

Newsletter

DUNSTABLE & DISTRICT
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

N°9

March 1998



Trades Evening

The recent Trades Evening, on *the Printing Industry in Dunstable* brought in another large audience of some 170 people, continuing the popularity of these particular meetings.

This last one was the fourth since we started the series in February '95. We have now covered Dales' Dubbin, Harrison Carter engineering, the herb factory of Mr Flemons, Dart Aircraft and related aircraft companies (all these four in one night !) old shops and the former cattle market, the whiting industry, Bagshawe's (where our President played a prominent part), and now the printing trade, which concentrated on Waterlow's, but also included a brief look at the Tibbett family and their association with the Gazette, Index and Enterprise printing works.

In turn these evenings have led to our book series on 'Old Trades of Dunstable' which has been very successful and has caused much interesting comment over a wide area. The talks and the books have resulted in a great deal of reminiscing which also has supplied us with more knowledge of Dunstable's past.

At this last evening we are greatly indebted to Mr Bill Bierton for his talk on Waterlow's and the collating and presentation of the display unit about the firm. Also thanks to members of the Society who produced interesting items. Of course we only scratched the surface. Apart from more about Waterlow's, Index with the developing publishing side relating to the international ABC travel guides, would make an evening in itself.

Colin Bourne

For your diary Summer 1998

9th June and 16th June :

Evening visit to Little Gaddesden Church and Frithsden Vineyard, wine tasting and supper. Transport arrangements by car. Two visits are being arranged as numbers at Frithsden are limited.

7th July :

Evening visit to Hitchin Town and Museum: the Old Chemist shop and garden, followed by light refreshments. By coach.

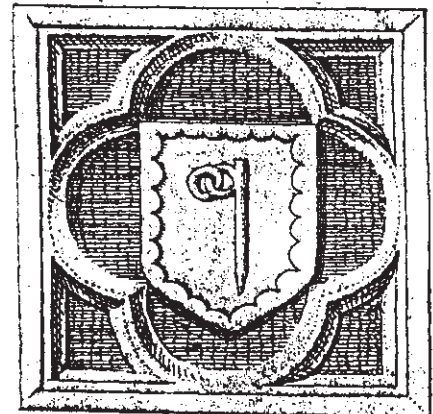
8th August :

A day out in Suffolk.
Coach tour to Lavenham via attractive villages and towns, commencing at 8.30 a.m.
If enough interest is shown another visit can be organised towards the end of the month.

Full details of all outings will be given in the usual Summer Programme leaflet.

The arms of Dunstable as they were drawn by Thomas Fisher in 1836, «on a house in Dunstable». The worn out sandstone is still visible by the entrance to Kingsbury House in Church Street. The engraving shows them reversed left to right when the engraver etched the copper plate as he saw the drawing. The illustration on the right shows the arms as they must have been originally. After that date the arms were always shown with the ring to the right, especially on the version published in *Dunstablelogia* by Charles Lamborn in 1859. The centre part has a scalloped edging, a motto : *Justicia omnibus Fiet*, that is : *Let Justice Be Done to All*, is added, and it is surrounded by decorating palms. These additions could have been suggested by the Rev. Frederick Hose who was the Rector at the time and to whom Lamborn dedicates his book. At that time only the engraving of the drawing by Fisher was available, and so the ring was drawn to the right, the opposite way to the older representation in the roof of the Church which we have used to draw the logo of our Society. This design was adopted as the Dunstable Arms when the town received its charter in 1864.

O.Roucoux



One of the daily sights of Dunstable in the decade or so before the last war and carrying on to the 1960s was the plethora of long distance motor coaches coming into the town, northbound and southbound, and stopping for a short break. The article below is written by Mr Reg Geary, a Dunstablian of long standing, following a conversation I had with him about the coaches and the liaison with the Central Café in High Street North.

This café was very much part of the busy life of the High Street and stood where the left hand side of the Halifax now stands. One interesting point was that, joining the café, was an archway which not only led to the back of the adjacent shops, but also to the Enterprise Printing works.

During the war Mr Geary was in the RAF, where he served with distinction, being Mentioned in Despatches. He still does much work for the local RAF Association and currently is its President. In 1945, after the war and following his father's footsteps he and his late wife, Doris, ran the Central Café until it was closed in April 1978, after over 50 years as a Dunstable business.

For the Central (and similar cafés) and the motor coaches, read the inns and stage coaches of the 18th and 19th centuries — and a market town noted for looking after all the various travellers who went through it.

Colin Bourne

Long Distance Coach Travel through Dunstable The Early Days — by Reg Geary

It was Easter 1927 that my father, Tom Geary, opened the premises, once part of the Woolley Saunders hat factory on the eastern side of High Street North, Dunstable and not far off the cross roads, and called it the 'Central Café'.

I myself, Reg Geary, went to work at Electrolux, in the vacuum cleaner department of this company. The café soon became well established and it was sometime in 1928 that a gentleman called in to see my father. He was a Mr. Victor Standerwick, of a Blackpool coach and taxi business that had been engaged in Blackpool local travel in various forms since 1912. He had even run a charabanc from Blackpool to London, just as a bit of fun for some of his friends and acquaintances — I believe it took them two days to reach London, however they did do it!

Mr Standerwick wished to find a refreshment place some 30-35 miles from London with toilet facilities and a very quick service to accommodate his passengers for morning coffee or tea, light refreshments, etc. He also wished to have his coaches stop for tea and some light, hot meals on the southbound journey to London. The times would be 10 a.m. on the northbound journey, leaving London (Victoria) at 8 a.m. and calling at various booking agencies en route, and approximately 4.30 p.m. on the southbound journey to arrive in London at 7 p.m. The journey was scheduled to take around 11 hours.

This form of travel soon took on as it was something quite new for the public and much cheaper than rail.

Within a very short time both the catering side of the Central Café and the coach Booking Agency, which had also been agreed with Mr Standerwick, became very busy and my father asked me to help him with the coach side of the business whilst my three sisters assisted with the catering side, cooking and as waitresses.

It was not long before other coach companies, mostly from northern towns, entered into long distance travel, thus increasing the agency side. However, a price war in fares became the thing of the day and some companies went bankrupt where there was more than one company

operating on a route. Any firm could start a coach business, but later on Traffic Commissioners were set up, formed to control standards, prices, routes, etc., eventually becoming part of the Ministry of Transport.

Standerwick's did not enter into a price war, but concentrated on a good, reliable service, the best of coaches, and experienced drivers, some of whom had been with the company for many years on travel for wakes, etc. from

Blackpool. Standerwick was a pioneer firm and covered the route London - Barnet - St Albans - Dunstable - Fenny Stratford - Weedon - Towcester - Coventry - Birmingham - Newcastle under Lyme - Preston - Lytham - Blackpool. Their coaches were basically white, with a red "Standerwick" name along the side.

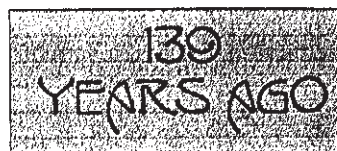
For a short time a Manchester company operating London - Manchester, via Dunstable, but whose name I cannot remember, ran a night sleeper coach with bunk beds, but this did not seem to catch on and I do not remember even booking anyone for this service. It was a



Mr & Mrs Geary outside their café, April 1978
Photo by courtesy of Dunstable Gazette

A Memorable Wedding

from *The Dunstable Chronicle* of Nov. 5th 1859



Fred Moore writes : *The following wedding so eloquently described is of particular interest in view of the family connection of the bride, Elizabeth Dorcas Darley.*

Her grandfather, John Darley, converted under John Wesley, became the founder of Methodism in Dunstable. He married Dorcas Summerfield in 1797 and their son, John, father of the bride, was born in 1798. Both father and son were Trustees of the first Wesleyan chapel built in 1831 on the site of the present church on The Square.

John the elder's sister, Ann, married Richard Underwood, a tailor and they lived at our premises at no 11 (now 21) High Street South. On the death of Ann, now a widow, in 1847 and of her last surviving son shortly after, the property went to her nephew, John Darley. It seems possible, therefore, that the bride, Elizabeth Dorcas Darley, was married from 21 High Street South. As an aside John Darley sold the property to James Tibbett, the younger of the well-known local printers and publishers, in 1876 for £600. A good investment, for he had saved the property from falling down in 1853 for an expenditure of £80 !

« On Tuesday last a marriage ceremony was performed in the Wesleyan Chapel in this town, under very interesting and imposing circumstances. The bride and bridegroom elect were Miss Elizabeth Dorcas Darley, and Mr. James Wheeler, of Luton. We doubt whether such a large assembly was ever previously convened, on a similar occasion, in that place, several hundred being present to testify their esteem for a young friend, who, by her self denying and unwearied efforts for the spiritual interest of the youth of this neighbourhood, as well as by her many personal excellencies, is endeared by all who know her. The happy couple appeared at the altar accompanied by Mr. B. Bennet, who acted the part of father, and the following ladies who had been selected as bridesmaids, viz.— Miss Wooton, (principal bridesmaid,) Miss and Miss D. Darley, Miss Davies, Miss and the Misses R. and K. Higgins. The officiating minister was the Rev. John Wesley Wilson, who read the service in a very impressive manner, commanding the serious attention of the numerous spectators. After the ceremony the choir sung an appropriate hymn for the occasion, and Mr. Wilson, on behalf of the lady of John Cooper, Esq., presented the bride with an elegant bouquet, composed of the choicest flowers which Mr. Cooper's extensive conservatory could afford. The bridal party then adjourned to the Mechanics' Institute, (kindly lent by Mr. Osborn,) where they were joined at breakfast by many of their personal friends, the singers of the Wesleyan Chapel, and the bride's two Sunday school classes, and also her week-night class. Mr Bennet presided, and performed the duties of his office, with much grace and ability. The repast being concluded, Mr. B. offered the congratulations of the party to the bride and bridegroom, and requested the acceptance of a handsome copy of Wesley's Hymns, pronouncing a high

eulogium on the hymns themselves. The Rev J. W. Wilson was then called upon for an address, when he took the opportunity of presenting to the bride a valuable writing desk, purchased by the members of her Sunday-school classes, as a token of their gratitude for her kind interest in their spiritual well-being; a beautiful volume of "Hawker's Daily Portion" from the members of her week-night class; and an elegant Cruet-stand subscribed for by the singers. The rev. gentleman spoke in glowing terms of the bride's valuable labours in connection with the Wesleyan church, and whilst congratulating the bridegroom on the choice he had made, expressed his regret at her removal from Dunstable. Mr. C. Lockhart, who had at one time stood in the relationship of Leader, both to the Bride and the Bridegroom, offered them a tribute of esteem, and urging on the necessity of marrying in the Lord, cautioning all the unmarried against being "unequally yoked with unbelievers." Mr. J. Williams and Mr. Beech also spoke. The pleasure of the party was greatly enhanced by the performance of the choir, who sung, under the direction of Mr. J. Robinson, several appropriate pieces. Thanks were unanimously voted to the singers, and suitably acknowledged by Messrs. Robinson and Watts. On the proposal of Mr. Lockhart, and supported by Mr. E. F. Gravestock, it was also resolved thanks should be presented to Mr. Bennett. The friends separated at a late hour, having spent a very happy day in the celebration of a wedding which we earnestly trust may be followed by a long, happy, and useful life. »

The Society's activities 1996 / 97

For the activities in 1992/93 see issue 1, for 94/95 see issue 5

1996

The History of Ashridge : Philip Sadler
Cinema & Theater History in Luton and Dunstable : Eddie Grabham
Dunstable, Massachusetts : Terry Oliver and Pat Reeves
Luton Hoo (June outing)
Selected places in North Bedfordshire (July outing)
Ashridge House (additional July outing)
Blenchley Park (August outing)
The Lower Reaches of the Ouse : Philip Lepper
Leighton Buzzard and its History : R.V. Willis
A Walk around Dunsatble : Vivienne Evans (slides by O. Roucoux)

1997

Arthur England and his Busses : Graham Smith
Bagshawe's : the Firm and the Family
67 years of the London Gliding Club : Ted Hull
Country Trades and Crafts : Marian Nichols
The World of the Highwayman : Hugh Grainger
Redbourne Church and Redbournbury Mill (June outing)
College Lake, Pitstone (July outing)
The River Ouse from Bedford onwards (August outing)
Whipsnade Wild Animal Park : Graham Lucas
Narrow Boat Nostalgia : Susan Woodward
Markyate Miscellany : Richard Hogg

1998

A Victorian Chemist shop : Isabel Wilson
Dunstable Trades Evening : The Printing Industry

More about the Central Café

The Central Café also catered for private coach parties by arrangement. These included coach companies carrying Ivy Benson's Ladies Dance Bands (the drivers loved them as the ladies insisted on carrying their own luggage) and football supporters going to Wembley for the Cup Final. The latter often returned north on the Sunday, having stopped in London for the night. The coach party

sometimes wished to have a group photo taken, so I would get Charles Smy, the photographer, to come along. He was always pleased to oblige on a Sunday, at a moment's notice. The photo would be taken on a small piece of waste land at the back of the café.

Prince Bira, the racing driver, would have breakfast soon after 9 a.m. on a Sunday, when he was racing at Silverstone after the war. He stayed in a caravan parked at the London Gliding Club during the time of the British Grand Prix. He was a very unassuming gentleman and liked to sit upstairs in the café, where it was nice and quiet.

Reg Geary

The Old Sugar Loaf

Mr Twaddle, who lived in Whipsnade, was a fine local historian and an expert on the history of South Bedfordshire. Many of us will no doubt have his book, entitled 'Old Dunstable', published in 1975, and re-issued by The Book Castle, a short time ago. Mr Twaddle worked at Bagshawe's for many years and was well respected in the neighbourhood. He died in 1992. The following extract was written in 1962 and comes from the author's own archives. We do not know if it has ever been published.

The sign is uncommon for an hotel or inn. It was at one time used by grocers. At the time the Old Sugar Loaf was built there was a prevailing custom amongst grocers to sell sugar at cost price. The breaking up of the lumps of loafs, weighing and packing were done gratuitously. The sign of the Sugar Loaf implied fair trading and it may have been selected for this reason.

Alternatively it might have been built on the site of a grocers shop, since the sign includes the adjective "Old" it appears that this is most likely.

It was built in 1717 as an inn, not as a house for stage coaches; but to accommodate nobility, persons of means and private families. It paid an annual duty of about £500 per annum to the government and enjoyed a more or less continuous period of prosperity for 130 years, until the decline of road traffic due to the opening of the railway between London and Birmingham in 1838.

A stud of outstanding grey horses was kept in the inn; it is recorded that a single horse was worth about £40, a considerable sum of money in those days.

The Royal Dukes of Clarence (the King William IV), York and Gloucester, sons of George III patronized the inn and

greatly admired the greys which were hired to them for their journeys.

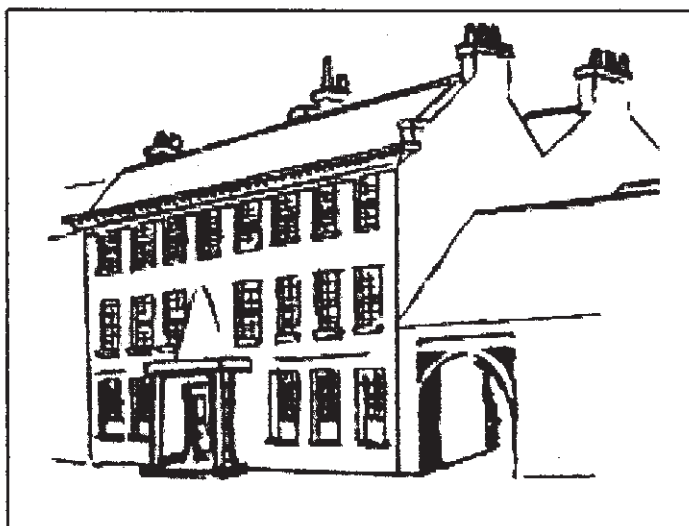
During the Napoleonic wars the landlord and staff were much inconvenienced by compulsory billeting of soldiers. Guests were obliged to give up their rooms and accommodation to troops. No payment was made for the use of these rooms and beds. The adjoining "Sugar Loaf Tap" was then built and called the "Soldiers House" that was also used to accommodate the troops.

It is said that the rather low windows of the dining room were arranged so that the guests could view and purchase straw hats which street vendors offered to travellers ...

A horse pond existed in the middle of the road opposite the hotel, wells supplied the town with water ...

During some alterations to the dining room about 1937 a small hide-out was discovered. It was

said to be a priests-hole, but it was more likely prepared as a hiding place for guests, for there was no limit to the protection an innkeeper would have offered his guests.



W.T. / A.C. 17th April 1962

DOOLITTLE MILL

This combined wind and watermill, one of the few such mills in the country, was described in a report published by South Bedfordshire D.C. and Bedfordshire C.C. in 1994 as an 'historic building at risk'. The mill, with the attached millhouse, is a Grade II listed building.

The mill stands on or near the site of a medieval watermill and its history is complicated. It is really the story of two separate mills, a watermill and a windmill, until the early 19th century, and some of the story can be pieced together from a surviving schedule of deeds; unfortunately the deeds themselves are missing.

The first document listed is a lease, dated 1620, from William Sandys, Anthony Sawrey, William Mackereth and Edmund Buckmaster to Francis Ashwell, Citizen and Vintner of London. At the time the mill was known as Horsham Mill (Horsham means the settlement where horses were kept). Variations of this name have survived in field names through the centuries.

Over the years the mill lease was bought and sold many times. Some owners were not themselves millers and let Horsham Mill to tenants; some had other mills elsewhere. Interestingly, most of the owners not only held the lease of the watermill but also the freehold of a windmill nearby.

It is not known when the first windmill was built, but in the course of time at least two were erected in adjacent fields, each in turn falling into disuse. In 1708 Richard Gadbury had inherited the watermill and a windmill at Warehill from his father, but he must have built a new windmill, or moved the other one closer to the watermill. Four years later he sold them both to Samuel Pierson, a miller who had come to Totternhoe from Northall. In 1729 he sold the land at Warehill "on which a windmill lately did stand on part thereof" to somebody else, another miller called Richard Cox. A writer in 1765 recalled that the stump of an old mill could be seen there up to 30 years before.

There was an important discovery in 1994. Two beams which span the windmill tower and support the 'sprattle' (this supports the windmill's upright shaft) were found to have come from the post belonging to a post mill, which had been cut into four lengthwise. Since millers were well known for their recycling abilities, it would be a fair assumption that the beams were part of one of the nearby post mills.

In 1780, 'by coincidence, a Buckmaster became the owner of the mill again. Thomas Buckmaster, a miller from Slapton, bought a "new erected windmill with appurtenances" for £188.10.0 and the "lease of the Mill House and Watermill called Horsham Mill" from the widow of Henry Pearson. In 1769 Henry died and left his widow the mill and house "known by the name of Horsham Mills (otherwise Do-little Mills)". This is the first occasion, as far as has been discovered, that the name Do(o)little appears in a document, probably an indication of an uncertain water supply.

How long the new erected windmill survived is not known, nor when Thomas Buckmaster or his son, Christopher, decided to combine wind and water power in one mill, but this is believed to have been early in the 19th century. A photograph dated 1858 (below) has survived showing the combined mill still with all its sails, which it is said were blown off in a storm in the late 19th century - the date 1868 is sometimes quoted but there is no evidence of the event at all in contemporary records. There was a report, though, of this happening at Edlesborough Mill, about half a mile away, in 1889.

Doolittle Mill is not easy to describe briefly. It has five floors in all, including the ground floor. The watermill occupies the two bottom floors, and its ceiling forms the 'ground' floor of the windmill above, which had three floors, though there may have been four originally.

The windmill had two pairs of stones of which only one bedstone remains. Of the windmill machinery, only the upright shaft and its solid wooden wallower (a bevel gear wheel), and the great spur



Doolittle Mill in 1858

wheel (a very large gear wheel which drives the millstones) are left. The cast iron wind-shaft (to one end of which the sails were attached) has been discovered being used as a support for the floor above the waterwheel.

Like the windmill, the watermill had two pairs of stones, both of which are still in place and complete. Of the overshot wooden waterwheel (approximately 16 feet in diameter) only the wooden axle and spoke hubs remain.

Most of the watermill's gearing and machinery still survive. A shaft runs out of the mill beyond the waterwheel and terminates in a large pulley which enabled the millstones to be driven by a portable steam engine installed in the lean-to shed alongside the wheelhouse to supplement the poor water supply. Each mill drove its own stones and there were no means by which the drive from one could be used by the other.

The mill remained in the Buckmaster family and ceased working in 1921 when the steam engine

became unusable. It has remained silent and virtually untended ever since, although the adjacent house remained occupied until the late summer of 1997.

In 1925, when the rates were being re-assessed, the assessor who looked at Doolittle Mill made notes in the margins of his official lists. Of Doolittle he wrote «This mill is in an appalling condition.»

A survey of the mill was undertaken in 1990 at the request of the District Council, and the report concludes with the words «The rescue, repair and protection of Doolittle Mill is fully justified as it is such an important example. It is however at a point when it has to be rescued now or it will be lost.»

Doolittle Mill and the millhouse were put up for sale a year ago with a guide price of £280,000. Whilst there has been quite a bit of interest, the mill remains on the market.

Joan Curran & David Lindsey

Icknield Lower School

Icknield Lower School, formerly called BURR STREET will be celebrating its 90th Anniversary this September. If you are an ex-pupil or ex-teacher of the school and would like to take part, please contact the Head Teacher, Mrs Beryl Joyce.

Next season's Programme

All the meetings for September 1998 to May 1999 will be held on the second Tuesday of the Month

Bedfordshire Local History Association AGM

This will take place on Saturday 16th May in the crypt of St. Mary's Church, Woburn, and will be followed by a walk round Woburn.

The talk will be entitled
Code-breaking at Bletchley in World War 2.

Bedfordshire Local History Conference

Dunstable Society were host to this in 1997 and this year the Potton Society are hosting a day at Cockayne Hatley on 6th June, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The Theme will be
Promoting Interest in Local History

A tour of the village has been organised. The cost is £8 per person including lunch and tea.

Please let Joan Curran know by the 27th March.

OLD TRADES OF DUNSTABLE

There are still copies of the first two books on the subject.

They can be bought at the Society meetings or from Society Officers and also from the Book Castle. Both cost £2.95

A third book about the Whiting Works in Dunstable is in preparation.

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A provisional index of the first 9 issues of this Newsletter is available from Omer Roucoux.
Price 50p. Comments about it will be welcome.

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