

NEWSLETTER

Dunstable & District Local History Society
No. 66 February 2025



Chairman's Notes

I hope you were fascinated by the film clip, shown at our December meeting, of BBC Television's coverage on August 12 1965 of the finding of the Swan Brooch at the site of the Friary, off Bull Pond Lane.

DORMAN'S PHOTOGRAPHIC SHOP

Your history society went to a good deal of trouble to screen the clip. The film reel was in a metal container at the headquarters of the Manshead Archaeological Society in Winfield Street. We retrieved the reel when the Manshead closed and then had a DVD copy made by the Dorman's photographic shop in the Quadrant. It was one of the last jobs of its type undertaken by Dorman's before they closed in 2023. Dorman's was a long-established business in the town, having started originally in West Street.

THE BBC'S FIRST FEMALE NEWS REPORTER,

The film showed interviews conducted at Dunstable and in the British Museum by Audrey Russell. To see Ms Russell again added to the interest: she was the BBC's first female news reporter, joining the corporation in 1942 and covering the fighting in Normandy after the D-Day landings.

In Dunstable she visited the archaeological excavations of the Friary and spoke to the Manshead's site director, Les Matthews, and the Manshead member who discovered the brooch, Maxene Miller.

THE SWAN JEWEL

The gold and enamel brooch, now a prized exhibit in the British Museum, has been the subject of so much local publicity that it was a surprise to history society mem-



Audrey Russell being filmed by the BBC at the Friary excavation in 1965

bers to find that many local people knew nothing at all about it.

PLINTH IN BENNETT'S REC

This gap in their knowledge was revealed on social media earlier this year when Dunstable Council installed a plinth in Bennett's Rec bearing a wooden carving of the swan, prompting a flurry of online interest. One parent confessed that he hadn't known until now why his child's school (Lancot Academy) has a depiction of the swan jewel as its badge.

KING HENRY V

There was even more discussion about the brooch after it was reported that it may have once belonged to King Henry V, of Agincourt fame. That is a great leap of guesswork. There have been thousands of words written about its origin and the use of the swan image as a livery badge for followers of various powerful factions, particularly by supporters of the Lancastrian cause during the Wars of the Roses. The Prince of Wales adopted the device before he became King Henry V (died 1422) and, as some experts believe the Dunstable brooch was made in the 1400s, it is plausible that the jewel could have been worn by one of his prominent supporters. How it came to be lost in the rubble of the old Friary is another mystery.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

On more modern matters, this is a reminder that the society's annual general meeting will be held after the talk at the Methodist Church hall on March 11. 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.



The Dunstable Swan Jewel

John Buckledee

Leighton Buzzard Narrow Gauge Railway (LBNGR)



THE EARLY YEARS - 1919 TO 1930

It could be argued that this railway was built because, in 1914, Belgium was a neutral country, like Switzerland.

NEUTRALITY

Belgium had been guaranteed its neutrality by the Treaty of London in 1839. The Treaty was signed on 19 April 1839 between all the major European powers, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and the Kingdom of Belgium. Under the Treaty, the European powers recognised and guaranteed the independence and neutrality of Belgium and established the full independence of the German-speaking part of Luxembourg. Article VII of the Treaty required Belgium to remain perpetually neutral. Following the German invasion of 1914, Belgium abandoned its policy of neutrality (except for a brief, unsuccessful resumption from 1936 to 1940).

WEAPON OF WAR

Before the war started in 1914, London was the busiest port in the UK and a lot of the shipping traffic was the export of manufactured goods from the Midlands. Ships would come in from many nations, and many came in loaded with ballast. The captains of most of the ships arriving would have to pay for the ballast to be unloaded and taken away. One of the exceptions was shipping from Belgium as they came in with sand as ballast, which was ideal for use in the foundries of the West Midlands. This meant that Belgian captains received payment for their ballast, which was very popular with them. However, the Hague Conventions on Land Warfare (1899 and 1907) defines foundry sand as a 'weapon of war' and when there is a war, neutral countries must not trade 'weapons of war' with belligerents. So, as Belgium was a neutral country, the foundries of the West Midlands had to find an alternative source of sand and they found it at the end of the Greensand Ridge, just north of Leighton Buzzard. The sand was not near either the canal system or the mainline railway and so it had to be moved from the sand pits to the rail station and canal side in Leighton Buzzard.

SOLID TYRES

All day and every day wagons and lorries would trundle back and forth through the town. And at that time lorries had solid tyres - see Photo 1 - as did the wagons, so the roads needed an awful lot of maintenance. Because the damage was a direct consequence of the war the road repairs were funded by the War Department to the tune of £1,000 per month - in today's money that's over £100,000.



Photo 1 - Lorries with solid tyres

Not surprisingly, when the war ended on 11th November 1918, the War Department quickly wrote to Beds County Council, passing the road repair responsibility back to the Council. The Council in turn wrote to the two sand companies, passing the road repair responsibility to them.

NARROW GAUGE RAILWAY AT WOOLWICH ARSENAL

The sand companies became aware that there were a lot of narrow gauge railway items at Woolwich Arsenal, because there had been an enormous network of railways behind the front lines. In total the Germans and Allies had about 27,000 kilometres (approximately 168,000 miles) of front line narrow gauge railway. In this case, narrow gauge has 2 feet rail to rail, instead of 4 feet 8 1/4 inches for standard gauge. It was used because, compared to standard gauge, it was quicker to lay, easier to repair, cheaper and easier to relay as the front lines moved back and forth. In fact a team of the British Army's track layers could often lay up to 6 miles of track in a day.

Of course, once the war had ended all the stock of railway items being held at Woolwich Arsenal was war surplus, so the two sand companies set up a separate light railway company that bought all that they needed at knock-down prices.

The sand companies wrote to Bedfordshire County Council asking for permission to build the railway and about the only stipulation was that they must use a man with a red flag to stop the traffic when crossing Stanbridge Road, Hockliffe Road and Vandyke Road. At that time Appenine Way did not exist and Shenley Hill Road was not much more than a farm track.

With permission having been granted, the line was laid and the first train ran on 2nd November 1919, just a year after the end of the war.



Photo 2 - The route of the narrow gauge railway

Francis Alick Fowler



The following are extracts from personal notes, written in 1974, by Francis Alick Fowler, 1891-1980. They are of interest because they show how Dunstable had changed from his younger days until he wrote these notes and how our town has changed since 1974. Besides the biographical details in his notes, it should be added that he was Secretary to the Parochial Church Council for over 40 years. His draftsman's skills are evident in the many drawings he did of Dunstable Priory and other local churches. The photograph shows him with Percy Ward. Together they were the editors of the Parish Magazine. Alick's son, David, who died in 2024, was Sacristan at the Priory Church for over 40 years.

ONLY PUBLIC HOUSES BETWEEN DUNSTABLE AND IVINGHOE

The view one gets of the Downs from Totternhoe is spoilt by houses on Tring Road and on Totternhoe Road. A lot of building has taken place here. When I was a boy there was nothing between the Rifleman public house and Ivinghoe, except the Plough Inn and the Traveller's Rest at Edlesborough and Dagnall cross roads.

A footpath ran northwards to Houghton Regis, there was first a large meadow which was behind the houses in Church Street and had a pond in its north-west corner. There was another and much smaller meadow, also with a pond, and finally a large field called the Litany Field which backed on Park Farm in the High Street of the town, where Queensway is now. The path crossed the railway line by gates and then continued up the hill to Houghton Regis. In the north-west corner of the field, beside the railway, was a clump of trees and a large pond which was known as the Litany. I suppose that here was made a station at the Rogation procession of the Medieval church – hence the name. These ponds doubtless served to drain the water from the Augustinian Priory in the olden days. We always called these fields the 'Back Fields' and loved to play in them. The meadow lands of Kingsbury Farm were grazed by cows and there were wild flowers in plenty, in springtime. Around these meadows were high hawthorn hedges, snow-white with blossom in late May and early June, and gay with the wild rose.

DOBBIN HOLT

Between the Back Way and Church Street, the cottages on the north side of the street were set back from the road, behind a depression known to us as Dell Hole. A colourful character who lived in Church Street, just beyond Dell Hole, where the houses were again brought forward to street level, was Dobbin Holt. Dobbin kept all sorts of creatures. He had, at one time, a tame owl which he kept in a large pen and possessed a fox which was kept just like a dog in a kennel. I suppose he had brought it up from a cub and had taken it in pity after the vixen had been killed in a hunt, for he followed the hounds.

KINGSBURY FARM

Westwards of the Ladies' Lodge was Kingsbury Farm, its walled farmyard adjoining the Ladies' Lodge almshouses. Here was a stone-built barn with a fine timber roof. Kingsbury was the site of Henry's house which he built when he established the town



Francis Alick Fowler (left) and Percy Ward, the Priory Church magazine editors in the early years of his reign and carved it out of the lands of the Royal Manor of Houghton Regis.

As a boy, I had many recollections of Kingsbury Farm, particularly at threshing-time, when the steam engine arrived and we hunted for rats and mice with the dogs. We had great fun in the fields at harvest time for my grandfather worked on the farm and the summer holidays were spent in the fields and meadows, now no more, for the whole area is built over with factories and houses on both sides of the railway line.

C OF E INFANTS' SCHOOL

I attended, first of all, the old C of E Infants' School, now the parish Church Hall which adjoins the churchyard at its north-west corner. I later crossed the road to the Ashton Schools which in those days were for boys and girls in separate buildings – a rather nice Victorian Gothic group, now spoilt and modernised. It had a bell turret on its centre building and a boy was detailed to ring the bell. We always started with a hymn and prayer, usually followed by a scripture lesson. During my time at the school, the Headmaster was a Mr. Knight, who was a strict disciplinarian but fair and just. I loved school and the teachers were nice. Occasionally, the proceedings were enlivened by incidents involving troublesome boys who were dealt with swiftly by six strokes of the best, always administered by the headmaster, with some ceremonial before the whole school. One afternoon sticks in my memory. One of the boys had to be punished. It took several teachers to hold such a wriggly customer down over a desk for Mr. Knight to cane his bottom. In the proceedings, Mr. Knight's detachable starched cuffs flew off. Immediately the caning was finished, the boy mounted a desk, jumped out of an open window and made for home. When his father learned what had happened, he got a parental wacking as well. The only time I was punished was during a Scripture lesson when I received chastisement for not being able to repeat the Apostles' Creed correctly, which, considering that I had been brought up as a Calvinistic Baptist and attended Sunday School there, I thought very unfair. One of our teachers, Mr. 'Billy' Bandy was a rather corpulent person and like most fat people, was always kind and friendly. Needless to say, all the boys loved him.

GOOD AT ART

At school I liked art and drawing lessons the best. I always could draw things convincingly, for it seemed to come naturally to me.

I was good at water colours and I remember well, being set to copy a bunch of azaleas. It took several lessons to complete but I made a very good job of it.

My chief love, and always has been, was architectural drawing and sketching, the medium usually pen and ink or pencil. I grew to love church architecture. It fascinated me. It may have been a reaction against the unadorned meeting-houses of the strict Calvinism, where all that is beautiful and smacks of sensualism is cast out. My first recollection of the interior of the Priory Church was being taken there for a Harvest Thanks-giving Service. I was then about six. I was familiar enough with its north side and beautiful west front, seeing it daily, but I had never been inside. All my people came originally from Northall and were Calvinists and attended the little Bethel, set back from the road through the village, standing by itself across the fields. When they removed to Dunstable, they of course attended the Ebenezer in St. Mary's Street. I don't remember much about the service in the Priory, which was all Greek to me, but I do remember the verger with a long pole at the end of which was a lighted taper, lighting the naked gas jets which at the level of the triforium, went round the north and south sides of the nave. What a smell of escaping gas before all were lighted! I had never been in an ancient church before and the massive Norman architecture impressed me. The beautiful west front was very much decayed and its open gallery positively dangerous. I remember the clock face being hauled up in position on the north side of the tower to commemorate Queen Victoria's Jubilee (1897).

SHEEP GRAZING

The churchyard grazed sheep, as did also the Priory meadow, which in those days was private property and belonged to a Mr. Munt who owned and lived in Priory House. There was a path from the churchyard at its south-east corner, skirting the Priory meadow and crossing a large field diagonally to Britain Street. This field was known as Star Close and is now the playing-field for the Priory School. In Britain Street, where now is the school, was a row of thatched cottages. The roofs took fire one Sunday morning and the cottages were destroyed. I well remember going to see the fire.

BLOW'S DOWNS

Priory Road was not made up and had houses on its west side only, a footpath continuing on to Richard Street and on to the foot of Blow's Downs. Half Moon Lane was a grassy track between high hedges. Midway along its eastern portion was a sheep-dip and what a sight it was to see the sheep 'baptised' in it! How they did protest. In those days, the slopes of the Downs grazed flocks of sheep. There was no scrub on the Downs – the sheep saw to that.

East of Priory Road was a large meadow used as a recreation ground and crossing it diagonally from Priory Road a path led to Long Hedges and the Blow's Downs. The top of Blow's Downs was, as now, arable land belonging to Zouches Farm.



Alick's conjectural pen drawing of the Priory Nave 1480

DEEP WELL WITH DONKEY WHEEL

Zouches had a very deep well with a donkey wheel to draw water. It was lovely to sit on the slopes of Blow's Downs in the long grass among the blue scabious and the cowslips where scores of larks nested and the air was filled with their song as they soared high above. Arable fields lay from the foot of the Downs right across to Houghton Park, some of them vivid with scarlet poppies or bright yellow with charlock among the wheat. You could look away to the north-east across the fields to where Biscot mill shone white in the sunlight, a house or two showing Leagrave to the left of it among the trees.

LIME KILNS AT SKIMPOT

The lime kilns at Skimpot and the whiting-work attached provided an interest to a schoolboy. The chalk quarries in those days were a mere nothing compared with

the mammoth excavations of the 1960s to the north-east of the town and the deep scars on the landscape between Sewell and Totternhoe Knolls. All that was to come with the exploitation of the chalk to make cement.

THE TOWN RUBBISH DUMP

Half Moon Lane led from the foot of Blow's Downs, at the end of Long Hedges, crossed Watling Street at the old Half Moon Inn and continued onwards in a westerly direction to the beeches (a fine group of trees near which the footpath to Kensworth ran southwards across Stipers Hill to where it met the road to Church End). The houses of the town ended at the foot of Spital Hill. Here on the west side at the entrance to Periwinkle Lane (which was then a real lane between hedges) was the Town Pound, an enclosure where stray horses or cattle would be incarcerated until claimed by their owners. A footpath ran across the Spital Fields diagonally to the western end of Half Moon Lane. The Spital Fields were the town rubbish dump and higher up the hill the Water Works abutted Half Moon Lane.

TOLL-GATE

The Watling Street had a toll-gate before one came to Kensworth Lane and the gateway and barrier was still standing c1900, with its one-storeyed house and garden strip. There were wide grass verges on either side of the road, here.

A footpath led from the Beeches towards the end of Bull Pond Lane. Bull Pond Lane was then a deep-rutted miry track by reason of the carts traversing it from the chalk quarries to the whiting works near its northernmost end near the top of St. Mary's Street.

A lane called Buttercup Lane, also deeply rutted and with old railway sleepers laid in places to facilitate the passage of carts bearing chalk, led from the end of Bull Pond Lane westward towards the Downs. At its head, where now Meadway begins, there were more whiting-works. A path led from here up the hill and across the Golf Links to the junction of the roads on top of the Downs to Kensworth and Studham.

Hugh Garrod
to be continued

Honorary Freemen of the Borough of Dunstable



Dunstable became a Municipal Borough in 1864, incorporated by Royal Charter.

The Honorary Freedom of the Boroughs Act 1885 (later replaced by the Local Government Act 1972) permitted Councils to give the title of Honorary Freemen to “persons of distinction and any persons who have rendered eminent services to the Borough”. The freedom itself carried no privilege but was the highest honour a council could confer.

WORTHINGTON GEORGE SMITH



Worthington G Smith

The first person to be awarded the Honorary Freedom of the Borough of Dunstable was Worthington George Smith. On leaving school he was apprenticed to an architect and became an expert draughtsman and a member of the Architectural Association. In 1861 Worthington left the Architectural Association to become a freelance illustrator. His interest in natural history and gardening led to him

becoming a botanical and horticultural illustrator. Worthington Smith and his family moved to Dunstable in 1885. He became heavily involved in the archaeology and local history of Dunstable and the area generally. He carried out excavations at Maiden Bower, Luton, and Dunstable Downs.

Worthington took an interest in local affairs and his skills as an artist and illustrator were well used when, on a number of occasions, he prepared illuminated addresses for presentation to local dignitaries, such as to the Duke of Bedford when he visited Dunstable in 1894. In 1897 he became the local secretary of the Society of Antiquities.

ANCIENT CHARTER

In 1899, during a visit to the Record Office, Worthington found the ancient charter granted to the Borough of Dunstable by Henry I. He translated and transcribed it and gave a copy to the Town Council.



The transcription and translation of the ancient charter for the Borough of Dunstable

In 1903 his contribution to Dunstable was recognised when he was made the first Freeman of the Borough. The following year his extensive work on the town ‘Dunstable – its History and Surroundings’ was published.

FRED TURNER GARRETT

In 1921 Fred Turner Garrett was awarded the Honorary Freedom of the Borough.

Fred was a clock and watch maker and jeweller. In 1887 he was elected onto the Town Council and served as a councillor between 1887 – 1895 and again from 1901 – 1919. In the intervening years he was an alderman. He was elected as Mayor of Dunstable from 1897 – 1899, 1905 – 1906, 1913 – 1916 and again 1918 – 1919.



Fred Turner Garrett

In 1897, during his first mayoralty, Fred Garrett introduced electric light into business premises. In 1898 he presented the Council with the Mayoral Chain of Office which is still worn by mayors today. In 1907 Fred was appointed as a JP. He was the council’s representative on several local charities, including the Ashton Almshouses, Dunstable Grammar School and the Ashton Elementary School. He was a Dunstable representative on Bedfordshire County Council and was chairman of the managers of the Dunstable group of County Council schools. He was a stalwart member of the Liberal Party.

In 1921 Fred Turner Garrett was awarded the Honorary Freedom of Dunstable in recognition of his many years of service, both as Mayor, and also as a magistrate, county councillor, school governor, charity trustee and holder of numerous other offices. Garrett Close in Dunstable was named after him.

CHARLES FREDERICK BOSKETT



Charles Frederick Boskett

Next to receive the honour was Charles Frederick Boskett, a plumber and house decorator by trade.

Charles was elected on to the Town Council in 1895 and served as a councillor until 1901, then an alderman until 1907 and then a councillor again, serving continuously on the Town Council for twenty-eight years until he retired in 1923. Alderman Boskett was elected Mayor in 1902 and served in this position until 1905.

He took an active part in the municipal, educational and social life of the town. He was on the District Joint Hospital Committee from its formation in 1905 until 1923. From 1896 to 1911 he was on the Luton Board of Guardians, then acted as overseer for Dunstable for fourteen years. He was a governor of the Grammar School, a trustee of the Ashton Almshouses, a member of the Evening Institute Management Committee and Manager of the Dunstable Group of Council Schools. He was also a Sunday School Superintendent for forty years.

Charles served in the local volunteers and was a member of the Excelsior Band. During the War he was a special constable and initiated the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Welfare Fund. He was appointed a magistrate in 1921. He is also remembered for

'Boskett's Breezy Battlements', roofless public toilets built near the crossroads in West Street in 1911.

Charles Boskett received the Freedom of the Borough in recognition of his life of service in 1924.

SIR HENRY HERBERT HAMBLING

Also honoured in 1924 was Sir Henry Herbert Hambling, the son of William James Hambling, Headmaster of Chew's School and Mayor of Dunstable. Herbert was a bank manager and became deputy chairman of Barclays Bank. During World War I he was a financial member of the Ministry of Munitions. In 1917 he was knighted for his services to Barclays Bank. At the beginning of World War I Herbert bought Rookery Park in Yoxford, Suffolk.



Sir Henry Herbert Hambling

In the early 1920s British air services were struggling to compete with subsidised European airlines. In January 1923 the Civil Air Transport Subsidies Committee was appointed under Sir Herbert Hambling. The government followed their advice that small airlines should merge and in March 1924 Imperial Airways was incorporated (which, after another merger, became BOAC). Herbert was awarded a baronetcy for his work on the development of civil aviation. Herbert was the first Hambling Baronet, Yoxford.

ALFRED WILIAM WEBB



Alfred William Webb

Another former Mayor became the next Freeman, Alfred William Webb, a builder, carpenter and joiner. Alfred was elected to the Council in 1908 and served alternately as councillor and alderman. After seventeen years' service he was elected Mayor of Dunstable (1926 – 28). He served on Dunstable Borough Council for a total of thirty years.

During his years of service to his town he was also an Overseer of the Poor, Church Warden at Priory Church, Manager of Ashton Elementary Schools, and Governor of Chew's Foundation. He retired in 1938, when he was made a Freeman of the Borough.

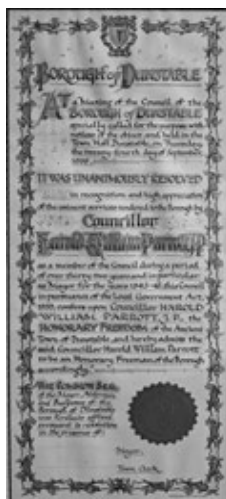
HAROLD WILLIAM PARROTT

In 1959 Harold William Parrott was created a Freeman of the Borough. Harold first stood for election to Dunstable Borough Council in 1925 as an Independent. He was elected as an alderman in 1932, a position he held for six years, and served on a number of committees. He keenly supported the Council's work to attract new industries to the town, such as AC-Sphinx in 1934.



Harold William Parrott

With the prospect of war, Harold, who was known for his organisational skills, was made Chairman of the Emergency Committee and in 1943 he was elected Mayor of Dunstable, a position he held for three years. When peace came he gave the victory



Harold William Parrott's Freedom of Dunstable certificate

speech from the Town Hall. He was then in charge of organising the celebrations.

He became a JP in 1948 and was also a member of the Rotary Club.

He was elected as an alderman again in 1951. In 1959 he was awarded the Freedom of the Borough and commented that "I love my town as I love my country, and whatever I have done has been a pleasure for me to do."*

Harold Parrott retired from the council in 1966, having served for forty years. He received the title of 'Alderman Emeritus', which effectively made him a member of the council for life. He was the last of the Honorary Freemen of Dunstable.

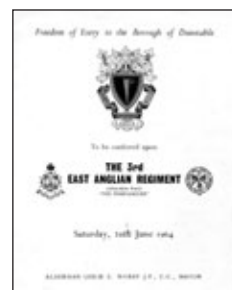
TWO REGIMENTS AWARDED FREEDOM OF ENTRY

Two regiments were awarded the Freedom of Entry to the Borough of Dunstable. The 3rd East Anglian Regiment received this honour in 1964, followed by the 201 (Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire Yeomanry) Medium Battery, Royal Artillery (Volunteers) in 1968.

This awarded them the honour and distinction of exercising all customary regimental privileges when parading in or proceeding through the streets of Dunstable on ceremonial occasions.



The 201 (Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire Yeomanry) Medium Battery, Royal Artillery (Volunteers) certificate



The 3rd East Anglian Regiment certificate

Dunstable Borough Council was abolished in 1972, merging with other districts to become part of South Bedfordshire in 1974. No Freemen could be created after this.

However, since the creation of Dunstable Town Council in 1985 it is legally possible to award the freedom of the town again.

Elisabeth Pynn

Greeting New Members



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

Marilyn Billington
Pam Greener
Julie Kirby
Lesley Parker

Chris Brown
Corinne Griffin
David Lawrence
Ivor Parrish
John Ward

Jesica Field
Colin Hudspith
Lorna Leech
Claire Ward

Sad Farewell

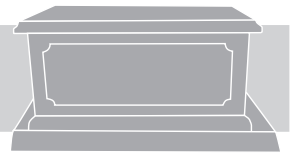


We are very sorry to announce the sad loss of

Michael Cater

Brian King

The Gostelows of Dunstable, Part 2



This is a continuation of my article in our Newsletter no. 55, page 416.

Chris and Jane Gostelow visited Dunstable, pre-Covid, as part of their holiday in UK. They were researching his ancestors who came from our town. Although they took many photographs in the Priory churchyard, they missed the one they were looking for. I met them at the Priory on 28th August this year while they were on their second holiday here. I took them to the Gostelow tomb and, with Shauna Dyke, we had a long conversation about Gostelows, past and present. The tomb has inscriptions on all five faces but most are hard to read due to centuries of weathering. I promised to ask the record office in Bedford if I could buy a PDF of the section of the 1907 Weight-Matthews survey of the churchyard memorials. We took quite a few photos and then went in to the church for coffee and to meet the other people in there. Before they left, I gave Chris and Jane a tour of the church, telling them some of the stories from across the ages.

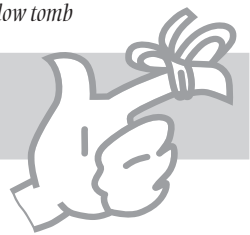
It was a lovely sunny day and a good time was had by all! We subsequently discovered, from Weight-Matthews, that there are at least eleven Gostelows buried in that plot.

Hugh Garrod



Chris and Jane Gostelow standing in front of the Gostelow tomb

Memories of old Dunstable



It has taken sixty years, but information has arrived about the man who took charge of the Dunstable Borough Gazette in 1928 and caused a minor upheaval in the town.

CHARLES WILLIAM CLARKE

Mr C. W. Clarke arrived in Dunstable that year, having bought ownership of the paper from Miles Taylor, who was retiring because of failing eyesight. Mr Clarke had been a successful newspaper editor in Australia but things didn't work out so well in Dunstable. The paper's circulation plummeted and townsfolk feared that it was about to close. A deputation headed by the Mayor, Cllr Percy Lockhart, went to meet members of the Gibbs family, owners of the Luton News, and begged them to buy the paper and keep it going.

The family had already been in contact with Mr Clarke and in 1931 the paper was rescued. It meant the closure of the Gazette's printing works in Albion Street but the more modern facilities at Luton enabled the paper to publish local photographs for the first time. This was welcomed in Dunstable as a great improvement.

But who was Mr Clarke? Details have now been provided by his descendants who contacted Dunstable History Society as part of their research into his career.

Charles William Clarke was born in Rushden where his father had a boot and shoe business. When Charles became a journalist he worked on trade papers serving shoe retailers. He emigrated to Australia in 1913 and became general business manager for a newspaper syndicate based in Sydney. He was then appointed editor of the Launceston Daily Telegraph in Tasmania.

Charles came back to England in 1924 for health reasons, with the lure of a visit to the British Empire Exhibition hastening the decision. After his ill-fated venture in Dunstable he retired to live in Staines. His eldest son, Reginald, fought in the First World War and was killed at Ypres.

When I wrote a history of the Gazette for a souvenir magazine published to celebrate the paper's centenary in 1965, I included anecdotes from local newspaper veterans including printers from the Gazette's old works in Albion Street, as well as Fred Taylor, son

of the one-time owner of the paper, and Dougal McReath, one-time editor of the Gazette and the Leighton Buzzard Observer.

Mr Clarke was described to me as a very forceful personality who brought a radical new-look to the paper. He "rather overdid things" and upset a lot of locals. Circulation dwindled – one printer told me that they were selling only 100 copies of the paper each week.

THE TIMES DRAMA CRITIC

Dunstable has had a rather extraordinary mention in the columns of The Times which you might have missed. The paper's drama critic, Clive Davis, was unimpressed by a play called *Minority Report* at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith. He described it as "A vision of this country that is a cross between *Blade Runner* and a rainy day in Dunstable, citizens scurrying around with umbrellas held aloft and occasionally plunging into symbolic dance gestures."

It sounds as if Mr Davis visited Dunstable during last year's Forties Day on the Square when we did indeed dance in the rain!

CORNELIUS VATER



Cornelius Vater

The memorable name of Cornelius Vater crops up in various parts of Dunstable's history so it was intriguing to be able to identify him in a group photo taken in 1909. Cornelius owned a furniture shop in Middle Row which was once the Britannia pub and which later became the well-remembered business of Bert Stott and Bert's son Bev. The premises today house the Celebrations card shop.

Cornelius was a Trustee of the Methodist Church in Dunstable and was in a photograph taken when work started on building the present church on the Square. The previous Wesleyan Chapel had been destroyed the previous year in a disastrous fire and the Trustees showed remarkable determination in quickly recovering from the shock to start a rebuilding programme.

John Buckledee