

NEWSLETTER

Dunstable & District Local History Society
No. 35 February 2011



Chairman's Notes

Our President Bernard Stevens celebrated his 100th birthday in style, hosting TWO luncheon parties at the Old Palace Lodge for many of his friends.

The History Society was well represented – Bernard would have probably invited all 200 of us if there had been room!

David Turner designed that special birthday card which many of you will have signed. It was on display at the hotel, showing Bernard as some of the other famous people born on November 23. These included the first Doctor Who (William Hartnell) and Billy the Kid (William Bonney).

The Mayor of Dunstable, Mike Mullany, was there to read out a birthday card from the Queen. Her Majesty referred to Bernard as “John” which is, of course, Bernard’s first Christian name. Perhaps we should all call him John in future...if it’s good enough for the Queen it ought to be good enough for us!

There was an impressively immediate appreciation at the luncheon for all the subtle references on Bernard’s birthday cake. It had, for instance, four candles – a joke about Bernard’s famous hardware shop. Clearly, almost everyone there had been fans of the Two Ronnies.

ANDREW BRAMMER

The society was treated to a real star turn by Andrew Brammer at our December meeting. He is a most accomplished story teller and is used to playing at far bigger venues than the church hall in Dunstable. But he could not have had a more appreciative audience. There was a simultaneous chuckle from 100 voices when everyone realised the catch in his story about the greyhound gamble at Skimpot. Andrew emailed afterwards to say how thrilled he was by the response from his home audience.



Andrew Brammer, the speaker, at the December meeting

TEAS ROTA

The December event was the last time we were served tea and coffee by our stalwart members May and Ivor Cole.



Members of the committee presenting birthday cards to the society's president, Bernard Stevens, on his 100th birthday

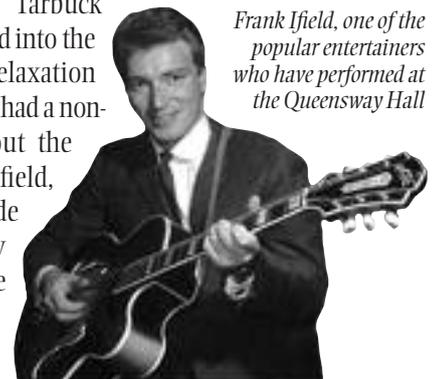
They have recently moved house and cannot now guarantee to be present at all our meetings. Our thanks to them for all their hard work and also to those people who have agreed to join a new refreshments rota. But we still need more volunteers...

The society has taken the opportunity to introduce a new system whereby we have a tea break in the middle of the evening instead of the end. It means the meetings do not finish quite so early, and we have more of a chance to socialise. A lot of members had requested this but we'll have a vote at our annual meeting to see if a majority approve of the change.

THE QUEENSWAY HALL

Richard Walden's excellent talk about the show business personalities who played at the old Queensway Hall prompted a huge number of anecdotes afterwards. There were far too many to record at the time but it certainly seems that there is a vast story still to be told.

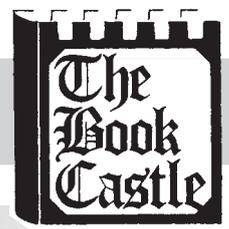
It would be a good idea to use the pages of this newsletter to gather them together before they are all forgotten, so please jot down your memories on a slip of paper and send them in. Just write them in note form if you wish. Events at the old California Ballroom have been well documented, but the old Civic tried to be more wide-ranging in its appeal and its big productions deserve to be better recorded. Is it just me, but does anyone else remember Janie Marden in a televised show there, or Stephanie Voss in a radio broadcast of Friday Night Is Music Night, or comedian Harold Berens (“Ignorance Is Bliss”) in a dinner-dance cabaret? Jimmy Tarbuck performed there, and nipped into the Union Cinema for some relaxation before his show. Roy Castle had a non-stop stream of jokes about the hall's décor and Frank Ifield, then living at Whipsnade village, hosted a charity concert. Have I jogged some memories?



Frank Ifield, one of the popular entertainers who have performed at the Queensway Hall

John Buckledee

From Boots to Books



On the front of what is now No.12 Church Street is the date 1872.

Who had it built is not known for certain, but it seems possible that it was Mr Milligan, the owner of the Crown hat factory.

His son, William Thomas Milligan, was certainly the owner in the 1890s. William had not followed his father into the hat trade but instead graduated from Cambridge University and became a clergyman, so it seems unlikely that he would have bought such a building and the most likely explanation is that he inherited it from his father. Probably intended for use as a workshop or warehouse, it has never been lived in and in the late 1870s it was a boot and shoe factory run by James Billington.

One Saturday night shortly before Christmas in 1879 the factory was burgled and thieves got into the 'clicking room', where the leather shapes were cut out. They got away with over 60 ladies' 'tops' and several pairs of men's shooting boots, and though the police spent the whole of the following Monday trying to trace the missing items they were never found.

THE SALVATION ARMY

Mr Billington eventually moved to High Street South and in 1885 the Salvation Army came to Dunstable and took over the building, which they referred to as their Assembly Rooms. Looking for more accommodation they also asked the Town Council for permission to use the Town Hall for meetings in November and December that year. Permission was refused, on the grounds that they wanted only to get non-churchgoers to attend and the Assembly Rooms would be quite large enough for their purpose. However, on the first Sunday in December a large crowd of people gathered in Church Street and caused so much disturbance while waiting for the Assembly Rooms to open that the police were called. One constable was heard to comment that, 'It ain't the Salvation Army as kicks up the row, it's the boys and girls, and the girls are the worst'.



Paul Bowes standing outside the Book Castle in 1988

DRILL HALL

The Salvation Army was right. The hall was not big enough for their needs. A few years later they had moved to premises in High Street North (now a betting shop) and the building in Church Street was advertised for use as a warehouse. But it was not for storage that it was to be used but as a drill hall and armoury for the local volunteers. The words 'Drill Hall'



The Book Castle when it was an antique shop. The photo was taken in 1980 by the late Bertha Eyre who donated her negatives to the history society

were painted over the doorway, the interior was fitted out with equipment for instruction in military skills, and books, papers and games were provided for recreation, which prompted a local reporter to write that 'many a merry hour will the volunteers and the young recruits spend within the walls of their own hall'. (Not, perhaps, how we would phrase it today.) A grand supper was organised to celebrate the opening in March 1890.

The photograph on the left shows the doorway when the words 'Drill Hall' were uncovered during redecoration in 1988

RIXSON ANTIQUES

It was not until after the First World War that the volunteers left and in the 1930s Mr William Rixson, the antique dealer, moved into the premises. (By this time all the streets had been re-numbered and the building was now officially No 12 Church Street. It had not originally been given a number.) A photograph shows that Mr Rixson had the word 'Antiques' painted over the door. He also owned No.26 Church Street (now a restaurant.) His brother, Harry, owned another showroom, known as the Retreat, in High Street South, next to the Saracen's Head. Demolished in the 1960s, this was a real Aladdin's cave of treasures. From local residents' memories it seems that during the latter part of his ownership William Rixson may have kept the former Drill Hall just for storage.

THE BOOK CASTLE

It was in February 1980 that Paul Bowes opened his bookshop at No.12 Church Street, with its distinctive 'battlements', and named it the Book Castle. It has become a familiar and well-loved landmark in Dunstable over the last thirty years and the Book Castle logo is well-known to collectors of local history books all over Bedfordshire. Since it was erected in 1872 the building has gone through many changes, and who knows what others are to come. Whichever they may be, long may the building survive

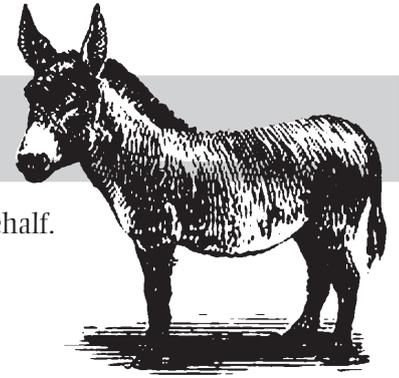
Joan Curran

The Mayor's Christmas Charity

Braund the pensioner, who has served his country abroad, has met with a misfortune. He bought a donkey to help him in his work as a hawker, but the animal died the other day and Dr Morcom, the Mayor, has very kindly headed a

subscription list on his behalf.

Dunstable Gazette
10th December 1890



A Useful Hat

In September 1929, another interesting article appeared in the Gazette in the form of a letter in which a lady wrote about her grandfather (again no name). Then aged 89 years he had not eaten bread for the last 2 years as it was not like the old fashioned variety. The only uses he now had for it were to put a crumb in his beer to take the froth down, and to carry a small piece in his pocket, during wet weather, to take the dampness out of his clothes, which was good for his rheumatism

The article went on to explain how he remembered the tinsmith shop that used to be where the bank is now. Next door lived Mr Dumble who made beaver hats and for strength lined them with leather. For this reason he was affectionately known as "Buckskin Dumble".

Mrs Dumble, his wife, made her own tallow candles but one evening a potkin of tallow caught alight and they had to fetch the fire 'manual' (old wooden fire engine which was later sold) that had

the appearance of a beer barrel on a truck. Although the writer rushed to help the Dumbles to pump the water it was too slow, so they proceeded to put the fire out by filling some of Dumble's hats with water and using them like fire buckets.

When the fire was out, Mr. Dumble suggested that his wife should not heat any more fat for candles but she replied it was not for herself but to be used on the leather of his hat.

In another article I found a reference to a tinsmith shop next door to a bank which the article referred to as the National Provincial Bank in High Street North.

Does anybody remember who occupied the premises before the National Provincial Bank? If so, we would very much like to know.

Rita Swift



Greeting New Members

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

| | |
|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Mr P Birch | Mrs B Brown |
| Mr R Clarke | Mrs S Donald |
| Mr A Haydon | Mrs P Heath |
| Mr J Mitcham | Mrs W Parker |
| Mrs J Rothman | Mrs W Utteridge |
| Mr & Mrs B Ward | Mrs C White |

REJOINED:

| | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| Mrs V Evans | Mr R Pepworth |
| Mrs C Willis | |

Miraculous Cure

The following incident took place in Chalk Hill, near Dunstable, possibly in the 19th century although neither a date nor a name is given.

Throughout the area there was a man well known for his laziness. Although fit and well it became too much for him to walk around so he decided to take to his bed and no-one could persuade him to leave it. Eventually his neighbours conspired together and came up with a plan incorporating the assistance of a small, young chimney sweep's apprentice. The cottage roof was of thatch so easy to climb, for suddenly from the wide and old-fashioned chimney, there came a strange and terrible noise. To the great horror of the lazy man there emerged from the chimney, in a cloud of soot, a grinning, mocking imp of darkness, who announced "Father will fetch you on Wednesday!" and immediately disappeared the same way as he had come. The malingeringer did not wait until Wednesday but instead rushed immediately from the cottage. He ran for miles before his neighbours could catch him, but his cure was "thorough and lasting."

Strange that the story of Johnny Underwood and the mustard-filled dumpling in the Newsletter No. 22 also took place at Chalk Hill.

Rita Swift

Sad Farewell

We are very sorry to announce the sad loss of

| | |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| John Hale | Geoffrey Morris |
| Mr D Sanders | |

All very valued members of the society.

REV. FREDERICK HOSE – THE FAMILY FIRM

Frederick Hose was born in 1801, he was ordained deacon at Lichfield and as a priest at Norwich, before becoming the curate of Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge in 1830.

He was also the Chaplain of Cambridge Borough Gaol before eventually becoming the rector of the Priory Church of St. Peter in 1844. He has been criticised, by some, for having a reckless disregard for anything of antiquity during a period of extensive restoration. Certainly, by 1845, the state of the church had become very parlous and required major repairs. Rev. Hose energetically raised much finance to facilitate renovations, though a tightening of finances prevented him from undertaking a radical gothic makeover to the exterior of the church. He was, however, responsible for the major changes to the interior including the removal of the pews and galleries and for the installation of the marble pulpit currently in use. Thought by some to be tyrannical when opposed, perhaps he was only reflecting the authority of the church at the time.



Rev. Frederick Hose

He employed a team of lay visitors to research the families of the town, gathering such information as 'how leisure time was spent', 'if the Sabbath was observed' and 'whether they possessed a Bible'. They also encouraged public worship and strove to 'inculcate habits of industry and cleanliness'.

Due to his many duties, Rev. Hose's health suffered, resulting in extended periods of leave with the time spent on the continent recuperating.

SALLY THE WITCH AND THE GRAVEYARD

In 1860, the council took over responsibility of the churchyard and the town's cemetery was subsequently opened. As the churchyard was no longer under the care of the church it was not being adequately maintained. This subsequently became the focus of a controversial issue and the local headmaster, Mr A P Wire, mischievously drew attention to the situation, hoping to shame the rector into taking care of the graveyard. He wrote, and anonymously published, a poem about a witch called Sally. After being being tried for witchcraft, Sally was burnt at the stake and her spirit supposedly terrorised the neighbourhood. Eventually a palmer captured the spirit in a bottle and buried it in the graveyard. A warning was given against anyone disturbing the spirit or it would haunt the town once more, suggesting the reason why the graveyard had not been maintained.



Mary Ann Hose



Catharine Ann Hose

TWELVE CHILDREN

Rev. Hose had a total of twelve children, six with his first marriage to Mary Ann (Knight) who died in 1844, and a further six from his second marriage to Catharine Ann (Snape). He died at the rectory in Dunstable in 1883, aged 81.

THOMAS CHARLES HOSE

Thomas Charles Hose was the eldest of Rev. Hose's children from his first marriage. He was born on 30th September, 1830, in Cambridge. He was ordained deacon at Peterborough in 1858 and a priest in 1859. He became curate at Sapcote, Leicestershire from 1858 until 1860 when he moved to Harpenden, Herts. In 1862 he became the vicar at Little Wymondley, Herts. moving to Roydon, Norfolk in 1870 as the rector where he stayed until his death in 1903.



WILLIAM CLARKE HOSE

William Clarke Hose, was the third of his children from his first marriage to Mary Ann, he was born on February 4th, 1834 at Cambridge. He went to Australia and became archdeacon of the Riverina, New South Wales.

He died on March 21st 1910 at Corowa, New South Wales, Australia.

William Clarke Hose



George Frederick Hose, Bishop of Singapore, Labuan

GEORGE FREDERICK HOSE

The fourth of Frederick's children from his first marriage was George Frederick Hose who was born in 1838 and would have been eight years old when his father came to Dunstable as rector. We assume his initial education was in Dunstable and he subsequently went on to St. John's College, Cambridge where he graduated as an MA. He was ordained at Ely as deacon in 1861 and priest the following year. Appointed colonial chaplain at Melaka in 1868, he moved to Singapore in 1872, and

two years later became Singapore's first archdeacon, eventually becoming Bishop of Singapore, Labuan, and Sarawak from 1881 to 1909. He was known as a man with a 'scholarly turn of mind' and for popularising the term 'Malaya' to describe the peninsula. His office was marred by a controversy in 1882 over the erection of a monument at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Singapore. His authority to do so was called into question, centring around a complicated issue as to whether Her Majesty and the Archbishop of Canterbury had followed the proper procedure to grant ecclesiastical jurisdiction. This rumbled on and was only resolved in 1909 when he retired and the Diocese of Singapore was formed and with it the consecration of a new bishop. He died on 26 March 1922 at Guildford, Surrey.

ELLEN GRACE

The twelfth (and youngest) of Rev. Hose's children was Ellen Grace Hose who was born on 22nd May, 1853, in Dunstable, where she lived all her life, dying at the age of 89, on 26th July 1942.

David Turner

DUNSTABLE FRIARY

In Lambeth Palace Library, I found a book called 'Obit Notices of Friary Preachers or Dominicans' by Revd CF Raymund Palmer OP, 1884. One of the chapters is about the Dominican Friary in Dunstable. His sources include the Annals of Dunstable, Matthew Paris and documents from the reign of Henry III, Edward III and Henry VIII.

Matthew Paris records that the Friary was established in 1259, during the reign of Henry III. Paris was hostile to the friars, saying that these men who professed a life of poverty soon acquired great wealth and grew fat from over-eating.

The Prior of Dunstable, Geoffrey of Barton, protested at the coming of the Dominicans. On April 9th the following year, the King sent him a letter patent ratifying the establishment of the Friary.

1264 On March 26th, Henry III gave the Friary 20 oaks fit for timber. On November 24th, he gave them 15 more oaks.

1270 September 8th Walter Clifford, Archbishop of York, gave the Friary 2/- alms for food.

Note. The sums of money in the Palmer book seem very small. However, today, the Retail Price Index equivalent of £1 in 1400 would be £417.

1277 saw the first cordial meal between the friars and the canons of the Priory.

Nicholas of Aldbury, a friar, became an Augustinian for 9 years, but reverted in 1274.

1276 March 1st, Edward I gave the Friary 17/- for food while he was in Dunstable and 12/- on 29th November while he was in Bassingbourn.

1282 A woman of St. Giles (Totternhoe?) was buried at the Friary. She was carried first to the Priory, where mass was celebrated. 8 candles were supplied by the Priory Sacristan. He gave 2 to the nuns (of Markyate?) 2 to the Friary but kept the rest himself when the cortege left the Priory.

1291 The executors of Queen Eleanor gave the Friary 10/- from her alms.

1300 Edward I gave the Friary 10/- while he was in Dunstable.

1311 Edward II was met in procession by the friars, to whom he gave 10/8d.

1328/9 January 23rd Edward III gave the 21 friars 7/-, a groat each, for food.

1332 The Dominican Provincial Chapter was held at Dunstable, on the Feast of the Assumption. Edward III gave 15/- for 3 days food.

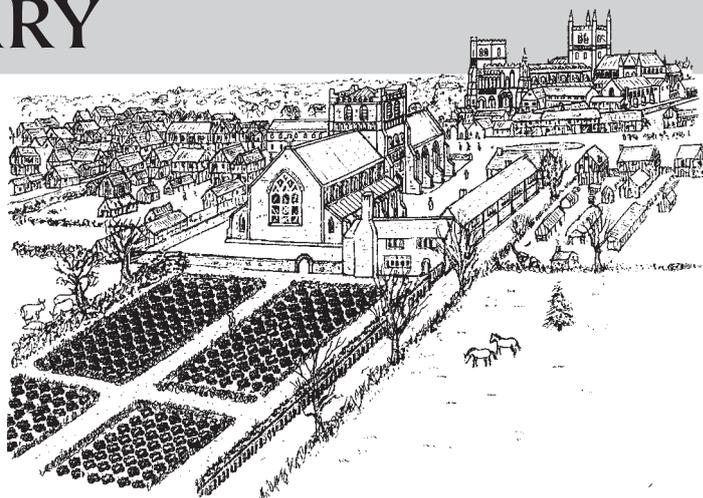
1357 November 18th, Isabel, Queen Dowager, widow of Edward II, gave cloth of gold worth 26/8d, for a vestment.

The Friary house held 20 to 32 friars at its peak.

The community declined as soon as Henry VIII 'established the rupture with the See of Rome'.

1534 On May 6th, on behalf of the Friary, along with other Friars in Kings Langley, Bedford, Ware and Hitchin, Friar John Coton 'subscribed to the royal supremacy'.

1535 The Friary was valued at £4. 18. 8d, besides rent of 4/- paid of old to the Priory for 3 tenements. The tenth, (tithe) paid to the



A conjectural illustration by Tony Woodhouse of the Dominican Friary with the Priory shown in the background

Crown, was 9. 10½d. The Priory, at this time, was valued at £402. At the Reformation, there were 52 Dominican houses in England.

1538 The Friary was finally dissolved.

1539 May 8th, Thomas Bentley, a valet of the King's guard, received a royal lease on the site of the Friary. This included all buildings, churchyards, gardens, lands and soil within the site and 4 acres of arable land in Kensworth and Dunstable, also 3 tenements with gardens which were rented to John Calverley, widow Paynter and John Godfrey. Exempted from the lease were 'such buildings which the King might command to be razed', as well as 'buildings and land already held by Robert Lee, in his wife's name, ie, a chamber and a house in the Friary, also a parcel of land for underwood in the great orchard, room to stack wood and a stable.' These had been let to William Marshall by the Friary for 50 years at an annual rent for 40/-. At his death, the lease, through his daughter, had passed to Lee, her husband. Thomas Bentley held his lease for 21 years at 44/8d, 26/8d being for the site, 4/- for the land, 5/- each for the Calverley and Godfrey tenements and 4/- for Paynter's.

1547 April 28th Sir William Herbert, gentleman of the privy chamber, petitioned to have, by way of a gift, all the property included in Bentley's lease. On 10th July the following year, all was leased to him by Edward VI at 44/8d per year to be held under the 'Honour of Ampthill'. This was a reward for loyalty but not a gift.

Revd. Palmer concludes with, 'every trace of the house has now disappeared and the site is a matter of conjecture.'

The Victorian County History for Bedfordshire, pages 363/4, recounts an incident from 1444. Prior John Roxston and some of his canons broke into the 'close and house' of Thomas, of the Friary. They wounded some of the friars, throwing one into a pool of water and despoiled the gardens.

Thomas Bentley is described as a yeoman of the guard.

It says the site, known as St Mary Over, was rented in 1676 by 'widow Rose' for 5/-.

Dunstable With The Priory 1100-1550, by Vivienne Evans, recounts details of the Friary on pages 43-6 and 96-7. Thomas Bentley is described as 'of the White Horse'.

Hugh Garrod

The legend of the Haunted House



Whilst researching the article which appeared in the last newsletter, on Dunstable, Massachusetts, I came across the story on the internet of the haunting of John Alford Tyng and thought it might prove interesting to our members.

It can be found at www.hollowhill.com/nh/tyng.htm

Edward's Tyng's* grandson, Eleazar Tyng, married Sarah Alford, and John Alford Tyng was among their five children.

JUDITH THOMPSON

John Alford Tyng met Judith Thompson, the daughter of Ezra Thompson, who provided land for a church and the town meeting house.

Judith was known as one of the most beautiful women in New England. She sometimes worked at the Tyng Mansion, helping with their large parties, and soon caught the eye of John Alford Tyng.

Tyng made advances towards Judith Thompson, but being raised in a religious family she insisted on marriage. Feeling that he couldn't marry a servant, and being already engaged to an heiress in Boston, Tyng solved the problem with a bogus marriage.

DR BLOOD

Tyng hired Dr. Blood, an itinerant physician and a known drunkard, thief and con artist (but otherwise a very nice man), to pretend to be a minister and marry the couple.

Then, John Alford Tyng moved Judith into his new home in Dunstable, a few miles from the Tyng Mansion. Judith soon gave birth to a child, then another, and finally a third child was on the way.

Some say that John Alford Tyng had squandered his money and felt overburdened by his young family. Others suggest that Tyng was insanely jealous of others' attentions to Judith, who grew more beautiful each year. So he hired his old friend Dr. Blood to kill Judith and the children, while he waited in another room as the deed was done. He then buried his family under the hearth.

That's when Tyng's problems really began, Judith Thompson's ghost began haunting her former home.



All that remains of the Tyng Mansion today, having been destroyed by fire under suspicious circumstances in 1979

*Edward Tyng was the person who we believe, together with his wife Mary, originated from Dunstable, Beds. and founded its namesake in Massachusetts.



John Alford Tyng's grave near the crypt of Edward Tyng, who we believe came from Dunstable, England

Meanwhile, John Alford Tyng made out that his family had gone to visit some relatives and his father, Eleazar, invited his son to return home while he was on his own. Judith followed him, and continued to torment her husband in his father's house.

Meanwile, one night, Dr. Blood was walking alone on a country road, it was just past dusk, and Blood felt uneasy when he heard footsteps behind him. Turning round he saw no-one there.

According to folklore, Judith Thompson's running footsteps and her jubilant laughter were heard as far as a mile away, as she pushed Dr. Blood to the ground. Dr. Blood fell face forward crushing the ceramic flask that he always carried, and the liquor contained within formed a puddle.

When Dr. Blood was found the next morning, he'd choked and drowned in the liquor. Judith's small footprint was still clearly outlined on the back of Dr. Blood's head.

The stories are consistent about Tyng's death. After moving into a third house, he became extremely ill. His servants took care of him for awhile, until Judith Thompson's ghost drove them out.

John Alford Tyng's family tried to visit him, but Judith turned them away at the door.

CAPTAIN JOSEPH BUTTERFIELD

They turned to an old family friend and neighbour, Captain Joseph Butterfield, who called upon John Alford Tyng and forced his way past Judith's ghost, to the man's bedroom.

Tyng tried to lift himself from the bed to greet his neighbour, but the effort killed him.

Captain Butterfield watched in horror as Judith Thompson's ghost materialised and cursed John Alford Tyng. She swore that Tyng's name would never remain on a headstone and he'd be forgotten in history.

Judith's curse worked. For years, John Alford Tyng's name repeatedly vanished from his headstone, along with the date of his death, September 4th, 1775. Stone after stone was replaced on the grave, but each time it rapidly eroded.

The problem was finally solved in recent years when the grave was restored yet again. They changed the date to June 24th 1771, perhaps when Judith and the children had perished.

David Turner

DALES DUBBIN



The history society's booklet by Colin Bourne about Dales Dubbin, that famous water-proofing preparation once made in Dunstable and used by numerous explorers, has now been discovered by the the author of an unusual website which specialises in boot additives of all kinds.

David Pratt has been in touch with our website (www.dunstablehistory.co.uk) and is seeking any more information which might be available.

His website is www.blancoandbull.com and is full of detail about the Dunstable dubbin, made from porpoise oil. It does not have

the unpleasant smell found in other dubbins and footwear treated with it will not be eaten by rats or mice.

Colin's article is very comprehensive, but members might like to look at the website which has a section to which additional comments can be added.

And if you do not have copies of any of the society's publications, we would be very pleased to help!

John Buckledee

Memories of old Dunstable



John Buckledee is collecting anecdotes about old Dunstable and district and always welcomes contributions. Phone him on his answerphone on 01582 703107.

THE COOPER FAMILY

One of the history society's very special visitors to the talk about film star Gary Cooper was Audrey Brown, who once lived at Bull Farm, Hockliffe.

This was the home of John Cooper, Gary's grandfather, before he moved to Manor Farm, Tingrith.

Bull Farm still stands, largely unchanged, alongside the Watling Street, opposite the entrance to what is now the McDonald's drive-through restaurant.

Mrs Brown, whose father John Olney farmed at Bull Farm all his life, brought along to the history society her prized autograph book, which had been signed by Charles Cooper, Gary's father, on a nostalgic visit there on December 20, 1936.

He wrote: "In memorium of my return to the Bull Farm after fifty eight years absence, with the gracious permission of the Olney family. Charles H. Cooper, father of Gary".

Charles Cooper, born in 1865, emigrated to America in 1883. Thanks to the autograph book, we now know that his family was living at Hockliffe until around 1878. Charles spent much of his boyhood at the White House in Houghton Regis, the home of Josiah Freeman, whose sister had married John Cooper.

Charles Cooper settled in Montana, USA, in the days when the

west really was wild! Nearby, only seven years previously, General George Custer and his cavalry had been defeated by Native American tribes at the Battle of the Little Big Horn. Cooper's second son, Frank (better known by his film name of Gary) was born in 1901 and spent his boyhood on the family ranch.

Audrey Brown's grandfather, Warwick Olney, ran the old King's Arms public house at Stanbridge. Her parents were at Bull Farm until 1943, when her sister, Sybil Nash, took over. Sybil will be 95 next April.

The Gary Cooper talk also brought a response from Patricia Heath, who shed some light on the famous story about Gary Cooper having a fight with a local lad when he was a pupil at Dunstable Grammar School.

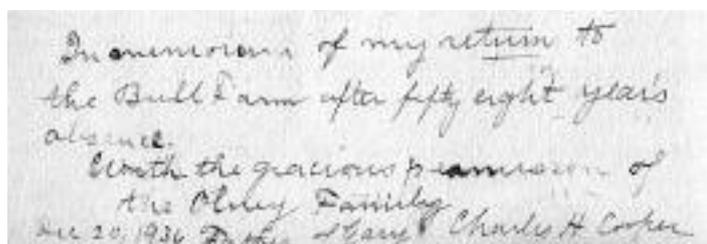
It appears that the boy involved was Frank Aldersey, whose daughter May is pleased to think that her dad may have had that brief moment of fame. She was only 16 when he died.

Patricia writes: "After talking to various members of the family it seems that only my Uncle George remembers this. He is the eldest of the family still about and his memory is excellent. Frank Aldersey married George's aunt, Ivy Powell.

"Frank was born in Cape Town, South Africa, and moved to Staffordshire aged two years – then to Dunstable."

It's not clear how serious this fight was, or who won! It became a favourite tale of Gary Cooper when he was being asked to recall his schooldays in Dunstable. He particularly remembered being reprimanded by the formidable headmaster, Mr Thring, for indulging in a bout of fisticuffs with a lad from the town.

One more local revelation about Gary Cooper's Dunstable connections: A 1912 photograph has come to light showing Gary's elder brother, Arthur, in a Dunstable Grammar School cricket team. It had lain uncared-for in the school's cricket pavilion at West Parade and was "rescued" by Elsie Buck, who had been



The Charles Cooper autograph dated December 20th, 1936



A 1912 cricket team at the Dunstable Grammar School which included Arthur Cooper, who can be seen at the top left

historian Thomas Bagshawe's secretary. It had been badly damaged but history society member Trevor Turvey has carried out a lot of restoration work on its digital image, reproduced here. Arthur is on the left in the back row. Who says Americans cannot understand cricket?

LUTON ROAD

Society member Bernard Webb was fascinated by the photo of Luton Road, which appeared in the Gazette's Yesteryear feature. Bernard had been apprenticed to a builder in Dunstable making the weighbridge at the Frederick Carter scrapyard as well as the first part of the scrapyard's warehouse which has now been converted into a tile showroom. He was there in 1942 and 1943, and he believes that the photo must have been taken soon after that. The scrapyard was behind the fence on the right.

He remembers the workmen there knocking the pins off the tracks of war-damaged tanks which were being scrapped, and seeing incredible amounts of scrap brass in sacks being uncovered while the foundations for the warehouse were being dug.



The construction of the Empire Rubber Company in London Road during 1938



The construction of the Empire Rubber Company in London Road during 1938

THE EMPIRE RUBBER COMPANY

An appeal for information about the old Empire Rubber Company, whose huge factory in London Road has recently been demolished, brought a response from Michael Bonnar, who worked there for 37 years.

Mr Bonnar, of Southwood Road, became the plant's senior quality planning engineer, and thankfully rescued a pile of historic photos of the factory just as they were about to be dumped. They include photos of the works being built on the empty meadows to the south of the town in 1938.

The factory, in its heyday, employed around 1,000 people. It was part of the Miles Redfern group which also had factories in Hyde, Clacton and Woking, and which became part of the BTR (Birmingham Tyre and Rubber) group in 1971. When the Dunstable factory closed in 2002, work was moved to the Woodside Estate in Dunstable under the name Metzeller.

The factory made a variety of products ranging from chewable bones for dogs to the mouldings surrounding car windscreens. The raw material for these was imported from Malaya and Ceylon, arriving at Dunstable in giant bales.

Said Mr Bonnar: "These were really heavy, and if one dropped off the lorry, they bounced. They really bounced! You had to be sure you were well out of the way."

During the war, the Empire Rubber Company was very busy making an extraordinary range of components including rubber bobbins, which fitted on the plates between the engine and propellers of motor torpedo boats, and the rubber linings inside soldiers' tin helmets. Rubber mouldings were manufactured to absorb the bounce for aerial cameras fitted on to planes, and for boxes carrying explosives.

Luckily for a factory working with such inflammable material, it was not bombed during the war. A few machine-gun bullets from a German plane which strafed the Watling Street in 1940 hit some pipes in the moulding shop which were covered with talcum. Everyone working there was covered with the white powder!

John Buckledee