

# NEWSLETTER

Dunstable & District Local History Society  
No. 68 February 2026



## Chairman's Notes

**Congratulations to society member Kay Kempster on organising the particularly successful Bedfordshire Day event in the Priory Church in November.**

Its theme was the discovery of the priceless Swan Brooch during the excavations of the remains of the old Friary in Dunstable. One highlight was the display of Kay's unique replica of the brooch – a wedding anniversary present – which was displayed in a glass case with a base simulating the tree roots amongst which Maxene Miller found the original. This society provided a film of the BBC's coverage of its discovery and Jean Yates gave a fascinating talk outlining the names of the various people who might have owned (and lost) the brooch.

On another theme, Stephen Williams highlighted the identifiable hand-written manuscripts of William Cotson, whose name ought to be better-known in Dunstable. Canon Cotson was a scribe at Dunstable Priory in medieval times and his copies of literary works are now museum treasures.

### STONE SCULPTURE

We are grateful to Hannah Firth, archaeologist with Central Beds Council, for providing the society with copies of the handsomely-produced report by Albion Archaeology of investigations into the Roman farmstead and other remains found during the extensive building development at Houghton Regis. The detailed and scholarly monograph is available to read at the society's research room at Grove House. One exceptional find has been a stone sculpture of a figure in a short tunic carved on a small block of Totternhoe clunch. It was perhaps once part of a shrine.

### GORDON IVINSON

It was particularly sad to hear before Christmas of the death of Gordon Ivinson. He had not been well for some time, but in his hey-day he had been a very active member of our society. He had helped to find speakers for our monthly events, hosted meetings of our committee at his home, and with the help of a



*Maxene Miller, who discovered the Swan Brooch, being interviewed by BBC's Audrey Russell*

much-thumbed National Trust handbook had arranged numerous coach trips for members. Whenever remotely possible Gordon would ensure that these outings would include a visit to a heritage railway, one of his passions.

### VERONICA SQUIRES

Another great loss to the society has been the death of Veronica Squires, a fount of knowledge about the history of Totternhoe. Veronica was a member of the Turvey family who had been farming in the

village for many generations.

### WE THREE KINGS (OF DUNSTABLE) ARE

My wife Lynn has been very absorbed in creating a Christmas tree display for the Festival of Carols at the Methodist Church.

The history society, as regular users of the church hall, is invited to take part and to choose a particular carol to feature.

In 2024 we had a flash of inspiration and selected as our theme "In The Bleak Midwinter". This includes the line "long, long ago" which seemed very appropriate for a history organisation. We created tree decorations made from scenes of Dunstable in the past.

Our selection for the 2025 tree was "We Three Kings (Of Dunstable) Are" which altered the lyric somewhat but gave us the excuse to include images of Henry I, Edward I and Henry VIII who all had significant connections in various ways with our town.

### GARY COOPER

I thought details about Dunstable's connections with film star Gary Cooper were very well documented, so it was surprising to see so many theories on social media recently about his local roots. Back in 2010 Dunstable held a Gary Cooper Festival to celebrate his memory. Events included screenings of High Noon at the Grove Theatre, Love In The Afternoon at the Little Theatre, Mr Deeds Goes To Town in the meeting room behind the old Star and Garter and a hugely well-attended talk about Cooper by your history society. Perhaps we ought to do it all again!

**John Buckledee**

# Frances Ashton 1668-1727



**Frances Ashton (nee Chew) lived in interesting times. By the time of her first birthday, Charles I had been beheaded and the Commonwealth declared.**

She also lived through Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate and the reigns of Charles II, James II, William and Mary, Anne, George I and died six months into the reign of George II. She was a child in the time of the Republic, a teenager during 'Merry England' and 18 years old at the time of the Great Fire of London.

She was the sixth child of Thomas and Elisabeth Chew. Her father and maternal grandfather, William Marshe, were both Dunstable haberdashers. She was born in Dunstable and in 1677 married a London distiller by the name of William Ashton. The wedding took place at St. Sepulchre's Church, Holborn. Her younger sister, Jane, married James Cart at St. Mary le Bow in 1682. He was also a distiller.

## **DISTILLING**

London had a long tradition of distilling, but the Glorious Revolution and the accession of William and Mary brought about the mass-production of gin. Its popularity was driven, initially, by the fact that rum, brandy and whisky were heavily taxed and their production was regulated, but gin was not taxed and its manufacture was not regulated. The craze for gin is captured in the cartoons of Hogarth and in the phrase 'Mother's Ruin.'

The Ashtons had homes in London and in Dunstable. London was where the money was made but the air was so foul that it was best to bring children up in the clean and healthy air of Bedfordshire. Most of the profits were invested in and around Dunstable. Farms and public houses were bought and the tenants' rents provided the money for day-to-day living.

## **PAYING SCHOOL FEES**

Frances' two surviving brothers, Thomas 1647-1698 and William 1656-1712, both became London distillers, the younger being particularly successful. He, William, encouraged boys from poor London families to attend school by paying for their uniform. It was his wish to found a similar school in his native Dunstable, but he died before he could achieve this. His sisters, Frances and Jane, along with a nephew called Thomas Aynscombe, sold five of his farms to build the school in his memory and ring-fenced the income from five others for running costs. These three were the original Trustees of the Chew's Foundation. The founding of this school was to have a lasting effect on Frances' estate long after she died.

## **DISAPPROVED OF DAUGHTER'S MARRIAGE**

Frances and William had eight children but, by the time Chew's Charity School opened, the eldest seven had already died. The youngest, Elizabeth born 1690, married a man called John Raynor in 1714. We have no idea what was wrong with this marriage but Frances disapproved so strongly that it also had a lasting effect on her estate when she died.

## **ALMSHOUSES**

Frances had long desired to fund an almshouse in Dunstable and it opened in 1715, the year her husband died. The accommodation was 'For the Relief & maintenance of Six poor Widows of ye town of Dunstable for ever.' They had, though, to have been regular members of the Priory Church congregation. The ladies

received £6 per year each, supplied from rents paid by Frances' tenant farmers. The money was to be used to buy, 'a gown and petticoat, all of the same colour, (blue), and for their firings and other necessities.' They were also provided with tea, and, as this was before the establishment of the plantations in India, it must have been imported from China. The ladies were required to wear their 'gown and petticoat' when they went out of the almshouse as a kind of uniform, to remind the local people of Frances Ashton's generosity.

## **BELL TOWER CLOCK**

In 1719 Jane Cart paid for a clock to be installed in the bell tower of the Priory Church and Frances paid for a similar one to be installed in Chew's Charity School. It was only in 2015, when we had the front of the building cleaned and re-decorated for the 300th anniversary of the opening of the School, that I saw that the clock had a date on it.

The Carts, when they were in London, worshipped at St. Mary le Bow, just down the road from St. Paul's Cathedral. The rector of St. Mary's commissioned Sir James Thornhill to produce a painting of the Last Supper for the East wall of his church. Incidentally, Sir James was by now William Hogarth's father-in-law. When the said rector saw the finished article, he refused to have it in his church, or to pay for it. Hearing of this, Frances and Jane bought the painting, for £50, and had it hung on the East wall of the Priory Church. Legend has it that Thornhill re-painted the face of Judas Iscariot in the likeness of the rector of St. Mary le Bow. The painting remained on the East wall for over 150 years.

## **CHARITIES ESTABLISHED**

Frances died, in Dunstable, on 21st December 1727. Her burial is recorded as 31st of the same month. Besides making provision for any debts and the expenses of her funeral, her will set up two charities. The first was based in London and was for the release from several London prisons, including the Marshalsea, of debtors who owed less than £5. It was also to support 'thirty poor clergymen of sober life and conversation' along with the same number of clergy widows of similar probity. Only Church of England clergy and widows were eligible. The second charity was based in Dunstable. It was for the upkeep of her almshouse, including the payments to the six ladies. Initially, the same Trustees ran both charities.



*A 19th century photo of Ashton Almshouses*

The one thing missing from the will was any bequest to her daughter who 'so disoblged me in her marriage' that Frances left Elizabeth absolutely nothing. Eventually the two charities went their separate ways and now have little contact with each other.

### **DUNSTABLE CHARITY BADLY MANAGED**

The Dunstable charity was, at times, very badly managed but, by the mid 19th century, there was far more money in the Trust than was necessary for the upkeep of the almshouse. The Trustees pondered what to do with all this surplus. It was remembered that she had been instrumental in founding Chew's Charity School, so it was resolved to found a school in her memory. Land was purchased opposite the Priory Church and in January 1865, two Elementary Schools, one Boys' and one Girls', were opened in the same building. About this time, the Dunstable charity split into two separate charities, the Ashton Almshouse Charity and the Ashton Schools Foundation. Some years later, the railway paid over the odds for a piece of Ashton land in the middle of Luton and this was the impetus for the building of Ashton Boys' Grammar School in High Street North. It opened in 1888.

### **ALMSHOUSES DEMOLISHED**

By the 1930s the almshouse was fairly dilapidated and it was eventually pulled down in the 1960s. The sale of the land allowed the Trustees to buy a piece of land in Bull Pond Lane and build a new almshouse. Known as Frances Ashton House, it was officially opened in October 1969. The Mayor, Alderman Ronald Wyles handed each of the six tenants the key to her centrally heated flat and a short service of dedication was conducted by Revd John Hare, Bishop of Bedford.

### **CHANGING EDUCATION SYSTEM**

In 1971 the Bedfordshire education system changed from two-tier (Primary and Secondary) to three-tier (Lower, Middle and



*Ashton School in 1933*

Upper) The existing Grammar School building became Ashton Middle School and the older pupils moved to the new Manshead Upper School, on the Caddington Road Campus. The system changed again and the Middle School shut in 2016. The existing buildings were converted into flats and others were built within the grounds.

The two Elementary schools were amalgamated into one Primary school in the 1930s and became Ashton St. Peter's Lower School at the introduction of the three-tier system. This school moved to a new building in West Parade, on the old Grammar School playing field. The 1865 building was demolished and an Aldi store built on the site.

### **FRANCES ASHTON'S LEGACY**

Virtually 300 years after her death, Frances Ashton's legacy is alive and well. It is chastening, though, to reflect that, had Elizabeth married someone her mother approved of, we might never have had any Ashton schools in Dunstable.

**Hugh Garrod**

## **Nicola Turton Book Review**



**Dunstable folk, if they are at all interested in local history, know all about Henry VIII's desire to marry Anne Boleyn.**

The King's "great matter" was eventually resolved at a hearing within Dunstable Priory.

Cardinal Wolsey had earlier failed to find a legitimate way to end Henry's marriage to Queen Catherine, bringing about his spectacular fall from the king's favour. The events were recorded in great detail by Wolsey's most faithful servant, George Cavendish: another notable figure from history who had significant connections with Dunstable.

But who in Dunstable has heard about Joan Larke, who lived through all those great events?

History society member Nicola Turton has set about filling this gap in our knowledge with her novel, just published, entitled *Wolsey's Wife*.

It really is a fascinating tale, featuring the girl who became Wolsey's mistress and bore him two children.

The young Thomas Wolsey, in Nicola's book, is convincingly portrayed as a man destined for great things...a thoughtful, caring priest with a diplomatic gift for earning trust and loyalty.

He is attracted by Joan Larke's beauty and lively personality,

shining amidst a miserable and restrictive household. As a priest, he is supposed to live a life of celibacy, but his struggles to ignore his feelings are abruptly abandoned when he learns that Joan, forlorn and her hair shaved, is being forced to become a nun. He chivalrously comes to her rescue and offers her a form of marriage, with the chance of a new life.

Part of the charm of Nicola's novel is in its continuation of its Cinderella-style story, describing Joan's delight in her new world, her sexuality, her new clothes...

Wolsey makes no secret about what has happened – he puts Joan in charge of his household and is delighted to see her charmingly rise to the task. He confesses about his new domestic arrangements to Prince Henry (the future king) who is more amused than critical. Wolsey's servants take care to look after their master's precious companion.

There is much more to come in what is Nicola's first novel because, when Cardinal Wolsey becomes increasingly important, Joan's way of life has to change. But there's no need for a spoiler alert here – suffice to say that Joan, a true heroine, has many more adventures to come and the way she makes the best of whatever fate lies in store is convincingly re-created.

*Wolsey's Wife* is published by Vanguard Press, price £14.99.

**John Buckledee**

# Edward Street Butchers



**A picture of a butcher's shop taken in the 1940s is a reminder of a time when Edward Street in Dunstable was a thriving trading centre.**

It was one of 20 businesses in Edward Street, including dress-makers, a laundress, two grocers, three different bakeries, tinsplate workers, coal merchants and Bournes Whiting Works.

Philip George Mead, owner of the shop, is seen in his striped apron on the far left of the picture (below).

His shop, on the corner of Winfield Street opposite the Globe pub, is festooned with birds and hind-quarters and ribs of beef alongside a boar's head in the window. The young boy with his dog is his son, Philip Charles, who was to take over the business in adulthood. The photo shows two delivery bicycles advertising the name, held by two employees in berets.

## A BUTCHER'S DOZEN

About the turn of the century there were about a dozen butcher's shops in Dunstable. Three of them belonged to the White family who had premises in High Street North and Church Street. Three other butchers were dealing from High Street South.

The whiting works in Edward Street was at the Union Street end of the road and would have once been on Mount Street before the road unified to become just Edward Street.

At the junction with Union Street is the eponymously named 'Bunkers Court' that was also once a butcher's shop. Numbers 29 and 31 Edward Street still stand today and are listed buildings. They were probably Mortons hat blockers, part of the thriving straw-hat trade which employed many local craftsmen and traders.

## SLAUGHTERHOUSE

Philip Mead, along with many other in the meat trade, may well have had a slaughterhouse to the rear of his premises. Following legislation in the 1950s this means of killing was stopped and abattoirs became registered.



*The photo of P G Mead butchers shop in Edward Street during the 1940s (The photo belongs to Jill Mead whose grandfather and father are featured in the picture)*

One of the main local abattoirs was Griffiths whose yard was in Victoria Street at the top of Clifton Road. This building was acquired by Mr Mead and became Mead's Wholesale Poultry which ceased trading about 2006. It is now a housing development opposite the Territorial Army depot.

## DUNSTABLE MEAT WHOLESAL

Dunstable Meat Wholesale operated from the Mead shop premises until 1995.

Trucks from Smithfields and other suppliers would park in Winfield Street alongside the meat wholesale business and about a dozen employees would shoulder off the carcasses from the lorry to hang on hooks along the ceiling bars. Schoolboys such as myself would gawp in at operations either when walking to school, or on the walk on sports days from Ashton School up to the playing fields in West Parade.

European laws in the 1990s stopped this open practice of off-loading across public footpaths.

## RELOCATED TO VICTORIA STREET

The business relocated to Victoria Street and shared the building with the poultry dealers. In 1995 the freezers and storage area in Edward Street were used by a different business that stored and delivered boxes of frozen fish.

## PETER PRATT FAMILY BUTCHER

Since the early 1970s the shop had been neglected and used as a general storeroom along with the flat above. Both were brought back to life in 1994 when the Peter Pratt family butcher's opened. Mr Pratt ran the shop until his retirement in 1999. I took over the shop but following the closures of the nearby grocery in West Parade along with the Creamers bakers, it was not viable to continue. The building was demolished in 2008 to make way for housing.

**John Pratt**



*Peter Pratt's butcher shop situated on the corner of Edward Street and Winfield Street from 1994 until 2002*

# Celebrating the end of the Crimean War



An article titled ‘Dunstable Festival’ (below) particularly interested me because of the current situation in Ukraine and the Crimea. I suggest that nothing is new.

What we now call ‘The Crimean War’ started in 1853 when Russia invaded what is now Moldavia and parts of Romania, territories belonging to the Ottoman Empire. Britain and France wanted to prop up the ailing empire and stop Russian expansion. This was part of the ‘Great Game’ and involved Russian interest in Afghanistan and India, in an attempt to have access to the Indian Ocean. Russia said its aim was to secure Orthodox Christian right of access to Christian sites in the Holy Land. The Black Sea ports of Crimea were ideal for the start of operations. The war was the first industrialised conflict. The British Empire lost approximately 22,000 personnel and the Russians about ten times that number. The war is famous for the work of Florence Nightingale and her team, improving the nursing of wounded soldiers. The Battle of Balaclava took place on October 25th 1854 and is noted for two events; *The Thin Red Line*, in which a company mostly made up of Sutherland Highlanders formed a line of fire against the Russian cavalry, resulting in the awarding of many Victoria Crosses, and *The Charge of the Light Brigade* in which they charged at the wrong guns, galloping through Russian fire from three sides and into The Valley of Death. Of the ‘600’, 195 survivors retreated. The War ended with the Treaty of Paris in 1856, which event was universally celebrated, including in Dunstable.

## HOW DUNSTABLE CELEBRATED THE END OF THE CRIMEAN WAR

I was leafing through some old material when I came across two photo-copied pages headed ‘Dunstable Festival’ and dated 5th June 1856. Reading through the handwriting, it was not obvious what was being celebrated.

I, therefore, went to our ‘Dunstable Timeline’. In the 1856 section, the first item says:

Festival to mark the end of the Crimean War includes dinner on the Square for 1,000 persons and tea for 1,200 children.



Some of the ingredients for the Crimea war dinner for 1000 people

## DUNSTABLE FESTIVAL

The Meat Committee Report to the General Committee as follows. That estimating the Numbers of persons to partake of the Dinner intended to be provided on the 24th Inst at 1200, this Committee recommends that 1281 lbs of meat be provided, a quantity the Committee imagine will be amply sufficient.

That the sorts of Meat to be provided consist of Rounds of Beef, Legs of Mutton and Legs of Pork.

That the Rounds of Beef be salted and Cut into two pieces (each piece weighing 30 lb), that the Legs of Pork be salted, or a portion salted and the remainder baked as the Committee may hereafter agree upon and that the Legs of Mutton be baked.

That the 1281 lbs of meat be divided into, or consist of, the following joint sizes.

11 Rounds of Beef (each Round cut into 2 pieces weighing 30 lbs each)	660
27 Legs of Pork weighing 12 lbs each	324
27 Legs of Mutton weighing 11 lbs each	297
	Total lbs 1281

## MEAT MUST BE BOUGHT AT LESS COST THAN 7½d PER POUND

That this Committee have ascertained that the Meat must be bought at less cost than 7½d per lb – thereby making the total cost of the meat £40.0.7½. The Committee recommends that the Meat be purchased of such Butchers in the Town who have or shall subscribe to the Fund, and in proportion to the amount of their several subscriptions.

The Committee adopting Mr. Howe’s calculation as to the Plum Puddings to be provided recommend that:

- 190 lbs of Flour
- 165 lbs of Raisins
- 56 lbs of Suet
- 11 score of Eggs and
- 24 gallons of Milk

be purchased or provided, the cost of which the Committee believe will amount to between £10 and £11. These quantities will make sufficient pudding to allow each of the 1200 persons upwards of ½ lb.

It will be necessary to provide pudding cloths and dishes for the display of the Dinner, and also make arrangements of the Cooking of the Dinner upon which this Committee will report on a further occasion as necessary.

Dunstable  
5th June 1856

## FOR YOUNGER READERS

7½d in 1856 is just under £4 today; £40.0.7½ is nearly £5,000; 1281 lbs is 581.5 kg; a score is 20 and an imperial gallon is just over 4.5 litres.

Hugh Garrod

# The Daily Governess



I found this article in a Bristol Times and Mirror newspaper, dated 9th March 1839, which refers to a governess wearing a Dunstable Bonnet.

There is a daily governess who passes our gate every morning at a quarter before eight, she is never a moment later and the cook knows this so well that she sets the kitchen clock by her.

All through winter we hear her approach by the splashing of her clogs in the wet, unrepaired path at the corner, and then she passes noiselessly.

Her bonnet is a coarse Dunstable. Within the last week the ribbons have been replaced, very plainly put on with the ruche beneath, ornamented with a sprig of sweet pea. Green gauze has taken the place of the black veil and her parasol, not one of those fawn-coloured, fairy-mushrooms of the present season, but a large full-grown parasol at least three years old, has replaced the heavy brown cotton umbrella.

The broderie on her collar is coarse, but the collar sits smoothly and is very white; her shawl, with the assistance of a boa, she thinks it a sufficient protection against last winter's cold, is now thrown open a little at the throat, and with the relief of a white collar. Her dress was then merino, now it is mousseline de laine (lightweight wool), the merino



Not quite a governess, but Dunstable Council's Jackie Carrington made a convincing Victorian schoolmistress at last year's Heritage Day at Grove House.

will be cleaned and made to look like new, her boots have been exchanged for prunella shoes and she generally carries a roll of music and one or two books. We must not forget her brown silk bag for what odds and ends peep out when it is over full. Ends of German wool, paper patterns, netting, knitting needles, half dozen new pens (the nibs being out, to avoid injury), or round roller, the bag is never empty. Just in view is the little threadbare purse worn out, not by money, but by time!

## THE WEIGHT OF ANXIETY UPON HER BROW

She is not a handsome woman but carries the weight of anxiety upon her broad brow. Her pallid countenance lacks expression but silent resignation, her eyes have an earnest, gentle, sad look. She looks neither to the right nor the left, except perhaps to glance at the church clock but she finds she has no need to hasten her steps. Except when her mother is ill she is always on time. Perhaps she casts a wistful eye towards the bookseller's placard telling of her great luxury, a new novel, or at the linen draper's, with an undefined hope that, when she receives her next month's salary, she may seek cheap challis amongst the stock now selling off. Ribbons do not attract her she has trimmed her bonnet and learnt the blessing of thrift. She is neither short nor tall, dark nor fair, nor does her cheek wear the pallor of ill-health for she is obliged to take exercise. She is young and would be mirthful were she not a daily governess.

## TWO OR THREE SHILLINGS AN HOUR

The daily governess must know everything but instead of resting after her wearied labours, returns to her mother's lodging and works hard to keep even a little way beyond her pupils. Her employers expect a young woman of nineteen to teach perfectly various accomplishments. While the man receives a guinea an hour for teaching one thing, the daily governess receives two or three shillings an hour for teaching all things.

"Miss Gray you must learn the figure of that new dance before the children." "Miss Gray, Alicia's shoulders are growing round." "Miss Gray, Alfred must not ink his tuckers." "Miss Gray, I wish you to learn to tune the piano I don't understand why you can't tune it as well as the harp" "Miss Gray, poor little Louisa cannot finish the Cologne stand pray take it home and finish it for her."

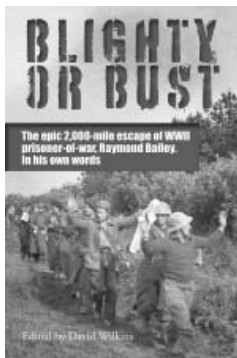
## FORTUNATE TO BE EMPLOYED

Poor Miss Gray could bear all this if her pupils loved her but the affection and tenderness which her gentle heart yearns to bestow is thrown back at her for, she is but the daily governess. She has been four hours at her first house and then has given an hour's music lesson a mile farther on, and then another and possibly another. She repasses our gate about six o'clock in the evening and has what she calls a holiday once during the week, when she returns home at three o'clock. "Are you not weary, Miss Gray?" "No," she answers, with a feeble smile "I am fortunate to be employed".

**Rita Swift**

*British Newspaper Archives*

# Memories of old Dunstable



*The Blighty or Bust book*

## BLIGHTY OR BUST

The society has been presented with a book, *Blighty Or Bust*, which is about the escape of a 21-year-old Dunstable soldier who became a prisoner in World War Two.

Raymond Bailey, who was serving with the Kensington Regiment, was among the thousands of British troops who were ordered to surrender at St Valery during the fall of France in 1940.

He escaped from a column of prisoners who were being force-marched to captivity by the Germans. He then managed to avoid recapture during a 2,000-mile journey across France and Spain to the British territory of Gibraltar.

He reached his home in Dunstable in December 1940 where his return was reported with banner front-page headlines - "Dunstable Soldier's Escape From Nazis" - in the Dunstable Borough Gazette.

The paper said that the full story could not be told for obvious reasons, to protect the identity of those who helped him until they were no longer within reach of Nazi vengeance.

But Raymond wrote down the details of his adventures in very great detail, demonstrating a remarkable recollection of the route he travelled and the people, friends and foes, whom he encountered. The notebooks containing his 80,000-word hand-written story were then stored in a cardboard box. Raymond returned to the army and died in particularly tragic circumstances later in the war. His notebooks were forgotten until they were recently discovered by David Wilkins who arranged for their publication. It's a unique account of an ordinary soldier's experiences in a chaotic situation.

The book does not contain too many details about his Dunstable life but of course we locals want to know more. So let's record here a few of those extra details.

Raymond, before he was called-up, had worked at AC Sphinx in Dunstable and Vauxhall Motors in Luton. He was the son of William and Margaret Bailey, of 52 Kirby Road, Dunstable. He had a younger brother named Harry.

After the fall of France and the British evacuation at Dunkirk his parents had had no news of him for five-and-a-half months until a letter arrived saying that he was safe and on his way home.

### ICE-CREAM SALESMAN

Here's a little-known Dunstable fact. The first ice-cream salesman in Dunstable was William Kilby, who died in 1947 aged 83. Mr Kilby, of Winfield Street, toured the district wearing a white coat and straw hat selling the frozen treat from a cart pulled by a pony. He was also well-known for his sporting prowess and for owning a grocery shop in Edward Street.

### FAMOUS FILM STAR STOPPED AT THE SUGAR LOAF



Greer Garson

Delving into old Dunstable Gazette files, we discover that Greer Garson, once a very famous film star, stopped at the Sugar Loaf in Dunstable in 1949 while on a car journey down the Watling Street. She was having tea with her husband, millionaire Buddy Fogelson, when she was recognised by a reporter from the Gazette. Miss Garson was not too annoyed at

being asked a question or two and actually admired the reporter's note-taking. She remarked that she had learned Pitman's in her younger days and could decipher what was being written.

### KENNETH ALLSOP

Another snippet from the 1949 newspaper files reveals that journalist Kenneth Allsop, who was among nine families living in a community at Barwythe House, Studham, had written a book about a rare bird, the little ringed plover. Mr Allsop, who was injured in the war while serving with the RAF and had a leg amputated, later became a tv personality as a presenter on the programme Tonight. Remember him?



Kenneth Allsop

### ELLIS BARBER'S SHOP

The society has answered a query about the history of the old Ellis barber's shop which once stood in West Street, on part of the site now occupied by new shops which include the British Heart Foundation's furniture store.

The Ellis shop was one of the oldest buildings in Dunstable and its remains, carefully numbered and recorded, were removed to the Chiltern Open Air Museum at Chalfont St Giles. Over the centuries its Tudor interior had been covered by layers of newer walls.

It was once an inn called The Old Vine. This became the Oyster Bar between 1868 and 1875 before it was converted into an office for the well-known local auctioneer William Derbyshire. It became a hairdresser's in 1900 until its closure in 1974.

### CHILTERN ROAD SCHOOL

A 1934 photograph of children from Chiltern Road School being escorted across the Watling Street by a policeman was published in the Dunstable Gazette's Yesteryear series a few weeks ago.

The research into providing details for a suitable caption proved quite tricky. Information about the history of the school was not easily available so, for the record, here's some of the facts which were uncovered.

The school was opened in temporary buildings in 1878 by the Houghton Regis School Board. Permanent buildings were ready for occupation three years later.

The Dunstable Gazette was calling it The National School in 1889 and its files include a report on a meeting held there by Houghton Regis Parish Council in 1898.

The growth of the population in the area had brought about the need for the new school. The Houghton Board was involved because Chiltern Road was then the parish of Houghton Regis and the area was known as Upper Houghton until 1907 when Dunstable was allowed to extend its boundary northwards, beyond Union Street.

The Houghton School Board continued to run Chiltern Road until 1902, even though nearly half of the school's 220 scholars lived in the borough of Dunstable, with obvious complications about how its running costs should be shared. Beds County Council took over the school in 1902 and extra buildings were provided in 1912.

After the war, children from the new Beecroft Estate added to the numbers at Chiltern Road School. For sports activities the

*continued overleaf*



Policeman and children at the corner of Chiltern Road in 1934

children would walk to the Waterlow's playing field at French's Avenue and have their mid-day meals at Northfields. Until two hutted classrooms were built on the Chiltern Road playground, two classes had to be accommodated in the Drill Hall at High Street North, where the Tesco filling station now stands.

There was a major change at the school in 1952 when all 273 of its junior pupils were transferred to the new Beecroft Primary School, leaving Chiltern Road to continue as a school for infants.

This closed in 1974 and the school buildings were converted into studios for Chiltern Radio (later Heart FM)

### ACT OF REMEMBRANCE ON WHIPSNADE GREEN

There was an Act of Remembrance on Whipsnade Green in October, followed by a service at the nearby church, to mark the anniversary of the death of American airman Glenn Hagenbuch.

He died on October 9 1943 when his aircraft crashed near the Chequers Cottages in the village on a routine flight from Bovingdon airfield.

It seems that nothing about the accident was published at the time, perhaps due to war-time censorship, but the history society became aware of many details following a talk by David Underwood at one of our meetings and an eye-witness description of the crash written by Mrs Irene Hurst. She had been changing her clothes when the wing of the plane hit her bedroom window.

Her daughter, Mrs "Twink" Bunker, says her mother tried to help the pilot and then men from the RAF, based in a hut nearby, ran to the scene and took over. The RAF operated a little war-time radio station on top of the hill behind the cottages, near the zoo fence.

Following the meeting, David Underwood traced a photo of the crash scene in American air force records.



Major Glenn Hagenbuch



The Whipsnade Green Act of Remembrance in October 2025

The chairman of Whipsnade Parish Council, Cllr Ken France, did further research and contacted Major Hagenbuch's family in Illinois, USA.

This led to the remembrance service last October and a special exhibition in Whipsnade hall. It was attended by members of the family and many representatives of organisations from the Bedfordshire area.

The eulogy at the church service included particularly poignant information about Major Hagenbuch's special abilities as a pilot. He had led flights of bombers in a series of raids over heavily defended targets in Nazi Germany and, thanks to his skilful tactics, all his aircraft returned safely to England. This was at a time in the war when the casualty-rate among bomber crews was very high. He had completed his combat missions unharmed but then died as the result of a mere mechanical failure.

### "WHIPPY" NESBITT-DUFORT

One other result of our investigations into local aircraft crashes was information about another incident at Whipsnade which, happily, ended with laughter rather than tragedy. It was the aftermath of a pre-war display at Hendon Air Pageant by RAF officer "Whippy" Nesbitt-Dufort. He had been flying back to base when his engine failed high over Bedfordshire and he made a forced landing on the nearest-available field. He found that he was inside the zoo's rhino paddock, hence his subsequent nickname.

John Buckledee



The Whipsnade war time air crash in October 1943 outside chequers cottages

## Greeting New Members



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

<b>Vivien Burman</b>	<b>Wendy Copley</b>	<b>Martin Funnell</b>
<b>Tracy Gray</b>	<b>Derek Hart</b>	<b>Sybil Hart</b>
<b>Audrey Morgan</b>	<b>James Morgan</b>	<b>Jean Parr</b>
<b>Patricia Shirley</b>	<b>Derek Spriggs</b>	<b>Jane Tomkins</b>
	<b>Keith Tomkins</b>	

## Sad Farewell



We are very sorry to announce the sad loss of

**Gordon Ivinson**      **Veronica Squires**