

NEWSLETTER

Dunstable & District Local History Society
No. 65
September 2024



Chairman's Notes

Our last newsletter mentioned the work being done to create a new signage board featuring the streets which disappeared when the Ashton Square car park was created.

This has now been completed and the board has been erected on the side of the offices of Alexander and Co, the estate agents.

The project was very much the brain-child of Joanne Bowes, of the Workhouse business in Ashton Square. She was thrilled to be able to trace the routes of such vanished roads as Moldyke Lane and Kiln Close. The history society helped with information and photographs, and artwork was created by David Turner. There has been further work on the "Talking Plaques" history trail which featured window stickers bearing QR codes telling the stories of various interesting buildings in the town centre. The history society wrote the scripts for each plaque, and sound recordings were made by members of Dunstable Rep. Now Katharine Brown has created an online App so people worldwide can go on a virtual tour of the history trail. Of course, those local people who can't be bothered to point their mobile phones at the shop window stickers can join in too! The web login details are <https://talkingplaques.story.app/> and people wanting to download the app on to their smart phones only need to search "Talking Plaques" and it should appear.

80TH ANNIVERSARY OF D-DAY

The history society has also been involved this summer in some of the local events commemorating the 80th anniversary of D-Day and we provided displays at the Motor Rally in Priory Gardens on July 8 and at the Lord Lieutenant's service in the Priory Church the following day. These, of course, featured the vital weather information provided to General Eisenhower by the Met Office at Dunstable, and the work on the Mulberry Harbours carried out at the Dunstable firm of Bagshawe.

We also copied out the various reports published by the Dunstable Borough Gazette in June 1944 recording local servicemen killed or injured at the Normandy beachheads, as well as the news which came through at the same time of casualties and prisoners from other war zones. The people mentioned are printed here so that they are not forgotten. Fuller details are in our records.

They include: Marine Commando Horace Rossen, of 262 West Street; Sgt Jack Leech, of 5 Worthington Road; Trooper William



The Lost Streets panel which can be seen on the wall of Alexander & Co.

Hunt, of 17 Leighton Road, Northall; WAAF Emily "Madge" Dickens, of 92 Victoria Street; Private George Allen, of 28 Benning Avenue; Private John Heap, of 119 Luton Road; Private Peter Adcock, of 7 Church Street; Private Jack Pratt, of 52 Periwinkle Lane; Private George Bartle, of 10 Park Lane, Eaton Bray; Private G M Trussell, of 18 St Michael's Avenue, Houghton Regis; Private Thomas Valler, of 59 Benning Avenue; Guardsman Bryan Ludbrook, of 8 Beech Road, Dunstable; Trooper Cyril Fountain, of 10 Victoria Street; L/Sgt Stanley Keast (ex Dunstable Grammar School boy); L/Cpl Bob Gurney, of Manor Farm, Studham; Flying Officer Frank Stannard, ex Northfields School teacher; Gunner Thomas Clarke, of 17 Worthington Road; Gunner Francis Harvey, of 26 Park Avenue, Houghton Regis; Gunner John Francis, of 36 Stipers Hill; Private William Paramor, of 38 Church Street; and Sgt W B Gladstone, of Dale Road.

TIMELINE

Work is continuing on a further edition of Rita Swift's Timeline of Dunstable which we are aiming to publish this Autumn. Additions are being made on an almost weekly basis to the list viewable on our website. If you spot any mistakes, please let us know before it goes to print!

BRENDA BOATWRIGHT

Brenda Boatwright, who died on Easter Sunday, will be remembered for numerous achievements during her exceptionally busy years of public service, but those of us who are particularly interested in the town's heritage will be especially grateful for her actions to persuade Dunstable Town Council to buy Priory House. Who knows what would have happened if the building, on which millions of pounds are currently being spent on its renovation, had passed into private ownership? A detailed appreciation of Brenda's life, written by Peter Hollick, was published in the Dunstable Gazette on April 10.

LEWIS EVANS

Sadly, in recent weeks we have also lost Lewis Evans, the genial husband of the town's much-missed historian Vivienne. He provided illustrations for many of her books. And we also remember history society member Peter Parker, veteran of the local aeronautical industry and well-known at the gliding club. He was probably the last surviving witness of the war-time incident when a German aircraft machine-gunned Dunstable high street.

John Buckledee

A founder of Dunstable Water Works



Dunstable in May 1873 celebrated the opening of Dunstable Water Works, described at the time as one of the greatest undertakings ever carried out in the town.

A pumping station had been built over a deep well adjoining the gas works and this enabled everyone in the borough to have a plentiful and continuous supply of drinking water.



William Jardine

The man who was a leader in the efforts to make this happen was William Jardine. He had the honour of ceremonially turning the valve at the town's reservoir to release the water into the new system.

Mr Jardine, a Scotsman, played an enormously influential part in Dunstable's history. From humble beginnings he became prosperous and his children went on to have distinguished careers. One was created a baronet and a later descendant became a famous cricketer.

William Jardine, son of a Dumfriesshire farmer, moved south with his fiancée and came to live in Dunstable in 1836.

The earliest local reference to him is a newspaper report of a Dunstable Caledonian Society dinner in September 1839 when he was one of the speakers – he proposed a toast to The Educational Institutions of Scotland.

DRAPER AND TEA IMPORTER

He seems to have started in business in Dunstable as a draper but at some point he became a tea importer and perhaps this led to his later prosperity (his will left legacies of over £2million by today's values). Research into his career in Dunstable has been prompted by an inquiry to the history society from his descendants who were trying to trace the houses where he lived. Family documents provide some clues but the town's street numbering was changed quite substantially in the 1920s so pinpointing the locations was not straightforward.

William and Jane Jardine's recorded address at the time of the 1851 census was 40 Church Street which (allowing for the later renumbering) meant that their home was right on the edge of what was then the built-up part of Dunstable, close to what became Station Road.

The area there was transformed when the railway between Dunstable and Luton opened in 1858. Work on building the line, together with a bridge across the road and a railway station alongside, began in October 1855. About this time some of the businesses listed on the 1851 census, including a shoe-maker and a wheelwright, disappeared. They would have been on sites which, much later, were occupied by a petrol filling station (also now replaced) and the present Kwikfit tyre depot.

The First and Last pub (so named because it marked the entrance or exit to the town) was probably built at this time to serve railway passengers. The pub site would have been alongside the Jardines' home.

Details about the progress of William Jardine's business are frustratingly scarce but being next to a railway station would have been ideal for a tea importer. Certainly, William became very influential in the town. By the time the railway to Luton was built, he was already a prominent member of the Dunstable community. There's a report in an old local newspaper, the *Dunstable Chronicle*, of Dunstable's annual Parish Vestry meeting on March 26 1857 in which there was mention of "the able and praiseworthy way which Mr. W. Jardine and Mr. J. Marshall have performed the office of Surveyors". The Vestry was, of course, the forerunner of the present system of

local government and the surveyors were responsible for organising the maintenance of the town's roads.

ONE OF ITS FIRST COUNCILLORS

In 1864 Dunstable Borough Council was created and Mr. Jardine became one of its first councillors. Alas, his wife did not live to be part of this. She died in 1861, leaving four sons and a daughter.

There's an early newspaper report of what were lively times in local government. The *Beds Times* of November 3 1866, describing a Dunstable council election, wrote:

"This event came off on Thursday last amidst the greatest excitement, the party spirit displayed being equal to that of a general election. During the early portion of the day matters went along pretty quietly, but at two o'clock Mr. W. Willis, of Luton, ascended a cab in front of the Red Lion Hotel, for the purpose of addressing the men of Dunstable. No sooner had he made his appearance than he was assailed with mingled shouts and cheers from the bystanders, and the tune of 'Moll Brooks' from the band of the party who were in opposition to the one whose claims he was about to advocate. The band of his own party made confusion more confused by endeavouring to play down the others.

After a half-hour's unsuccessful attempt to make himself heard, he made an inglorious retreat into the Red Lion, and a general fight ensued outside amongst the opposing elements.

"There were sixteen candidates offering themselves for election, and of this number eight were selected being eligible, and these were divided into two parties of four each, termed high and low, or blue and yellow; the former consisting of Mr. B. Bennett, jun, Mr. Joseph Darby, Mr. William Jardine, and Mr. John Henry Limbrey; the latter party being Mr. John Clarke Barker, Mr. William Marshall, Mr. James Tibbett and Mr. Edwin Hanchard.

"At the close of the poll the following statement was issued: Bennett 347, Jardine 314, Limbrey 303, Darby 306; Barker 113, Marshall 109, Hanchard 66, Tibbett 125. It will therefore be seen that the four first-named were the successful ones."

Before this event, William's third son, John Jardine, had already left the town to study at Christ's College, Cambridge. In 1864, he won the chancellor's Gold Medal for English Verse.

To have the chance of a university education was a remarkable achievement, particularly considering that his earlier lessons had been at Chew's Charity School in High Street South, Dunstable. John went on to have a distinguished career in the colonial service in India and later entered British politics. He was created 1st Baronet of Godalming in 1916.

Another descendant, Douglas Jardine (William's great-grandson) became particularly famous: he was captain of the English cricket team during the 1932-33 Ashes tour of Australia which is still remembered for the "bodyline" controversy when the English bowlers' tactics of pitching the ball short was regarded as intimidatory and dangerous.

MAYOR OF DUNSTABLE

William Jardine became Mayor of Dunstable in 1869. His appointment came a few months after he learned of the death, aged 26, of his second son, Robert, who (like his brother) was serving in India.

Local newspaper coverage of William's election as Mayor are frustratingly short of details about his life and career and include a rather downbeat nomination speech. According to the *Luton Times* on November 13 1869 his election was proposed by Mr Limbrey

who said that everyone would agree that William Jardine was most fitted to become mayor for the ensuing year. He added: "Alderman Jardine was not a member of the aristocracy; at one period he was a member of the working classes in England but, turning his attention to trade, had secured competence in the town."

The Borough Mayor at that time automatically became presiding magistrate at hearings in Dunstable Court. Alderman Jardine found himself very busy passing sentence on a variety of miscreants, seemingly dealing with them in a more-kindly fashion than was normal for the time. He was also very active on the committees of a number of local benevolent and charitable organisations.

TOWN'S WATER WORKS

In May 1873 the Dunstable Borough Gazette reported on the opening of the town's Water Works - "One of the greatest undertakings ever carried out in Dunstable".

The need for a more plentiful supply of fresh water had long been a subject claiming the attention of the town's leading men, said the report, and the work needed had been carried out under many disadvantages. On the day of the opening they could be seen "ostentatiously wending their way through the town to the site of the reservoir" where the chairman of the company responsible, Mr W Jardine, performed the ceremony of turning the valve enabling a plentiful supply of good water to be within the reach of all inhabitants.

The reservoir at Half Moon Hill was connected to the new water works which had been built on a site near the railway station in High Street North. There, three steam-driven pumps pumped water raised from a deep boring in the chalk to the reservoir a mile and a quarter away. This was lined with brick and cement and was at the highest point in the town, so that water could be delivered continuously, by gravity, to taps at every house.

Long before this great event, certainly by 1871, Mr Jardine had moved from Church Street to a more prestigious address in High Street North. The changes in street numbering have made this difficult to identify, but has become virtually certain that it is the three-storey building close to the Regent Street junction known today as Wentworth House. It is now used as offices. There is a photograph from the 1870s showing the Jardine family in their rear garden, now used as a parking space, and this is well-nigh identical to today's building despite later alterations.

Any remaining doubts about the location vanished when an 1875 newspaper article was discovered. This reported on a levee held at St James Palace by the Prince of Wales and said that among the gentlemen presented to the Prince was Mr Justice Jardine on appointment as a Judge of Her Majesty's High Court of Judicature in Bombay.



The front of Wentworth House in High Street North today



The Jardine family in the Wentworth House garden c1870

The report added that Mr Justice Jardine (presumably John Jardine) was a native of Dunstable and said that his father, the late Mr William Jardine, of Wentworth House, was a borough magistrate who filled the office of Mayor in 1869. Mr Justice Jardine, said the report, was educated at Chew's Foundation School under Mr Hambling and thence he went to Cambridge.

William Jardine died on December 28 1873, four months after the death in India of his eldest son, also named William.

The death of Dunstable's former Mayor was reported in the Dunstable Borough Gazette:

DEATH OF WILLIAM JARDINE ESQ.

It is our melancholy duty today, to chronicle the death of one of the most esteemed gentlemen in our town viz: William Jardine, Esq. His death took place on Sunday evening. The deceased gentleman had been declining for some time, but his end has no doubt been hastened by the blow he received by the death of his eldest son in India. Still almost up to the last day he was moving about, and it is only a few weeks since he was upon the bench at the Petty Sessions. His death has thrown quite a gloom over the town, everyone expressing their opinion, that a good and wise friend has passed away. Mr. Jardine came to Dunstable in 1836, and since that time his life has been one worthy of imitation. There is no office that he has not filled, either before or since the town was incorporated. He was one of the first magistrates, and one of the first councillors and at the time of his death was an alderman."

The funeral service was at Dunstable Baptist Church and Alderman Jardine was buried in Dunstable Cemetery. The property left in his will included The Bricklayers Arms and cottages in Edward Street.

The great enterprise to bring drinking water to every home in Dunstable did not continue smoothly. The water in the well at High Street North became polluted and the pumping station was then moved to a site adjoining the reservoir in Half Moon Hill in 1894. A second well was put down in 1901 and an additional well was sunk in 1912 on Spittle Bottom Estate in Periwinkle Lane.

A water tower (now demolished) was built above the reservoir in 1924 and a new reservoir has since been dug at an even-higher site at the top of Beech Road.

John Buckledee



The Water Tower at Half Moon Hill in 1967

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.

JAMES FIELD

James Field was one of the leading photographers in Dunstable in the early 1900s. He was a friend of the Dunstable historian Worthington G Smith and provided many of the photographs included in Smith's History of Dunstable published in 1904. James Field was born on 22nd May 1855 at High Street, Dunstable. His father was also James Field who at the time was described as an agricultural labourer. His mother was Patience Field (formerly Smith). James (senior) and Patience had married on 18th February 1844 at the Parish Church, Caddington. Both were living at The Green, Caddington at the time of the marriage.

James was 15 at the time of the 1871 census and he was shown as living at home and working as a hairdresser's apprentice, possibly to his uncle Joseph who was a hairdresser himself.

When he was around 18 years of age he joined the local Congregational Church and for many years he acted as the secretary. He also joined the Dunstable Liberal Club around the same time and remained a life-long member.

Between 1871 and 1877 the family moved to 71 Edward Street, Dunstable.

In March 1884 James married Louisa Sawyer of 77 Edward Street, Dunstable, at the Congregational Church in Luton. After their marriage the couple lived at 75 High Street North and James was trading as hairdresser at that address. This property was subsequently renumbered 24 High Street North in the 1920s. It would have stood close to the current entrance to Nicholas Way from High Street North and was demolished to make way for the Quadrant development.

Trade directories of 1890 and 1894 and the census of 1891 list James as a hairdresser at this address and in 1898 as a hairdresser and picture framer.

DUNSTABLE BOROUGH COUNCILLOR

Around 1900 James was elected as a Dunstable Borough councillor and the 1901 census shows he was still resident at 75 High Street North with his wife Louisa and he is described as both a hairdresser and a photographer.

By 1903 he has become a councillor endeavouring to improve the living conditions for the people of Dunstable by raising the standards expected for residential buildings.

He was also instrumental, along with another councillor, Arthur Nash, a builder, in forming a New Industries Committee to try to attract new businesses to the town. After the decline of the straw hat industry it was seen as vital to try to attract new employers to the town. Together they often visited London to promote Dunstable as a place for business relocation. Through their work they managed to encourage businesses such as Bagshawes and Cross Paperware to come to Dunstable providing valuable jobs for the town. Alongside his work as a councillor he took a keen interest in the work of the Dunstable Mutual Improvement Society.

In 1906 his occupation is recorded for the first time as a photographer at 75 High Street North.

By 1914 James and Louisa had been married for 30 years but no children had been born to the couple. He is still a town councillor and listed as a photographer and picture framer at 75 High Street North.

James died aged 62 at High Street North on 14th January 1918. The cause of his death was recorded as sclerosis of the brain and coma. His funeral was held at the Congregational Church in Edward Street, Dunstable, and he was buried at West Street Cemetery. In his will dated May 1890, James left his entire estate to his wife, Louisa Field. His death was seen not only as a sad loss for his family and friends, but also for the town. By the time he died he had served around 18 years in public life promoting the interests of the town.

LOUISA CONTINUED THE PHOTOGRAPHIC BUSINESS

After the renumbering of the property in the early 1920s from 75 High Street North, Louisa was shown in a directory of 1923 to be living at 24 White Hart Yard but this would have been the same property now renumbered 24 High Street North. It appears Louisa carried on the photographic business after her husband's death because even in the early 1920s there were still references to the photographic business at 24 High Street North.

Louisa died in May 1945, aged 87, at 118 West Street. She was buried alongside her husband at West Street Cemetery.

On the right is an advert for James Field's business. He consistently advertised his business in the Dunstable Gazette during this time.

Trevor Hunt

Where to Shop in Dunstable.

Dost Thou Love Pictures?

—Advertisement—

They are a means of Education and make the home bright and attractive.

My business is to frame Pictures, and the right kind of Frame adds much to the attractiveness of the Picture. I always study what is suitable for each subject, and I do the work at the lowest possible price. I have a new and varied stock of Mouldings, adapted for all kinds of Pictures.

Another branch of my business is

Pictorial Photography.

In taking a Portrait my chief aim is to obtain a pleasing natural likeness.

If you are visiting this interesting neighbourhood I should be pleased to show you my Pictorial Post Cards, View Books, and Photographs of Pretty Views of the Town and Neighbourhood. These are very suitable for sending to friends, or would be a valued Souvenir of your visit to Dunstable.

THE STUDIO,
75, HIGH ST., NORTH,
DUNSTABLE,
Where the Good Photos are taken.

James Field

An advert from the Dunstable Gazette for James Field

Greeting New Members



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

Lindsay Betts Jayne Fishenden Lorna Leech
Barbara Macrae Mark Morgan Tara Morgan
Denis O'Donoghue Nicola Wakelin

Sad Farewell



We are very sorry to announce the sad loss of

Brenda Boatwright Lewis Evans Barbara Macrae



James Field's photo of the town hall in High Street North, looking north



James Field's photo of High Street North, looking south with the town hall in the distance



James Field's photo of the bank buildings in High Street North



James Field's photo of the White Hart Inn in High Street North, his shop is on the right

Dunstable Lace

When I retired from full-time teaching, a colleague, Sue Harrison, presented me with a Cross made of Bedfordshire lace (see fig 1). It came in a beautiful wooden frame (see fig 2) but I took it out, briefly, to photograph it.

Sue was an exponent of this craft and used to teach it to some of the children at our school. There are various accounts of the origins of Bedfordshire lace.

One of them says that when Catherine of Aragon was under house-arrest in Ampthill Castle, she taught this style of lace-making to the villagers. If this is so, it has a special resonance for our town as this was during the period of the Court of Annulment. In May 1533 Thomas Cranmer, newly elected Archbishop of Canterbury, presided over this Court in the original Lady Chapel of our Augustinian Priory. On May 23rd of that year, Cranmer, with no authority whatsoever, decreed that Catherine of Aragon and Henry VIII had never been legally married, that the marriage was null and void. Catherine was in Ampthill and Henry was in Greenwich, pretending not to know what was going on.

Another source says that refugee Huguenot lace-makers from Flanders settled in Bedfordshire in the 16th century and brought their craft with them. There are also references to bone lace, which was taught to children of people in workhouses, so that they could earn something towards their upkeep. The highpoint

of handmade lace came to an end with the invention of the bobbinet machine in Nottingham in the late 18th century.

Bedfordshire lace can also be called bobbin lace or pillow lace. The threads are wound onto bobbins and the piece of lace is made on a pillow and held in place with pins. There are examples of Bedfordshire lace in the Higgins Art Gallery and Museum in Bedford.

Hugh Garrod

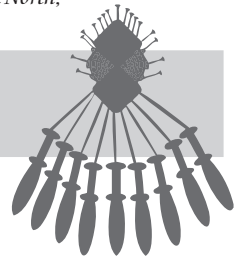


Fig 1 Dunstable lace cross



Fig 2 The lace cross in the frame

George Eric Collins 1908-1935



1930S GLIDER PILOT

I was recently asked if I knew where Eric Collins was buried.

With a little help from a friend I found his grave. Eric Collins took up gliding in Dunstable in January 1932 and he soon became one of the top glider pilots. He was an instrument maker but after flying gliders he gave up making instruments and devoted all of his time to gliding. He took a small cottage in Flamstead with his wife who he had married a few months earlier.

GERMAN 'RHONADLER'

Eric was hired as an instructor at a glider meeting on 18th June 1933 at Huish in Wiltshire, flying a BAC VII, a British built glider. On one flight in July after being auto-tow launched (a car with a long rope pulling the glider up) he achieved a cross country distance of 6 miles and two days later he managed to climb to 2,350 feet. He set a distance record of 19½ miles from Dunstable in a 'Poffessor' sailplane on 23th August 1933. He learnt to find thermals (upward rising air) without instruments by sensing slight differences under the wings of his glider and turning into the side which was lifting the most. His record flight got into the newspapers.

Eric did not get on with his stepmother so he hadn't seen his father for 8 years. However, when his father read about him in the newspapers he offered to buy him the best available glider in 1934. This was the German 'Rhoadler', the most efficient sailplane at the time. This he got in April 1934.

Meanwhile, on the 18th March, he flew a 'Kassel' two seat glider with a passenger 46 miles from Dunstable to Essex. Next he flew his 'Rhoadler' 52 miles from Dunstable to Rayleigh on the 22nd April 1934. With this flight he became the first British pilot to get a Silver C certificate. Eric went to Germany on a gliding course at the Wolf Hirst high performance school. Here he flew to a height of 6,825ft; this became a local record.

GREATEST FLIGHT OF HIS LIFE,

Back in England on the 5th August 1934 he did the greatest flight of his life, 95 miles from Dunstable to Holkham Bay Norfolk. In 1935 Collins made the first appearance of a sailplane at the Royal Aeronautical Society. Taking off from Reading being towed by an aeroplane the cable broke. But finding thermals he arrived on time making a diving approach which enabled his glider to float for hundreds of yards across the aerodrome.

FORWARD LOOP

Soon afterwards he got a lucrative engagement with Sir Alan Cobham's air displays performing aerobatics in a Slingsby built Grunau Baby glider. During a display at Upwood Huntingdonshire he tried to do a manoeuvre called a Bunt (a forward loop). The glider was not designed for this and under the stress a wing broke off. Eric Collins was killed in the accident. His wife survived him and worked at the London Gliding Club until the outbreak of war, then became an ambulance driver in St Albans. Eric Collins is buried in God's Acre cemetery Flamstead.

In a short period of time, just 44 months, during Eric's brilliant gliding career, he had flown 185 hours, 19 different types of gliders and sailplanes at 15 gliding sites in England and Germany.

David Underwood



George Eric Collins and the Rhönadler 32



George Eric Collin's ill-fated Grunau Baby



George Eric Collins' grave

A Plate from Dunstable Massachusetts

A friend of mine from church, Claire Dowsing, gave me a plate for the History Society's Research Room.

She told me that she, her sister and her sister's partner planned to visit Dunstable, Massachusetts, during their visit to the USA in 2009. Before they left, they went to see our town's Mayor, who that year was Peter Hollick. Peter arranged for the Press to be present and to interview the three of them. When they were state-side, their visit to Dunstable included a meeting with the Mayor. Claire's sister showed some locals a photograph of a group outside our Priory and one of the ladies in the group recognised her aunt in the photo. Some years after returning home, Claire found the plate in a charity shop. She bought it and had it in her kitchen for some time. She now feels it important to pass it on.

The plate shows a picture of 'The Evangelical Congregational Church of Dunstable, Massachusetts', as it was when it was originally built. Social media shows it looking somewhat different nowadays. On the back, the plate has a label.

PRESTON-HOPKINSON

Est. 1949

P. O. Drawer 341

Bedford VA 24523

For Decorative Use Only

Toll Free 1-800-872-1278



The social media picture of the church today

This Bedford is the count seat of Bedford County in the Piedmont region of Virginia, population in 2021 of 6,642. The reason it says in italics 'for decorative use only' is because the image is only on a film, stuck on the plate, and could easily be peeled off.

Hugh Garrod

Memories of old Dunstable

There were some pleasant surprises for history society members at the annual 'Mayor's Sunday' service held this year at the Priory Church.

CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

The Mayor, Cllr Liz Jones, chose the occasion to present a Certificate of Appreciation to our Vice Chairman, Hugh Garrod, to mark his work for the town. Hugh, a retired headmaster and a founder member of this society, has steered Dunstable to its successes in the Britain In Bloom awards as well as sharing his fount of knowledge about cricket and local history. Congratulations Hugh!

The address at the service was given by the Rector, the Rev Rachel Phillips, whose themes included some of the humorous references to the exploits of past Mayors as recorded in Rita Swift's Timeline of Dunstable. They included the 1893 reference to the "bad behaviour" of nine boys who were brought before the Mayor for sliding on the frozen pond at Kingsbury Farm. Let's give a "shout" for the history society, said the Rector.

THE VINTAGE GLIDER CLUB

Another history society member has also received a special honour. One of David Underwood's particular interests is the restoration of old-time gliders and his expertise has been recognised by the presentation to him of a handsome medallion by the Vintage Glider Club.

THE CROWN INN

The publicity for the latest volume to be published by the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society talks about "the luxurious inn at Dunstable" – a statement which has intrigued some of our members.

The book prints details which have recently come to light about early wills in the county. One of these was by James Duckington, whose documentation reveals that he was the innholder of The Crown at Dunstable around 1598-1604. It must have been a substantial property and Barbara Tearle, editor of the Record Society's new book, asked the Dunstable history society if we could trace its address. We were delighted to be able to provide a little information.

There have been quite a few inns named The Crown in Dunstable, and Mr Duckington's hostelry must have been the one in High Street South (South Street). Some years ago the late Joan Curran searched through Manor Court records to try to identify its exact location. The Crown is mentioned there a number of times and the records identify it as being very close to another inn called the Star. We know exactly where this was because the Star was converted into the town's workhouse in 1780 and was demolished in around 1836. Today the workhouse site is occupied by the Dunstable Lock and Safe Company (number 89 High Street South).

Later in Dunstable's history there was another Crown: a famous coaching inn in High Street North (adjoining today's Eleanor Cross shopping precinct) which began calling itself by that name in the 1720s (previously it was called The Windmill and Still). When the stagecoach industry came to an end the inn closed. In about 1845 its building was converted into a hat factory, also called the Crown.

continued over

Today's pub called The Crown, quite close to the crossroads, was previously called The Raven and then The Crow. It added an "N" and changed its name to The Crown in 1869.

Barbara Tearle's new volume is titled *Bedfordshire Probate Inventories Before 1660* and is available from Boydell and Brewer, the history book publishers.

WAR WOUNDED

Here's a story about one of Dunstable's war wounded which was never published in the newspapers. Les Marsh, now a committee member of the history society, was one of the young lads who enjoyed racing to collect the parachute material from flares which were frequently being tested on Dunstable Downs in the 1940s. This was in the days when clothes were rationed and silken material was highly desirable.

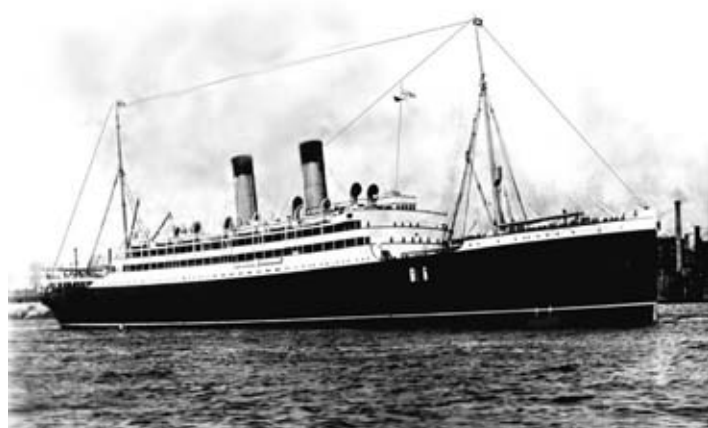
Young Les saw a flare dropping in the area around Dunstable Cemetery, off what is now Meadway. He ran through the darkness towards the flare and did not see a wire stretching across the pathway. It badly cut his neck and when his mum saw the injury she took him to Dr Gerald Ashton's surgery in Church Street. The doctor sent him to hospital to have the wound stitched.

THE EMPRESS OF IRELAND

A recent tv documentary featured the disaster off the coast of Canada which befell the ocean liner, the *Empress of Ireland*, in May 1914. It collided with a Norwegian collier, the *Storstad*, in thick fog and sank very rapidly into the icy waters of the St Lawrence River. Most of the liner's passengers had been asleep when this happened and 1,012 people died. It was a tragedy comparable with the earlier sinking of the *Titanic*.

Rita Swift's researches for the forthcoming new edition of *Dunstable Timeline* led her to discover a local reference to the disaster. The *Leighton Buzzard Observer* on June 9 wrote about the anxiety being felt by relatives of Mr and Mrs G Stone, formerly of Dunstable, who were supposed to have set sail for England on the ill-fated liner. There had been no news about their whereabouts, and when the mail arrived with no message from them it was feared that the worst had happened.

There were few further local reports about the disaster, with the news being dominated by the outbreak of the First World War. But it appears that Mr and Mrs George Stone had once lived at Half Moon Hill, Dunstable, and had emigrated to Canada. They had been planning to return to England aboard the *Empress of Ireland* for a holiday.



The ill-fated Empress of Ireland

Researchers have compiled a list of passengers aboard the ship which includes the name of Mrs George Stone (nee Impey), aged 37, whose first name was Emma. She was in the third-class and deepest section of the boat from which it would have been particularly difficult to escape and she is not listed as a survivor. Puzzlingly, there is no reference to her husband as being on board. Perhaps we will trace more details about him in the future.

Other early local reports of the sinking mention that Mr Clements, a brother of the wife of the Rev. Alfred Butler, Pastor of the Hockliffe Street Baptist Church in Leighton Buzzard, who was understood by his relatives in England to be joining the *Empress of Ireland*, had not been heard of since the disaster. The name of Robert H Clements is included on the lists of those who died.

One of the survivors was Arthur Thomas Smart, a son of George Smart, of "The Chalet," Old Bedford Road, Luton. Many of his relatives were unaware that he was on the ill-fated steamship until they received a cablegram saying that he was safe.

PRICKING IN THE BELT OR GARTER

Stories abound in Dunstable about gambling, whether they are tales about wagers on cock fights at the rear of the old White Hart or bets on horse racing by gentry staying at the Sugar Loaf. King Edward II is recorded as coming to Dunstable to settle the gaming debts of his sister (living at Leighton Buzzard) and there are tales in more recent times about local venues where illegal bets on horse racing could be picked up by a bookie's runner. But who has heard about an unlawful gambling game called "Pricking in the Belt or Garter"? We've stumbled across a report about the game being played at Dunstable Cow Fair on November 12 1802 when a servant named Thomas Woodward, of Battlesden, lost the enormous sum of four guineas. It seems to have been some kind of street game like "Find The Lady?" where sleight of hand could fool an unwary punter.

THE LOCATION OF THE METEOROLOGICAL OFFICE

The history society has been drawn into a discussion about whether Dunstable Meteorological Office was actually in the parish of Houghton Regis.

Well, we can confirm that this piece of land at the bottom of Brewers Hill Road really WAS in Houghton, albeit a long way from Houghton village centre. Dunstable Borough Council purchased fields there from Alice Mary Beecroft in 1930 and later began building houses for workers needed by the town's rapidly expanding manufacturing factories. There was then a dispute about which local authority should receive the rates payable by the new householders. A boundary commission held an inquiry in 1953 and decided to allow Dunstable to expand and officially incorporate the Houghton land.

Ironically, at about the same time as the arguments were being presented to the commission, the *Dunstable Gazette* reported on a broadcast by the BBC from what it happily called "Dunstable Met Office". A bit difficult then to start calling it "Houghton Met". The weather forecasting station moved to Bracknell in 1961. It had wanted to substantially expand in Dunstable and set up additional wireless masts but local authorities objected, saying the land was more urgently needed for houses.

Incidentally, the February edition of this newsletter featured a Christmas card issued in 1955 to commemorate the Met Office's centenary. The article should have mentioned that the card was kindly given to the history society by Mrs Pat Mitchell to whom we extend our thanks.

John Buckledee