

NEWSLETTER

Dunstable & District Local History Society
No. 43 February 2015



Chairman's Notes

A major initiative by your society in the past few months has been the purchase of up-to-date technology for the research room in Priory House.

PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD

When the room was first allocated to the society by Dunstable Council, we obtained a computer which was fit for purpose at the time. But the world has moved on and there is now technology which is more suited to our needs. In particular, the society has a growing collection of digitised photographs which need to be stored in a searchable format. We have been finding it more and more difficult to hunt for required images, and we have been relying too much on the local knowledge and memories of the present committee. And we won't always be here!

So we have invested in a new computer which will enable us to run software capable of storing detailed information alongside the pictures. With the town changing so rapidly even the photos we took last year around Boscombe Road and Court Drive are now memories of a vanished Dunstable. They all need to be preserved.

The next step will be to relabel the present collection and install the extra information. That will be a big job and could take many months. But for starters the new images being regularly obtained can now be entered properly.

We have also purchased replacement parts for the sound system which we use for our meetings in the Methodist Church hall. The equipment has been starting to give trouble and Ron Frith has used his expertise as a former BBC electronics engineer to put things right.

Money for these purchases has come from a bequest to the society from Maxene Amey, who discovered the famous Swan brooch when helping with archaeological excavations on the site of the old Friary. Her condition was that the money should be used specifically to provide equipment for the society's use.

THE REIGN OF KING EDWARD II

One of the eminent historians who gave generous help to the medieval project in Dunstable was Kathryn Warner, who is an expert on the reign of King Edward II. She continues to transcribe the annals and documents of the period, and sends us snippets of informa-



Nicola Turton with her Priory cake

tion about Dunstable whenever they are found. Largely thanks to her we know so much more now about the complicated relationships of the knights who took part in the great Dunstable tournament of 1309. Nearly all of them died in unpleasant ways in the troubled years that followed.

It was Kathryn who discovered, among reports about the attempted escape by Edward from his imprisonment at Berkeley Castle, that two of the "great leaders of the company" which tried to rescue the deposed

king had been arrested in Dunstable. John Norton and John Redmere, both Dominican friars, were found in Dunstable friary by the Prior of Dunstable's bailiffs and thrown into the Prior's prison. The story was included in the Medieval Dunstable book, still on sale at Priory House.

NEW BIOGRAPHY OF EDWARD II

Now Kathryn has published a new biography of Edward II (Amberley Publishing £20) which gives an almost day-by-day account of Edward's reign as revealed by contemporary documents. She takes the Dunstable story a little further, revealing that in October 1327 Norton and Redmere were transferred from Dunstable with two other men to the notorious Newgate prison in London. They petitioned King Edward III for release and Norton, at least, was successful...Kathryn has found that he was still alive in 1329.

Another local sidelight in the book is that it was here in Dunstable that the invasion army, led by Queen Isabella and her lover Roger Mortimer, joined forces with a large body of men led by the king's enemy, Thomas of Lancaster. Edward II was subsequently overthrown. Our town on the crossroads was such an important and well-known venue in those times!

PRIORY CAKE

I just have to share with the society the photo of one of our members, Nicola Turton, with a cake she made to celebrate the golden wedding of her parents, Julie Bray and Clive Hawes. They were married at the Priory so an edible model of the church (in its post-Reformation state) was entirely suitable. Nicola had to carry the cake carefully on her lap all the way from her home in Basingstoke to the anniversary party in Priory House. It seems almost a shame that the cake was then eaten!

continued overleaf

WALLPAINTINGS REVISITED

Experts continue to be fascinated by the historic wall paintings which were discovered in Charlie Cole's cycle shop in High Street North and are now preserved in Priory House. Dr Andrea Kirkham, a leading wall-painting historian, has been trying to work out when the murals were painted, and has come to the fairly precise conclusion that the work must have been carried out in around 1610. That places them in the Jacobean period, rather than in Tudor times.



HISTORY DAY

This has prompted the theme for the town's next history day, which will be at Priory House and the surrounding gardens on Saturday May 16. The title will be "The 1600s and All That", which echoes that amusing best-seller of our youth, "1066 and All That". The History Society will, of course, be involved. The murals once decorated what was probably a fairly low-life pub and feature one of the earliest depictions of tobacco smoking. A health warning follows...

John Buckledee



Boudica Battle

Did the Romans finally defeat Queen Boudica and her rebel army in an enormous battle at Dunstable?

The site where two great armies met, and where thousands of Britons were killed, has never been traced and its whereabouts has long been a subject for research.

Now archaeologist and local historian Barry Horne has put forward theories that it happened at Dunstable to a conference, held by the University of Warwick, which discussed various ideas about the location of the battle.

REVOLTING QUEEN

Queen Boudica led a revolt against Roman rule in AD 60, during which her followers sacked Colchester, London and St Albans, slaughtering thousands of Romans. They then marched north up the Watling Street and were confronted by an army led by the Roman general Paulinus, who had hurried south when told of the rebellion. Although the Romans were heavily outnumbered, they achieved a great victory, killing (it is said) 80,000 Britons.

No-one knows where the battle took place, but it could have been at the foot of Blow's Downs, where Manshead School now stands.

TRAPPED

The only description of the battle was made by the Roman historian Tacitus, who indicated that Paulinus chose a defensive site in front of a plain, where his men were protected at the sides by wooded hills. Barry's theory is that the mass of Britons were restricted and trapped in a narrowing pass in the Chilterns where they could not make use of their superior numbers.

He has written a detailed article, published in South Midlands Archaeology, where he discusses how long the two armies could have taken to march towards each other and which confirms that a Dunstable confrontation was possible within the estimated time-scale. He describes what he thinks happened:

"The Boudican army would have been spread out over many miles as they travelled up Watling Street. I estimate there would have been about 10,000 to the mile so an army of 40,000 might have covered three to four miles, much of this army being beyond the pass when the fighting started. This would have stacked the odds heavily in favour of the smaller Roman force. The best and keenest warriors would presumably have led the Iceni columns so once the Roman army had beaten them the rest would have realised the game was up and fled in terror...

"The last thing (Paulinus) would have wanted was a large force of well-armed, blood-thirsty natives rampaging around the countryside on a system of roads Rome had provided...By choosing a site just south of Dunstable the Roman army could place itself between the rebel army and the Icknield Way."

Barry Horne writes that the Watling Street, as it heads north, enters a pass roughly where the traffic lights are in Markyate. The pass becomes more pronounced at the Packhorse public house. Turnpike Farm is roughly where the pass widens into the plain occupied by Manshead School. It is likely, he says, that the Roman Army was deployed in the plain between the road to Caddington and Turnpike Farm.

THE WATLING STREET PROJECT

The conference has prompted a number of new investigations of the possible battleground at Dunstable, including metal detecting in the fields leading to the Manshead campus, and an informal group called The Watling Street Project has been set up. But so far nothing relevant has been discovered. There ought, at least, to be traces of equipment abandoned by the British baggage trains in the Markyate/Friars Wash area when families, who had been following Boudica's army, fled southwards. But such material might now be buried to a depth of a foot or so, and Barry Horne is suggesting that archaeological investigations be extended by drilling dozens of test holes in fields close to the road.

A copy of his detailed article is available by contacting him on bhorne@globalnet.co.uk

This article is reprinted from the Dunstable Gazette, January 7, 2015.

John Buckledee



Is this the site of a massive battle where the Romans slaughtered an army led by the British queen Boudica? The view is from the hills near Kensworth quarry, looking towards Blow's Downs and the fields leading to the Manshead campus.

Roof Figures in Dunstable Priory Church



John Lunn, writing in the *Bedfordshire Magazine* in 1993, describes the existence of 14 carved wooden figures fixed to the rafters of the roof of Dunstable Priory, seven on each side.

DUNSTABLE ARMS

They are about 70cm high and 30cm wide and are believed to date from the late 15th century when the roof was replaced. Wooden carvings are frequently found in the roofs of East Anglian churches, but these invariably take the form of angels and are known as 'angel roofs'.



Detail of a beautifully carved face

The figures in our Church are clearly not angels, though it has been suggested that they may have had their wings removed. There is not, however, a trace of evidence that any wings were ever present. Twelve of the figures wear ankle length tunics covered by cloaks with turned-down collars fastened at the neck and they all hold shields which vary in shape and all but one is plain. The decorated one depicts the earliest known example of the Dunstable Arms which is carved in relief. Of the two figures which are dressed differently, one is wearing a long-sleeved garment with a large collar, John Lunn speculates that this could possibly be a chaplain. The other is smaller than the others and John has suggested that this one could be a pupil. He states that the figure to his left (with the Dunstable Arms shield) is possibly a schoolmaster.

The faces of all the figures are more finely finished than the rest of the carving and each face is distinctive though it's impossible to say whether they represent a likeness to a person. The carving style differs among the figures suggesting more than one craftsman was involved in their production.

SO WHY ARE THE FIGURES THERE AND WHO ARE THEY SUPPOSED TO REPRESENT?

Since 1392 the nave had been used by the townspeople for their church services on the understanding that they maintained the structure of that part of the building and it gradually came to be regarded as the Parish church (as a result of this arrangement, the Church together with its roof and carved figures, escaped demolition following the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1540).



One of the roof figures showing the rafters



The figure of possibly the schoolmaster with the Dunstable Arms on his shield



The figure with the large collar that is possibly the Chaplain



A smaller figure in different attire could possibly be a pupil

FRATERNITY OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

In 1442 a group of local burgesses founded the Fraternity of St. John the Baptist in order to employ a chaplain who would say masses and prayers for their souls and those of their friends, to run a school and to look after the poor. As there were no local wealthy landowners, it is thought that the Fraternity was most likely to have provided most of the funds for the replacement roof. Several wills dated around 1520 refer to money bequeathed for the purpose of repairing the roof, although it is believed that the replacement of the roof had been undertaken by the end of the 15th century, so perhaps these were just for ongoing repairs.

FAYREY PALL

A pall to cover the coffins of members and their families was given to the Fraternity by Henry and Agnes Fayrey in about 1500. Twelve men are depicted on the left of the pall to represent the male members of the Fraternity and are dressed in a very similar manner to the roof carvings, so it is a reasonable assumption that the figures are those of the members of the Fraternity. The pall is now on permanent loan to the Victoria and Albert Museum.

John Lunn's article appeared in the Bedfordshire Magazine in the Autumn of 1993, Vol. 24 No. 186 and a copy of which be seen at the Society's research room at Priory House.

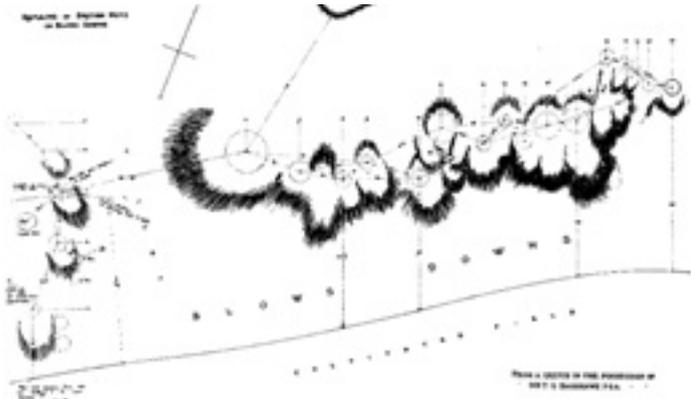
David Turner

Blow's Downs

Dunstable is well known for its Downs, but less well known are Blow's Downs which lie 3 miles to the north-east.

NEOLITHIC HUTS

This is a shame because much of the area is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, rich in flora and fauna. It is managed by the Wildlife Trust. There is evidence of human habitation dating back some 4000 years. Worthington G Smith identified the bases of Neolithic huts at the top of the hill facing Half Moon Lane and he states that a skeleton was excavated from one of them in 1888. A polished stone axehead was found in 1893 as noted by the Bedfordshire Historic Environment Record. No doubt animals were grazed in the area during the Romano-British period by the people living in Durocobrivis, the town founded by them on the crossroads.



Part of Worthington G Smith's map of the Neolithic huts on Blow's Downs

There is no reference to the area in the Domesday Book, with the land at the foot of the Downs belonging to the parish of Houghton Regis while the slopes themselves lay within the boundaries of Caddington which belonged to the Canons of St Paul's Cathedral at the time.

Following the establishment of the town on the crossroads by Henry I, land would have been rented by the King, with the slopes of the Downs being used for grazing as it was too steep to plough. Some crops were grown, witnessed by the existence of strip lynchets, artificial terraces cut into the slope to form a platform. These are quite visible in the area now known as Cottage Bottom fields, above Manshead School.

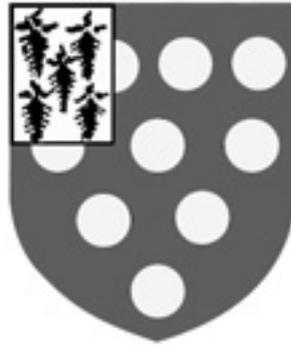
In the 13th century, the wool trade flourished in the country and the area benefited by the access afforded by the Watling Street and the Icknield Way and became an important fleece trading centre. Merchants based in the town, would have traded fleeces from the surrounding villages and became very successful. The land at Blow's Downs was rented out by the canons of St Paul's. John Duraunt of Dunstable, rented the largest estate of 300 acres in the parish of Caddington and was hugely wealthy. Disputes in the 13th century, between the tenants of St. Paul's and those of the Priory, over grazing rights were recorded with the tenants of St. Paul's prevailing!

MEDIEVAL TOURNAMENTS

Dunstable was one of the major centres for medieval tournaments or *mêlées* and the fields at the foot of Blow's Downs, running at the back of Jeans Way towards Skimpot Road, would have made an ideal location. There is no evidence for this but there are few better locations in the area for several hundred mounted knights to have conducted mock battles.

ZOUCHES MANOR

Zouches Farm at the top of the Downs is probably the site of the original Zouches Manor, an important estate. It took its name from



la Zouche of Haringworth family crest

a family named la Zouche of Haringworth in Northamptonshire who leased the land from the Dean and Chapter of Saint Paul's from the mid 14th century. An earlier tenant was Edward Inge who in 1310-1311 was granted a free warren (to stock rabbits, an important food source). The Zouches also held the manor at Eaton Bray and William Zouche was one of Richard II's councillors. He died in 1396 and his son was active in the Hundred Years' War against France under Henry V, being Lieutenant of Calais in 1413. He died in 1415 and three more generations of William la Zouches followed. John la Zouche fought with Richard III at Bosworth Field. He survived the battle but was attainted for treason by the usurper Henry VII.

The Zouche family remained tenants until the mid 16th century after which it changed hands many times but always in the ownership of St Paul's.

The Parliamentary Enclosures of the early 1800s would have dramatically changed the appearance of the Downs with hedges planted to separate fields. At the time a William Beckford had been allocated land on the northern slopes.

JOHN BLOW

It was around this time that the Downs became known by its current name – an 18th century map shows the area named as Zouches Down. Worthington G Smith states that the Downs were named after a Mr. Blow, a local farmer, and it was certainly true that many Caddington residents had the surname Blow. John Blow, a tenant farmer at Poynters Farm in the 18th century, whose land may well have extended to the slopes of the Downs, seems a likely candidate.

ST MARY'S POTTERY

Skimpot Road, which is one of the main accesses to Blow's Downs, is named after a farm which was located where the busway now crosses the road. Worthington G Smith, somewhat implausibly, states that the name 'Skimpot' is a corruption of St Mary's Pottery, which was located nearby. However, I've been unable to find out anything about the pottery itself and what it produced.

THE CHALK PIT

The arrival of commercial chalk extraction in the early 20th century saw real change in the area. The Luton to Dunstable rail link, which opened in 1858, provided transportation of lime, after a railway siding was constructed at the quarry. The first indication of quarrying activities on Blow's Downs can be found on the 1901 Ordnance



Dunstable Station at the turn of the 20th century showing Blow's Downs in the background – note the absence of scrub

Survey map which clearly shows the Blow's Downs Limeworks. The chalk was excavated from the quarry sited adjacent to a broad gully believed to be an ancient road and there is still some evidence of the gully on the western edge of the quarry. When the tenant, B.J. Forders of Luton, put the site up for auction in 1915 it was described in the catalogue as being, 'over 57 acres in extent with seven brick built kilns and various other buildings'. The British Portland Cement Manufacturing Company acquired the lease and were still running a lime and whiting works on the site in the 1920s.

HOME GUARD

It is not known when production ceased but it was certainly prior to the Second World War because the chalk pit was used during the war by the Home Guard as a training area. There was a rifle range and the kilns provided targets for their demolitions teams. Some of these teams were a little over enthusiastic with the amounts of explosive, which explains why there is little left of the kilns. Apparently, the blasts broke windows and were also responsible for bringing down ceilings, giving nearby residents rather more problems than the Luftwaffe!

With the increased demand for housing, the farmland at the base of the slope was developed with Jeans Way providing the boundary of the Downs by the early 1960s. After the war, prefabs were erected at the end of Half Moon Lane. These were eventually replaced by the permanent development of Chichester Close in the 1960s. Slightly further south, the Downside estate was developed during the 1950s and in the 1970s the newly constructed Manshead School completed the south-western boundary.

Sheep continued to graze the slopes around Dunstable into the early 20th century but declined following the second world war and with the decline of the rabbit population due to myxomatosis, scrub invasion threatened the grassland communities. Recent scrub clearance and the reintroduction of grazing over part of the site has ensured the survival of many species of flora.

This article is indebted to research carried out by the Blow's Downs Conservation Group.

David Turner



Sad Farewell

We are very sorry to announce
the sad loss of

Andrew Harries
Bernard Wilkes



Greeting New Members

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

Rita Burrows	Alan Herbert	John Howard
Ted Keane	Pearl Mathieson	Valerie Poole

Another Dunstablian transported

The Newsletter of August 2014 was most interesting, especially the item on page 310 by Joan Curran, 'Dunstablians Around the World'.

Under the section 'Convicts and Colonists' she stated that 13 men and one woman from Dunstable were transported to Australia. Having checked with her I can add another man (or boy) to her list.

My son Jasper, at the end of his gap year in 1996, was in Sydney and visited the Convicts' Museum. Out of curiosity he looked for the name of SANDERS in the index. To his surprise the following information appeared:

SANDERS, Francis Arrived February 7th 1831. Native of Dunstable. Aboard the ship York. Age 17. Sentence 14 years. Crime: house breaking. Tried: Bedford July 13 1830. Education: can read and write. Trade: stable boy. Certificate of freedom 1847.

Joined gang and given 23 lashes for giving false name. (Did he say Sanders and it was written down as Saunders or vice versa?) Religion: Protestant. Marital status: single.

January 31 1832. Assigned to road department. For running away from this sentenced to 28 days on the treadmill. March 3 1832 same offence. 24 days on the treadmill.

In March 1845 he was discharged under the name of Francis Saunders.

Additional research by 'Tony' Sanders of Melbourne. Victoria.

Francis Sanders/Saunders became Prisoner No.31/5 and was indentured to I. Sharpe, of Sydney. He was 5'8" tall, with dark brown hair and brown eyes. His name was given as Saunders. (From the Australian Institute of Genealogical Studies, Blackburn, Victoria.)

My own research in 1999 at Bedfordshire & Luton Archives & Records Service showed that the Prison Record Book (ref. QGV 10/1) contained the following information:

FRANCIS SANDERS b. Dunstable

Age 15 Height 5'1" Complexion: pale Hair: brown Offence: Stealing cheese. Committed by Rev. W.B. Wroth Sentence: 14 days in prison and whipping

Type of gaol: Bedford Old House of Correction.

Epiphany Sessions 1830. Discharged January 26 1830. Comment: A very bad youth.

June 13 1830. Francis Sanders. Houghton Regis, Bedfordshire.

Age 16. Height 5'5" Complexion: pale Hair: brown.

Committed by Revd. W.B. Wroth Offence: stealing from dwelling house.

Sentence: 14 years transportation

Delivered on board the Justitia (a prison hulk) at Woolwich July 27 1830. Transferred to the York to sail to Australia.

So to which or what family does this Francis belong?

Rex Sanders

CHEW'S HOUSE TRICENTENARY



Chew's Charity Schoolboy

This year will see the tercentenary of the opening of Chew's Charity School, a building which is now called Chew's House.

William Chew was born in Dunstable in 1656. He became a very wealthy London distiller and, like many of his contemporaries, was conscious that wealth brought with it responsibilities towards the poor. In his lifetime he gave money annually to provide school uniforms for thirty poor boys in London. He told his family, including his sisters Frances Ashton and Jane Cart, that he wished to found a school for forty poor boys in Dunstable. Unfortunately, William Chew died on 18th March 1712, unmarried, before he was able to do this.

THE FIRST TRUSTEES OF CHEW'S CHARITY SCHOOL

His sisters and his nephew, Thomas Aynscombe, set about fulfilling his wish, using some of his estate to buy the site, employ an architect, fund the building, appoint a Master and select 40 boys – all by 1715. These three relatives became the first Trustees of Chew's Charity School. They also drew up rules for the running of the school and set aside the income from five of William's farms to finance it. The costs were £150 a year which included the Master's salary, purchasing uniforms for the boys, books and maintenance costs of the building.

Chew's Charity School was built of local brick but, also, much timber was used in its construction, consequently part of the staircase is now skewed. There were two large rooms downstairs. One was used by the Trustees for their committee meetings and the other was used to teach small groups of the boys. The main classroom filled much of the upstairs and it was here that most of the teaching took place. The boys sat



Chew's School in 1820c by Thomas Fisher



Chew's House today

on benches (forms) for most of their lessons, only sitting at desks when they were required to write. There were pegs for them to hang their caps on and a small cupboard for the meagre supply of books. The Master lived at the back of the building. There was also accommodation for a maid. The back yard contained the stables, a well and the latrine. The cellar originally had an earthen floor. Heating was by coke stoves but they were only used in extremely cold weather. The external doors were of oak and those inside were of deal. Two lead figures stood above the main door, showing boys in their uniform. Unfortunately, these were stolen in early November 1998 and replacements were made of fibre-glass. Initially, the building had no clock, Frances Ashton paid for this addition after the school had been open for a few years.

GREAT SUCCESS

The school was a great success and became an asset to the town. Up to the 1870s, the Trustees had a fairly free hand in running their school. Big changes came about as a result of the Education Act of 1870 and the establishment of the Borough Council. The Charity School closed in 1880 and was replaced by Chew's Foundation School in the same building, catering for a slightly older age range. It was soon realised that the original building was no longer fit for purpose and a new school was built next door. It opened in 1883 but was not destined to have the same success because in 1888 the Ashton Grammar School opened. This provided the Chew's School with its first real challenge. Numbers declined in the Foundation School until it finally closed in 1905.

THE LITTLE THEATRE

The County Council hired both buildings for educational purposes on either side of WWI, under the Settlement of 1910. The governing body comprised twelve members. Four were ex-officio – the Archdeacon of Bedford, the Prioxy's Rector and his two churchwardens. Two others were representative – appointed by the Town Council. The other six were co-optative, appointed by the ex-officio and the representative governors. This is still the make-up of the Chew's Foundation governors. The new school, now the Little Theatre, was used by children from nearby schools for woodwork and cookery. The original building was also much used by the Prioxy Church for youth work and by the Church of England's Men's Society. The income of the Foundation, after the maintenance of the building, was to be used for the educational benefit of poor families in the parishes of Dunstable, Houghton Regis, Kensworth and Caddington. At the beginning of the 20th century most of the income still came from farm rents and from the rent of land owned by the Foundation. During the next hundred years, these assets were sold off and the money invested in Government bonds. The sites of Watling School and Prioxy Middle School playing field are two examples of this.



The new school which opened in 1883 which is now the Little Theatre

On 24th October 1938 the new building became the Dunstable branch of the Bedfordshire County Library. It had a stock of 4,500 books, including a 'Lilliput Library' for children and a reference section. It was the first full-time branch library in the county. In 1968 it became the home of the Dunstable Repertory Company and was officially opened that year by Bernard Bresslaw. The 'Little Theatre' has flourished ever since and is a great asset to the town.

SCHOOL UNIFORMS

The original building now contains the Dunstable parish office and the Priory Church office and is used for booking weddings and baptisms. It is also let out to many local groups, providing a central venue for meetings. The Governors are responsible for the up-keep of the building but use as much of the income as possible in providing grants to families whose children attend local schools. This can often be a contribution towards school uniform and is in keeping with William Chew's original intentions.

CELEBRATIONS

The Governors are planning various events to celebrate the tercentenary of our building, some of which will be in conjunction with the Town Council. The main focus will be on the weekend of September 19th & 20th. This will tie in with the Town Council's theme of Georgian Dunstable. There will be talks, exhibitions, town walks and a service to give thanks for all the Dunstable Charities. Further details will be published nearer the time in the Dunstable Gazette. The last Master, William Hambling, propagated



Photograph of Chew's 'blue coat' boys taken in 1879

a new apple tree, which was named after him. Dunstable In Bloom will be planting local varieties of fruit trees around the town this year, including Mr. Hambling's

I have spent much time, in the last few years, researching William Chew, the extended Marshe family and the Dunstable Charities. The sources of information are many and varied and are located in many different places. I will be publishing the information online, probably called 'Dunstable Charities', so that it may be more readily accessible.

Hugh Garrod

For further information about Chew's House see Newsletter No. 23 which can be downloaded from the Society's website



Memories of old Dunstable

Clocks and clockmakers have become a theme of recent correspondence to the society.

T G COLLINGS OF DUNSTABLE

Nigel Lawrance wrote to us because he has inherited a grandfather clock made by T. G. Collings, of Dunstable. He is intending to restore it to good health.

Coincidentally, Sandy Freyberg wrote to us because her children are descendants of Thomas George Collings who, she said, was a local clockmaker and owned a straw hat business in town.

No problem finding the information required, because Joan Curran's book, *Straw Hats and Bonnets*, is a mine of information on Mr Collings.

In 1821/22 he had bought the building in High Street North which later became the Charlie Cole's cycle shop and is now occupied by the Nationwide Building Society, Mr Collings, uniquely, combined being a watch and clock maker with being a hat manufacturer. His factory buildings were on two acres of land at the rear.



Grandfather clock by T G Collings of Dunstable

Joan has seen records mentioning Mr Collings as repairing the church clock at St Mary's, Eaton Bray, and the workhouse clock in High Street South. His son was also a clockmaker and a clue about who made what is in the decorations on the face. If there are flowers painted on the corners, then it is likely to be Mr Collings Snr. Full painted scenes or vignettes, geometric patterns or shells would be by his son.

JOSEPH KLIMICH

The clock theme continued after a number of residents became intrigued by an old grandfather clock on display at the Timeless Interiors memorabilia shop in Brittany Court, High Street South. This has on its ornate face the name Joseph Kimich, of Dunstable.

There's information on the internet about Joseph Kimich, who was of German origin. There were a number of watch and clockmakers of that name operating in various parts of the country in the 1840s including Kimich, Flaig and Co in Bath, Somerset, and by 1844 there was a company of that name in Dunstable. A Hayer Flaig was a clockmaker in Gas House Row, Houghton Regis, in 1841, and there was an Alex Flaig working as a watchmaker and jeweller at Lovell End, Leighton Buzzard, in 1851.

GAS HOUSE ROW

One mystery has led to another. Where was Gas House Row in Houghton Regis? A message to the Houghton Regis Facebook site run by Alan Winter produced a flurry of interest and a suggestion that Gas House Row was a group of cottages in Houghton Regis high street next to Pratt's butchers shop. We are now hunting for photos of that part of the village. The clock, meanwhile, is still on show at Timeless Interiors. It's not for sale.

continued overleaf

Memories of old Dunstable continued



THE OLD WORKHOUSE

Incidentally, another correspondent has been seeking a photo of the old workhouse in High Street South, mentioned previously. We can't oblige because the workhouse was pulled down in 1836 before photography was invented, but curiously we have so far been unable to trace any early pictures of that part of the town. The locksmith's shop and Ashton House now stand on the site, next to the White Swan, and there's a plaque commemorating the workhouse. If anyone has a postcard view of the cottages there before they became shops and offices we'd be pleased to hear from them.

TEACHERS AT BRITAIN STREET SCHOOL

Alyson Read is clearing out her parents' house, and has found a photograph (date stamped February 1960) of teachers at Britain Street School, posing for a picture in Priory Gardens before taking part in a football match. Alyson's sister, brother and sister in law (Janice Read, Martin Read and Julie Smith) all attended the school in the 1950s to early 1960s.

There are names written in pencil on the back: Back row, Mr Taylor, Mr Baldock, Mr Ball, Mr Lee, Mr Adams, Mr Hayward; front row, Mr Aldridge, Mr Roberts, Mr Wooford, Mr Gabriel, Mr Hughes and Mr Birch. Most of these faces became very familiar to generations of schoolchildren so this is much more interesting than the usual team photos. It will be on our website soon.



Britain Street staff football team in February 1960

LUTON HAIKUS

A group of writers in Luton have been producing for their website regular haikus about local life which have now been gathered together into three volumes (Luton Haiku, published by Clod Books). These come complete with notes explaining some of the personalities and events mentioned. The collection is now so large that it has earned an entry in the Guinness Book of Records.

A haiku is a Japanese invention: a poem of 17 syllables, split into lines of five, seven and five syllables. Clearly, writing these can become quite addictive.

Dunstable comprises only a tiny part of these volumes, but here are four examples, with their notes. The volumes build up into a unique and rather fascinating snapshot of the area. But you might not agree with the feelings expressed in their authors' notes!

*Dunny's Wetherspoon
Is called the Gary Cooper
A tribute, of sorts*

Posted 12 March 2008. A girl at work said Wetherspoon's decision to give its Dunstable outlet this name was "totally random". I felt I had to explain to her that the erstwhile Hollywood legend schooled in Dunstable – a history lesson she accepted with seething hatred.

*It always kicks off
At Dunstable Sealed Knot meets
They've got history*

Posted 23 January 2008. Sealed Knot is an organisation whose very existence is centred around dressing up in period costume and re-enacting the Roundhead/Cavalier civil war. They are often seen in Dunstable, given that town's clamour for all things which it can grab hold of in an effort to give itself a "heritage".

*Chiltern radio
Turns up at local events
Big black car, huge grins*

Posted 1 February 2007. Chiltern Radio was an independent local radio station whose catchment area included Luton. It had two outside broadcast vehicles called Black Thunder 1 and Black Thunder 2. These were fearsome vehicles whose slightly sinister appearances were belied by the happy people who issued from them. Chiltern Radio changed to Heart FM around about the end of 2008 for those who might have been listening.

*Dunny College ads
claim that they create "heroes"
Nice. Show us one then*

Posted 21 August 2009. Following the "heroes" campaign, the former Dunstable College was rebranded to become Central Bedfordshire College. A few years earlier, soon after a similar "hero" campaign, the former University of Luton was rebranded to become the University of Bedfordshire. The decision to throw weight behind brand Bedfordshire rather than Luton or Dunstable shows just how low each town's image has sunk.

WATERLOWS

Chris Waterlow, a descendant of the family which founded the giant printing company which was once so important to Dunstable, has published a book about the firm, the House of Waterlow. A copy has been acquired for the history society's research room.

Alas, the company has now vanished from the Dunstable landscape. Robert Maxwell took control of it in 1982 and after a series of mergers his businesses went into administration in 1991. The huge Dunstable factory was demolished. Finally, Waterlow and Sons Ltd was wound up in January 2009.

The Dunstable plant was just one of a number of Waterlow factories and is featured in only a very small part of the book. The company took the decision to expand into Dunstable in 1891 and purchased a 13-acre site here. The town was chosen rather than other possible sites in Hatfield, St Albans and Arlesey because the decline in Dunstable's straw plaiting industry meant there was ample supply of cheap female labour available.

James Vernon was appointed manager and by the end of 1893 he was already employing 200 people. Expansion continued and, amusingly, documents dated January 29 1895 report: "It was stated that Mr Vernon had exhausted the available female labour to be obtained at Dunstable, but that he believed he could get any number of girls from Toddington."

John Buckledee