside the Town Hall. With a little gentle encouragement by the police at first to induce hardened elbow shovers to line up, they are now standing two abreast as calmly as they do for chocolate. It took a war to put an end to the old established Town Hall rugby scrums.

3 July 1942

The design of the large poster outside the Town Hall advertising the County Salvage Drive has a large number of admirers but not many people know its strange history. It bears the legend '..... was the only town in Bedfordshire to win a prize during the January contest. Let lead the way now'. Mr Harold Stew, Acting Senior Sanitary Inspector, explained that for several days the legend read 'Dunstable was the only town in Bedfordshire to win a prize. Let Dunstable lead the way now'. Mr Stew was justly proud of the poster until the police, more concerned with National Security than with the town becoming salvage minded, remembered a defence regulation which states the name of the town shall not be displayed publicly on the streets. Mr Stew armed with paste-pot, brush and clean white paper climbed a ladder outside the Town Hall and carefully obliterated the offending word 'Dunstable' from the poster in both places. Imagine his horror when a tersely worded note arrived at his Municipal Office from the Police Station stating that unless the word Dunstable was removed immediately something would be done about it by the police themselves. Suspecting that 5th Columnists had been at work and removed the paper allowing the Huns to know they were in Dunstable, he discovered that the poster had two faces to be seen from both directions and he had blacked out that telling word on one side only. Taking up his paste-pot, brush and a new sheet of paper the words were obliterated from the other side. Thus he became a law-abiding citizen again.

14 August 1942

For the benefit of the American troops a special pamphlet introducing Britain has been published aiming to help American soldiers to understand British character and customs. The British dislike bragging and showing off. American wages, are the highest in the world, but they won't think any better of you for throwing your money around. The British Tommy will not appreciate you swiping his girl or not appreciating what his army has been up against. Britons sitting in trains or buses without striking up conversation doesn't mean they're being unfriendly – probably they don't want to appear rude.

18 September 1942

For 14 years councillor George Holt of Church Street has cut the grass on a piece of wasteland at the bottom of Ridgeway Ave by permission of successive owners. He did so again recently only to find too late that the land had been requisitioned by Beds County War Agricultural Committee and he had cut what was a very poor crop of growing oats. Summoned for the theft of the oats, value four shillings, he explained it was a genuine mistake. The bench accepted his explanation and the summons was dismissed.

7 May 1943

Across the balcony of the Town Hall are two banners which to the initiated are the cause of some amusement and to those people out of touch with local events the source of mystification. The banners, one directly above the other, read 'Wings for Victory' 'For the Love of Mike'. What the banners desire to express is that the play 'For the Love of Mike' is taking place at the Town Hall this week and that proceeds are to be invested in the appropriate charities during Wings Week.

Rita Swift



Peter Pratt remembers Houghton Regis

Peter Pratt has a host of memories of Houghton Regis, where three generations of his family ran butcher's shops in the village. Peter's father, Frederick Pratt (better known in Houghton as 'Sunny'), had a shop in the high street, opposite today's Bedford Square, until the area was redeveloped. Peter's grandfather ran a business at Bidwell. On this page, Peter (now living in Dunstable) recounts some memories of his boyhood in the village in the 1940s when the family's home was in Cumberland Street. In those days the street was a cul-de-sac, leading from the high street where the Morrison's store now stands.

MEMORIES OF BOYHOOD

Children would often collect in our street to play 'rounders'. No traffic ever came our way so games went on with no interruptions. Great care had to be taken with the soft ball not to hit it over fences of near-by houses. There were some where we knew we would not get it back immediately, so spare ones were vital to continue the game. To be fair, we would usually get them back in due course and I am sure that we were not too much of a nuisance. Mr Adams' house (opposite Malmsey Cottages) had a very large bird aviary, and as a special treat we would sometimes be allowed in to view his collection of canaries and budgerigars, and also retrieve some of our lost balls!

Conkers were always popular during the autumn season, with plenty of trees around village green and local lanes. Many contests were held during school term time with sometimes battles between a '34er' and say a '22er' resulting with a winner then having a '56er'. These battered conkers rarely survived more than a handful of encounters but it



Frederick Pratt's butcher's shop in the High Street

was all good fun, except when a mis-timed swipe resulted in a whack on the knuckles! Also one had to be on the lookout for cheats who might have pickled their conker or gently hardened it in the oven.

GAMES, TRIPS TO DUNSTABLE AND WELSH RAREBIT

During the war years, while I was at junior school, we played many games of cricket and football on the Green which was the focal point for most children. We rarely went out of our village and a trip to Dunstable was a treat. Luton was almost like a journey to a foreign country. I can remember going to Dunstable with my mother shopping, wandering around the cattle market in the Square and going to the Noah's Ark Café and having Welsh Rarebit (cheese on toast to you!) That was a very special treat, and you may have had to queue up to get a table, in what was a very small building (now a vet's).

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BOMBING RAIDS

During the war a stick of bombs was released across Houghton Hall park but, considering how near we were to the tank factory at Vauxhalls, we were lucky not to have been in the firing line of errant bombs. The boys would scour the countryside for pieces of shrapnel for souvenirs. Empty shell cases were much sought after.

We had a very stout table in our dining room and often we would be bundled under it when the air-raid sirens wailed. I can also recall that we had an Anderson shelter dug into a part of the garden and remember spending time cramped on benches in a damp and dark environment. But to a child it was a great adventure.

The blackout was vigorously enforced with the local Air Raid Warden patrolling the streets shouting 'PUT THAT LIGHT OUT' if you showed as much as a glimmer of light. Often there would be an encampment of troops on the Green, bivouacking for a few days, and I guess that they may have been part of the forces assembling for the D Day landing assault. We as kids just enjoyed looking at the tanks and lorries assembled for our wide-open eyes.

TEENAGE YEARS

My teenage years started at the war's end, and I can always recall seeing my father drunk, for the one and only time, on VJ Day in the summer of 1945. We had been to the Five Bells pub, then run by the Thorpe family.

I went to Northfields School to complete my education, and I recall that in the years after the war lines of American trucks would queue up outside the Blue Circle works to collect bags of cement. Airfields were still being built as the 'Cold War' was still much in the news. The children would scrounge chewing gum from the U.S. troops in these trucks who were always very friendly and generous. Getting a few sticks of gum was a real treat and greatly sought after.

THE CEMENT WORKS

The cement works was a vital part of local life with many jobs providing income for the village. There was an overhead cable truck system from the quarry on the opposite side of Houghton Road to the kilns and storage silos. Large excavators would extract the chalk from as much as a mile away and load it on to narrow-gauge railway trucks, which then transferred it to the overhead bucket system to the main works.

The factory's 300-foot chimney dominated the village and surrounding countryside, spewing out smoke, steam and, of course, cement particles. Our house was right under the firing line (with the wind nearly always westerly) and my father fought the company for many years for compensation, as the lime content would strip the paint from windows and doors and other exposed surfaces.

He did get a measly sum in the end, I think, but we had to learn to live with the problem which sometimes would result in blobs of material, some as big as an 'old' penny, landing on and around ours and other people's houses. In due time another larger chimney was built and to some extent the problem eased a bit with better filtering equipment.

We, of course, went to school either by foot, bike or bus. The number 6 bus that went to Dunstable would be closely followed by us boys trying to keep up with it on bikes! A very dangerous practice, I suspect, and one that was discouraged by the local 'bobby' if he saw you.

BLUE WATER PIT

We would spend a lot of time at the disused Blue Water pit at Bidwell. We created an up-and-down circuit around the flooded pit for our bikes. It was great fun.

One of my most vivid memories was walking from the village to visit the Fensome family at Bury Corner Farm at Bidwell one sunny summer day. I crested the hill on the path near the Blue Water pit. The air was still and hot, the birds (including the skylark) were singing nearby and the countryside was laid out before me in all its glory. I could have been the only living person on the planet at that time, and that memory has been etched in my mind for ever.

I built model gliders and got quite adept at towing them up with a hand winch and letting them circle to the ground. One day I was flying one in the meadows alongside the Dog Kennel walk. The weather was very hot and as it was after the harvest had been cut there was plenty of space for flying model planes. Unfortunately mine got into a strong upward thermal current and I chased it right across those fields and in the end saw it disappearing over Blow's Downs never to be seen again! These fields were also the scene of great excitement when the corn was cut, and we would gather and watch the final section get smaller and smaller and then see the rabbits make a dash out when there was no cover left. The farm workers were very good shots with a rifle or shotgun and would carry many rabbits away to provide extra food on the table. We would help 'stook' the bundles of corn cut by the tractor drawn binder, to be left to dry out until they were taken away to be threshed out a few days later.

SATURDAY MORNING PICTURES

A special treat was to go to the Union Cinema in Dunstable on a Saturday morning and be one of the ABC Minors to see films like 'Tarzan' and Laurel and Hardy. We would walk there via Dog Kennel Walk or get the No 6 bus if you were lucky. Most boys collected train numbers, and you would set off with your Ian Allen book which listed, by engine class, all the steam locos of the day. Many a Sunday afternoon would be spent on the railway bridge on the Sundon Road. We would also get a packed lunch and cycle to Leighton Buzzard and spend the whole day there, marvelling at the speeding trains, belching steam and soot, just a few feet away from us. With the advent of diesel engines, most of the glamour went out of our hobby and we spent less time at this pastime. However, I still have my original 'dog-eared' book.

CRICKET

I was always interested in sport, particularly cricket, and spent countless hours by the small pavilion on Houghton Green that served both as a changing room and scorer's hut.

I can remember one cricketer in particular, 'Dicky' Bird, who had the most unusual run up, but as a medium pacer was so accurate that few runs were ever scored off him, and his nagging length and ball movement bought him countless wickets. Likewise Ray Birchley, (whose family's greengrocer business was at the top of Drury Lane) who with 'Dicky' proved the downfall of many opposing sides

I eventually graduated into the side, and many happy days were spent playing my favourite game. In those days the teams changed in the British Legion Hall on the Green (behind the site of the present Memorial Hall), it was rather spartan to say the least, but we made do. This Hall was also the site for many years of our Youth Club, where we could enjoy table tennis and other games. It was, for many years, where whist drives and other social activities took place.

Peter Pratt

Greeting New Members



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

Katharine Brown	Martin Cummins	Sandie Cummins
David Getter	Jon Hitchcock	David McVicar
Diane Morris	Simon Patterson	David Wilkinson

Sad Farewell



We are very sorry to announce the sad loss of

David Foster	Gill Hayward	Jackie Jeffs
	Peter Parker	

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. Here we continue his series of articles.

THOMAS MORGAN

Thomas Ashwell Morgan, a Dunstable photographer who was later to become famous as the discoverer of some remarkable underground caverns, was born on 10th July 1875 at Ty Mawr, a substantial farm property in Abercrave, Ystradgynlais, Breconshire, to parents William Morgan and Mary Ann Morgan (formerly Watkins). Abercrave was a small mining village in the lower part of the Upper Swansea Valley.

Thomas Morgan was one of ten children born to William and Mary, six sons and four daughters. Thomas's grandfather, Morgan Morgan, was a wealthy individual who made his money as agent for The British Iron Company and then from mining coal and limestone in his own name in the local area.

At the time of the 1891 census Thomas, then aged around 15, was boarding as a scholar at 21 Park Street, Swansea. On the census he was shown as a dual speaker of English and Welsh.

In 1901 Thomas was living in Kings Lynn, Norfolk. He was now employed as a photographer, probably at a large photographic business named Dexter & Sons, in the town.

One of the photographic assistants was Elizabeth Jane Crawford. On 19th November 1903 Thomas and Elizabeth married at the Register Office in Birmingham. Thomas was 28 and Elizabeth was 22. Thomas was still described as a photographer but no occupation was entered for Elizabeth. At the time of the wedding Thomas was living at 101 Bristol Street, Birmingham, and Elizabeth was residing at 12 John Bright Street, Birmingham. Thomas's father, William, died on 11th June 1905. He left an estate of over £35,000 which today would equate to many millions of pounds.

Thomas inherited a number of cottages known as Pen-Y-Bont Cottages which was part of Nantygward Farm. Nantygward Farm had originally been purchased by Thomas's grandfather, Morgan Morgan, way back in 1876 when he purchased Craig Y Nos Castle.

By 1906 Kelly's Directory for Bedfordshire shows Thomas Morgan as a self-employed photographer, working from 23 High Street North, Dunstable. The address became 41 High Street North in 1920 after renumbering. In recent years it has been a bookmaker's office. He was using his middle name and was trading as Ashwell Morgan. In all probability Thomas took over the business of Herbert A Strange around 1905, who traded as a photographer from the same property. Thomas lived and traded from 23 High Street North, Dunstable for around five years up to 1910. He appears to have consistently traded under the name of Ashwell Morgan during this time.

On the right is an example of a postcard produced by Ashwell Morgan during his time in Dunstable.

The postcard has been embossed with 'Ashwell Morgan, Dunstable' but it is difficult to see. If he used the same technique on all of his postcards it indicates there may be many postcards in collections throughout the UK which will never be attributed to Thomas due to the indistinct embossing.

The postcard has a note on the back which states it was taken on Empire Day 1913. The date may be incorrect because the evidence suggests Thomas left Dunstable in 1910. Alternatively, perhaps he made a return visit in 1913 to celebrate Empire Day and to catch up with friends.

Thomas and Elizabeth's first child, Gwen Vivienne Morgan, was born on 11th March 1907 at 23 High Street North. Thomas was described

as a photographer on the birth certificate.

Thomas and his young family seem to have left Dunstable around 1910 when Albert William Cooper moved to the property at 23 High Street North also to trade as a photographer.

In 1912 Thomas, his wife and daughter, Gwen, moved to Ty Mawr to be with his mother and some of his brothers.

Thomas Morgan died on the 23rd August 1964 aged 89 after a stroke at Westbrook, 30 St James Gardens, Swansea where he had lived with his three children for many years. He left his estate of approximately £25,000 to his three children in equal shares.

ALBERT WILLIAM COOPER

Albert William Cooper was born on the 7th September 1874 at 40 Fishergate Hill, Preston. His father was Richard Cooper a coal merchant and his mother was Maria Cooper, formerly Hemmingway.

Albert, aged 26, married Elizabeth Coles, aged 30, a cotton weaver, at the Lancaster Road Congregational Church in Preston on 4th December 1900.

A daughter, Hilda Hemmingway Cooper, was born on 26th March 1904 at 31 Kenmure Place, Preston. Albert was described as a coal dealer's manager.

It seems likely that through his connections in the coal industry Albert knew or knew of Thomas Morgan in some way. It was probably this link which resulted in his change of career and a move from Preston to Dunstable. There is some evidence to suggest Thomas Morgan and Albert Cooper may have worked together before Thomas finally left Dunstable.

By 1910 Albert is shown in a trade directory as a photographer working from 23 High Street North, Dunstable. However, the rates book for 1910 shows Thomas Morgan as the occupier. The 1911 census shows Albert living at the property with his wife, Elizabeth, and their daughter Hilda. Also living at the address was Albert's sister, Mabel Cooper aged 38, who was described as an assistant in photography.

By 1913 Albert seems to have left Dunstable, ending a period of approximately twenty years during which time 23 High Street North had been home to at least four different photographers, Percy Turner, Herbert Strange, Thomas Morgan and finally Albert Cooper.

Albert died on 20th August 1920 at the Cottage Hospital, Skegness aged 46, whilst on holiday with his wife. He was described on the death certificate as a journeyman photographer.

Elizabeth Cooper died on 10th August 1932 at Smithdown Road, Toxeth, Liverpool. She was described as the widow of Albert William Cooper, photographer.

Unfortunately it has not been possible to find any Dunstable photos which can be attributed to Albert.



Ashwell Morgan's photo of a parade in High Street North, near Albion Street

The De la Lynde Cemetery



The arms of Sir John De la Lynde of Sussex

A fascinating query arrived from folk in the USA wanting to know about a De La Lynde Cemetery in Dunstable. It has led us on a long trail which has not yet reached a satisfactory conclusion, but members might be interested to read about our journey.

It is fairly well-known that members of the Lynde family were among the religious dissidents who sailed from Plymouth on August 1 1634 bound for the 'plantations' in the New World. They arrived at Boston in America on September 18. Thomas Lynde, a maltster (beer-maker) by trade, was among the 100 passengers together with his wife Margaret and Thomas and Henry Lynde. After many adventures, some members of the Lynde family became influential landowners in America whose deeds have been well recorded.

REV SYMMES

Among the other people aboard was the Rev Zachary (Zachariah) Symmes, who had been Rector at the Priory Church in Dunstable. He had with him his wife Sarah and children William, Mary, Elizabeth, Huldah, Hannah and Rebecca,

They founded a township in Massachusetts which they called Dunstable. The Rev Symmes and family had left for America so they could freely practise their religion, which actually meant stricter rules on behaviour. For instance, the laws of the new colony forbade dancing and in 1660 William Walker was imprisoned 'for courting a maid without the leave of her parents'.

THE DE LA LYNDE CEMETERY

The current puzzle arises because ancestry websites have entries recording a number of Lyndes as being buried in what is described as the De La Lynde Cemetery in Dunstable, Bedfordshire, dating back to times before that mass emigration to America.

The assumption is that this must have been a private family graveyard. People in America would very much like to know more. But so far we have been unable to trace any such location, either here in Bedfordshire or in any of the other places called Dunstable throughout the world.

It's odd, because the names attributed to being buried in Dunstable, Beds, appear to have been gentry whose names would normally appear somewhere in local records. They are listed as Andrew Lynde (1454-1516), Sir Nathaniel Lynde (1488-1569), Sir Nathaniel Lynde (1532-1619) and Sir Nathaniel Lynde (1565-1595). According to the internet sites, the first Sir Nathaniel married Lady Frances Cotton at Dunstable in 1520 and the second married Lady Elizabeth Hannah Collier at Dunstable in 1564.

None of the births, marriages and deaths of the Lynde family is recorded in the Dunstable parish registers or in those for Houghton Regis, and they are not traceable in the county records office.

THE DETAILS ON THE WEBSITES ARE:

Andrew Lynde (1454 – 1516) buried at De La Lynde Cemetery, Dunstable. Wife was Lois Miller. Son Nathaniel born 1488.

Sir Nathaniel Lynde born July 1 1488 in Dunstable, died December 10 1569 in Dunstable. Wife was Lady Frances Cotton (1500-1576) married on July 15 1520 in Dunstable.

(Another site gives Sir Nathaniel's birth date as July 9 1488 and death date as November 30 1569. His children are listed as Nathan, Philip, Allen, Dora and Elliott).

Sir Nathaniel Lynde born 1532 died 1619 married (?) Hannah

Elizabeth Swatter (1545-1600) or (?) Lady Elizabeth Hannah Collier (1570-1594) in (?) 1564 at Dunstable. Daughter Katherine Lynde (1566-1603) was born in Ottery St Mary, Devon. Son Richard Lynde (1594-1687).

Sir Nathaniel Lynde (also known as Hendrick Van Der Lynde) born July 6 1565 in Dunstable. Died May 30 1595 in Dunstable. Buried De La Lynde cemetery, Dunstable. Married Elizabeth Colyer (1570-1594).

Elizabeth Colyer was born 1570 at Dunstable. Married Nathan Lynde in Dunstable 1590. Her children were Deacon Thomas Lynde, Enoch Lynde, Richard Lynde.

THOMAS LYNDE - YEOMAN OF THE GUARD

Our inquiries at Luton Museum led its staff to trace a Lynde connection in notes about the Priory at St Neots, Huntingdonshire, presented at a meeting of the St Albans Architectural and Archaeological Society on May 25 1886 by the Rev H Fowler. He mentions that John Raunds, the last Prior at St Neots, was instated as Vicar in 1512 and was 'presented by Thomas Lynde, Yeoman of the Guard to Henry VIII, the advowson being made over to him for that purpose.' This would have been in the third year of Henry's reign. Thomas Lynde had also served Henry's father, Henry VII.

Thomas Lynde, who died in 1527, was a great benefactor to St Neots Church, where a monumental brass to him existed in the Jesus Chapel up until 1684.

The guide to the church says that the brass was under the tower arch and featured three figures (Sir Thomas and Alice and Joan, his wives) with an inscription plate and four roundels.

The museum at St Neots has no record of a De La Lynde Cemetery in that region or where Sir Thomas was buried.

The official History of the Yeomen of the Guard mentions that the memorial to Thomas Lynde showed him wearing the apparel of a Yeoman of the Guard "with his pole axe, a rose on his breast and a crown on his left breast or shoulder", together with his wives Alice and Joan.

The history lists Thomas Lynde (Yeoman of Crown) as being one of Henry VII's Yeoman of the Guard, Crown and Chamber, and also records a connection between Thomas Lynde, Yeoman of the Crown, with Thomas Gilmin of St Neots, who died in 1508. (Yeomen of the Crown were the king's personal bodyguards.)

Another part of the history mentions Thomas Lynde or Lyne, as being a Yeoman of the Guard who was buried at St Neots. It adds, significantly, that he was 'of Dunstable'.

THE LYNDE FAMILY IN THE USA

There are some distinguished members of the Lynde family in the USA and they have traced their roots in some detail, including a connection with the Van Der Lyndes of Holland. But they have found no link with Dunstable or a family cemetery here.

NO RESPONSE

However, the details about the Lyndes of Dunstable as posted on the internet sites are so very detailed that, surely, there must be a written record somewhere...perhaps in a family bible. Inquiries to various websites about their sources have not received a response so far but perhaps this newsletter article, which will be indexed by Google once it appears on the history society's website, will prompt a response.

John Buckledee

Meteorological Office Christmas Card 1955



The Society has recently been given a Christmas card from 1955, which was issued to mark the Meteorological Office's centenary.

On the left hand inside page, there is a potted history of the Office, as follows:

'The Meteorological Office was founded in 1855 as the Meteorological Department of the Board of Trade, its main function being the collection of meteorological and ocean surface observations for the benefit of shipping.

'With the development of the electric telegraph in 1860 came the collection of observations by that means and the organisation of a forecast service. In 1861, storm warnings were sent to ports and the issue of forecasts to the press was commenced, but both services were discontinued in 1866 on the recommendation of a Royal Society Committee, which considered that the forecasting of weather was a premature innovation. As the result, however, of great popular outcry, storm warnings were partially resumed almost immediately, but it was not until 1876 that the full warning service was restored.

'The first Daily Weather Report was issued in 1869, its contents being limited to observations and a general statement of the weather over the British Isles; but the public had to wait until 1879 before confidence had grown sufficiently to justify the publication, once again, of weather forecasts. This service has continued ever since, apart from the interruptions caused by two World Wars when publication was suppressed for security reasons.

'By 1920 broadcasts by radiotelegraphy of forecasts for Atlantic shipping were in operation. It was in this year that the Office became the State Meteorological Service and was attached to the Air Ministry.



'The first forecast broadcast to the general public by the BBC went on the air on 14th November 1922. Forecasts were first shown by the BBC Television Service in 1950 and since January 1954 they have been presented to viewers by a Meteorological Office forecaster. Throughout its history the Meteorological Office has played a leading part in securing the international co-operation which is the very life-blood of meteorological science. So successful has been this aspect of its work that if only similar co-operation could be extended to all other realms of international relationships, the era of Peace and Goodwill towards Men, so earnestly desired by us all, would surely prevail'.

The left hand page of the inside reads:

CHRISTMAS 1955

**With every Good Wish for your
Happiness and Prosperity at Christmas
And throughout the Coming Year
from**

(and it is signed) **Kathleen & Maureen (Short)**

The card was printed by Hiorns and Miller Ltd. The Services Printers, Devonport, Plymouth

Mention of the Air Ministry reminds me of a childhood memory that it was officially a White Christmas if there was snow on the Air Ministry Roof on Christmas Day.

The account of Dunstable's part in the 'Met Office' can be found in, Issue 12, pp70/1, September 1999 of our Newsletter.

Hugh Garrod

Memories of old Dunstable



There was much to enjoy at the hugely successful Bedfordshire Day in the Priory Church, arranged by Kay Kempster and her team to launch the new book, *They Came To The Crossroads*, edited by Jean Yates.

C S LEWIS AND J R R TOLKIEN

During the event there was a local exclusive revealed by Stephen Williams in his talk about C.S Lewis (of Narnia fame) and J.R.R. Tolkien, author of *The Lord Of The Rings*.

Professor Tolkien served in the army in the First World War and had a tough time. In 1917 he was invalided out of the front line and transferred to a Signal Corps base at Houghton Regis where he was trained to draw maps.

It was a skill which he later used to great effect when creating the imaginary maps for his books about Middle Earth. So much has been written about Tolkien and his stories that it is quite remarkable that this important piece of information about his army life had previously been overlooked.

STORIES ABOUT CHESS

An interest in history sometimes leads us down some very unexpected byways. Some of our members, supporting the series of

heritage lectures arranged at Flamstead Church, have become quite knowledgeable about the origins of ludo and snakes and ladders thanks to an enthusiastic talk on ancient board games given by Dr Irving Finkel.

Dr Finkel, of the Middle East Department of the British Museum, was at his most animated when describing his discovery of overlooked traces of games in a number of historic sites. But he brought his talk very much up-to-date with a tale about that famous film scene in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* when chess pieces become alive and very violent. In all the drama of the movie, few of us noticed that some of the pieces were coloured red instead of the usual black or white. The film makers wanted to base their animations on chessmen excavated in the Scottish island of Lewis and contacted the British Museum for help. Dr Finkel was able to point out that the pieces had originally been covered by a red pigment.

There has been a scholarly dispute about the colouration of the Lewis chessmen so we in Dunstable have been particularly interested to read the Danelaw section in *They Came To The Crossroads*, the new book mentioned above. In this, Stephen Williams describes how settlements in Dunstable were right on the edge of the violently dis-

continued over

puted boundary of the area controlled by the Danes. It led Stephen to discuss the discovery in the 1880s of Danish chess pieces near Harlington Church. These were also coloured red although much of this has disappeared, apparently when a plaster cast was made of the figures.

MESOLITHIC PITS

The considerable amount of archaeological work being undertaken in the fields to the north of Houghton Regis, before 5,000 new homes are erected there, was the subject of a talk by Hannah Firth to the history society's December meeting.

The headline news, of international importance, was the discovery of a series of large pits dating back to Mesolithic times. Carbon dating has been possible on the bones of an auroch, an extinct species of cattle, which were found in one of the pits.

There's a short report of Hannah's talk on the history society's website, but one aspect of her visit is leading us down another byway. Hannah mentioned this area's tenuous local connection with Kevin Crossley-Holland, the author who is best known for his trilogy of fantasy novels about King Arthur. Kevin's grandparents built Oakwell Park, a meticulously designed house which now stands in the midst of the new development at Houghton Regis.

The house was commissioned in the mid-1930s by Dr Frank Crossley-Holland, a barrister who served as High Sheriff of Bedfordshire and who led scientific missions to Russia and Yugoslavia. The interior of the house, a Grade II listed building, includes many fascinating antiquarian features. A very detailed report about the house, covering many pages, can be found on-line.

The architect involved in the design of the house was Harold W C Shaw, who was based in Dunstable from the 1930s to the 1950s. A hunt through Dunstable Street Directories shows that he was at 75 High Street North in the 1930s and he seems to have been responsible for a number of small housing developments as well as house extensions and alterations. Does any history society member know more about Mr Shaw?



Oakwell Park

BEDFORDSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

The annual conference of the Bedfordshire Local History Association is always an impressive and interesting occasion. This year it is being held in the south of the county, hosted by Leighton Buzzard and District Archaeological and Historical Society on Saturday, June 22, at Linslade Middle School in Mentmore Road. There will be a series of presentations including the story of Alice Chaucer, the immensely rich granddaughter of the poet Geoffrey Chaucer. She owned Leighton Buzzard for 60 years during the turbulent times of the Wars of the Roses and became a great benefactor of the town. She built the Market Cross among other things.

HOLY WELL

There will also be talks about the recent discovery of the location of the Holy Well in Linslade, once a great centre for pilgrimages, and about the secret operations in Leighton during the Second World War. Tickets are £25 including lunch. Dunstable History Society will have a stall at the conference where we will be promoting our activities.

A VERY SPECIAL VISITOR TO THE CITADEL

When the Salvation Army's first citadel in Dunstable was opened in St Mary's Street in 1937 it received a very special visitor: a white-haired grandmother who had founded the local corps 52 years previously.

Mrs Commissioner Ridsdell travelled from her home in Clacton to speak to local Salvationists.

The Dunstable Borough Gazette recorded her memories in some detail. "I was known as Captain Selby at the time," she said. "I was not married then... The District Commissioner sent the order to open at the old Drill Hall in Church Street about a fortnight before Christmas."

She was supposed to have the assistance of a Lieutenant but the arrangements fell through so she marched out of the Drill Hall alone, armed with a song book, a bible and a tambourine, to the central lamp in Dunstable crossroads where a crowd of about 200 assembled.

"I commenced with a hymn, and some of the congregation took up the words and finished the hymn for me," she said. "I told them all I could about the Salvation Army and invited them to the Drill Hall. There wasn't much more I could do, but some of the crowd followed me in and heard it all over again."

The Salvation Army later moved from the Drill Hall (later an antiques showroom and then the Book Castle) and made a former shop near the crossroads in High Street North its base for many years, before opening its purpose-built hall. This has subsequently been replaced by the present building whose entrance is in Bull Pond Lane.

DICK TURPIN'S CONNECTIONS WITH DUNSTABLE

A message to one of the Dunstable sites on Facebook innocently asked if anyone had details about the highwayman Dick Turpin's connections with Dunstable. It brought an immediate response, with at least 40 people volunteering information. Nearly all the facts were wrong, particularly those connecting him with the Wicked Lady of Markyate.

There have been numerous books published which give authentic and well-researched details about Dick Turpin's career. None of them has uncovered evidence that he ever operated in Dunstable or that tunnels exist where he or anyone else once hid.



The Old Half Moon Inn

There were many robberies on the Watling Street at Dunstable during the stagecoach days, and there are many records of local highwaymen. A blue plaque on the old Half Moon Inn in London Road says that it is reputed to have been the haunt of highwaymen and there's an old photo, reproduced here, of the inn in 1900 which has a handwritten caption identifying "Dick Turpin's room". So the legend continues...

John Buckledee