

NEWSLETTER

Dunstable & District Local History Society
No. 48 August 2017



Chairman's Notes

Quite a few changes to report since our last newsletter, after the dismaying news that, for family reasons, Sue and David Turner have decided to leave Dunstable.

DEPARTURES

This was very much a bombshell because in recent years Sue and David have made themselves a key part of many aspects of local life, not least in the history society.

David became active in the society's work when our secretary, Joan Curran, asked him to use his professional skills to help provide a more-modern look to one of our exhibitions. David and Sue had intended to move home from Dunstable to the Lake District, but they delayed a decision and then became increasingly involved in all sorts of town events. The permanent information boards at Priory Gardens, Ashton Square and Grove House Gardens are examples of David and the society's work, plus of course the superb series of displays in Priory House.

David has agreed to continue as editor of this newsletter, which will be possible thanks to the marvels of email. But they are no longer members of the society's committee, hence some considerable reshuffling during the summer months.

NEW TREASURER

Sue is relinquishing her key role as treasurer, and I am delighted to say that Pat Larkman has agreed to take her place. I am having to write this before the society's members hold an extraordinary general meeting to agree to this appointment, so I hope and trust that all goes well!

At the same meeting, members were also to be asked to appoint June Byrne to serve on our committee.

Hugh Garrod has agreed to take David's place as vice chairman. But, alas, Cynthia Turvey feels that her health is making it difficult for her to continue as membership secretary and she has decided to resign from the committee.

Cynthia has served on the committee for around 20 years and had been treasurer for much of that time. She well remembers financial meetings at Bernard Stevens' house where, helped by Fred Moore and lots of tea and cakes, the accounts were balanced.

To try to replace Cynthia (impossible!), we have decided to revert to our old system where the treasurer also deals with membership details. That does make a lot of sense, particularly as Rita Swift has agreed to help with the task of handling all the mail to members,

including filling envelopes with, for example, this very newsletter. John Pratt will hopefully still be able to save enormous amounts of postage by hand-delivering mail around Dunstable.

A SOUND UNDERSTUDY

Richard Hornsey, a former BBC sound engineer, has agreed to be Ron Frith's "understudy" in operating the society's sound system in the church hall.

Finally, Jackie and David Jeffs will be helping Trevor Turvey and Martin Nye to serve tea and coffee at the end of our meetings. Do stay and chat...there's no hurry to lock up the hall.

John Buckledee

SAD NEWS



Barry Horne



Vivienne Evans

Sad to record the death of two of the key figures in the study of Dunstable's history. Vivienne Evans MBE was the author of numerous books about the town and gave countless lectures based on her researches. Barry Horne had been a prominent figure in the Manshead Archaeological Society and was one of the leaders of the campaign to save the building in Church Street which is now the home of the Chez Jerome restaurant. That campaign led, indirectly, to the founding of this society. Their deaths occurred just as this newsletter was about to go to press, so it has not been possible here to amplify what was published in the Dunstable Gazette. Hopefully our next newsletter will include some fitting tributes.

Worthington George Smith (1835–1917)



Worthington Smith, a Dunstablian by adoption, rose to prominence as archaeologist, plant pathologist, mycologist and illustrator.

CENTENARY OF HIS DEATH

In the year that sees the centenary of his death, we dwell here on his contribution to the fledgling discipline of Palaeolithic archaeology.

Smith was born in Hoxton, in the East End of London, on 23 March 1835. Upon leaving school at sixteen, he was apprenticed to an architect. Finding such work unsatisfactory, he took up freelance illustrating in 1861. John Evans's account of Palaeolithic implements from northeast London prompted Smith to find similar stone tools in the valleys of the rivers Lea and Brent. His descriptions of this material, published in 1879 and 1880, marked the start of his Palaeolithic-based archaeological career.

MARRIED HENRIETTA WHITE

Menaced with heart trouble, and advised to leave London, Smith moved his family to Dunstable in 1885. He had married Dunstable-born Henrietta White at St Mary's, Kensworth, on 24 March 1856. They occupied several different properties before moving into Hawthorn Cottage, 121 High Street South, a '... small, old farm house, with no gas', where they remained for the rest of their lives.

BEST-PRESERVED LOWER PALAEOLITHIC SITES

For the next two decades, Smith monitored numerous working brickearth pits, finding '... some of the best-preserved Lower Palaeolithic sites that have ever come to light in Britain ...', e.g. Gaddesden Row, Round Green, Whipnade and, most notably, Caddington. It was at Caddington that he discovered he could 'refit' flint fragments together and thus work out how implements had been manufactured. In common with others, he seldom did any digging but simply examined excavated material. Trusted workmen (including 'the Caddington clodhoppers') were paid for artefacts, occasionally in meat or alcohol, but usually in cash.

MISTAKEN FOR A TRAMP

A temperance man and non-smoker, he pursued a punishing schedule, walking twenty-five miles on each of three consecutive days at the age of seventy-two. In the Dunstable Year Book for 1908, he wrote 'Sometimes I get very tired towards the end of a day ... one always gets dirty in a wet clay-pit ... I am ... taken for a tramp ... by respectable "classy" and genteel people, [and] by tramps themselves'.

An entertaining speaker, Smith frequently spoke to Dunstable's mutual improvement societies and others on subjects such as the 'barbarian' ancient Britons, their music and musical instruments, sometimes dressing in 'authentic' clothes.

On 8 May 1902, he was awarded a Civil List pension of £50 per annum 'in consideration of his services to Archaeology and Botanical illustration, and of his inadequate means of support'. In 1903, he became the first Freeman of Dunstable. Worthington Road in Dunstable is named for him, and a blue plaque marks the position of Hawthorn Cottage (demolished 1959).

PUBLISHED SEVERAL INFLUENTIAL BOOKS

Smith published several influential books (not only on archaeology), numerous journal and newspaper articles. In his capacity as freelance artist, he undertook many train journeys to London, preparing prodigious numbers of drawings for *The Builder* and *The Gardeners' Chronicle*. The greater part of *Man, the Primeval Savage* (1894), his most famous work, was written on the London train.

His letters are held in various institutions and in private hands. They include those to two local aspiring archaeologists: Thomas Cumberland, an unschooled shepherd of Leagrave; and Frederick George Gurney of Eggington. Regrettably, many of Smith's personal relics were lost when his grandson's photographic premises in London were destroyed in a German air raid in 1941.

WARDOWN PARK MUSEUM

Thomas Wyatt Bagshawe (1901–1976), a native of Dunstable, was twelve when he first met Smith. Whilst still at school, he persuaded his industrialist father Arthur (1859–1926) to purchase much of Smith's library together with fifteen sketchbooks containing hundreds of his drawings of artefacts and ancient agricultural implements; these are now at Wardown Park Museum.

One issue common amongst Victorian archaeologists is the widespread dispersal of the material they collected. Thanks to the Bagshawe and Dr William Allen Sturge bequests to Wardown Park Museum and the British Museum, Smith's material did not suffer this fate to nearly the same extent.

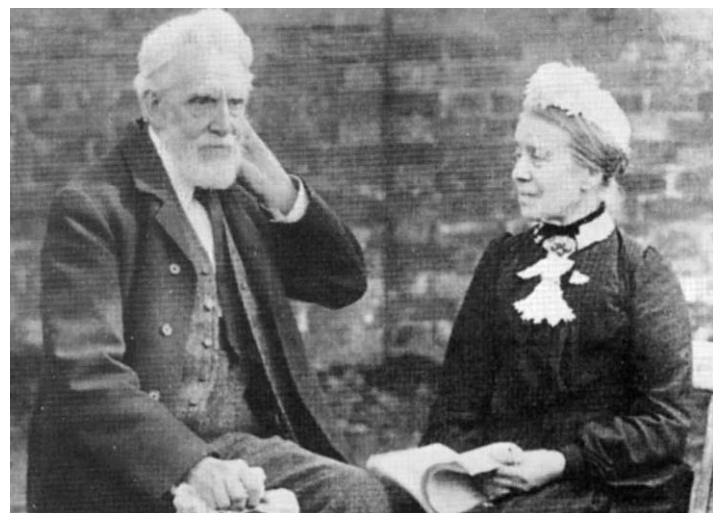
ZEPPELIN LZ93 DROPPED BOMBS

On 19 October 1917, Zeppelin LZ93 dropped a bomb close to J. Harrison Carter's engineering works in Bull Pond Lane, and not far from Hawthorn Cottage. Smith went to examine the damage, caught a chill, was confined to bed, developed pneumonia and died on 27 October 1917. He was '... accorded Dunstable's equivalent of a State Funeral ...' and buried at West Street Cemetery alongside Henrietta who predeceased him by four months. The Bedfordshire Archives Service holds a sealed envelope said to contain pieces of talc (a magnesium silicate mineral) that are, allegedly, parts of that bomb.

Worthington Smith was archaeologically prejudiced and inconsistent on certain matters. At Caddington, he believed his finds were distributed across what had been a single, extensive, land surface; we now know that they were trapped in several solution depressions in the Chalk which may be of different ages. Nonetheless, he played a pivotal role in the formative period of Palaeolithic archaeology, 'his failings were [largely] the fault of his time in history ...', and he has left much to impress and delight us.

Dr Peter Hoare

Dr Peter Hoare, a native of Dunstable and an Old Dunstablian, is a Visiting Academic at the British Museum and Honorary Senior Research Fellow in the School of Geography, Queen Mary University of London.



Worthington G Smith and his wife, Henrietta, in 1906

DUNSTABLE TEACHERS' CENTRE



Teachers' Centres were the product of the 1960s and in particular the Plowden Report. Bedfordshire had Centres in Dunstable, Kempston, Biggleswade and Luton.

BEECROFT SCHOOL

When I came to Dunstable in January 1970, our Centre was located in Beecroft School and its Headteacher, John Lunn, was also Warden of the Centre. As the vast majority of teachers worked full-time, most of the activities at the Centre happened in the evenings. Some day-time courses were run by Bedfordshire's Local Education Committee (LEA) advisors but most of the evening ones were run by fellow teachers who had particular curricular experience. There was also a wide range of social events. While it was at Beecroft, the school secretarial staff took care of the administration. The Centre was well resourced, with a library and much audio-visual equipment. We were encouraged to borrow items for use in schools. The Centre catered for Leighton Buzzard and the villages in between. It also had facilities for reprographics, laminating and binding. Besides the in-service training, it was the venue for meetings of newly appointed probationary teachers, exhibitions and publishers' displays, Union meetings and curriculum groups. There were meetings to discuss the proposed change to a Three Tier education system – Lower, Middle and Upper Schools. Besides the LEA grant, income was generated from lettings; it was used as a Polling Station and Dunstable Amateur Operatic Society held meetings there.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

It was about this time that the LEA was encouraging teachers to take part in Curriculum Development. Following a huge meeting at Northfields School, curriculum panels were set up, mostly meeting at the Centre. This was a wonderful opportunity to talk to other teachers. I was on the Mathematics Panel and we spent many long evenings coming to agreement among ourselves, and with the Advisors, as to what the Maths Curriculum should include. How prescriptive should it be? How much scope should it allow? These and other questions kept us very busy. The final document encompassed both Primary and Secondary schools. During all this, I became a member of the Centre's Management Committee and, eventually, its chairman. We had representation from all phases of education, including the College.



Hugh Garrod outside the Teachers' Centre in 1981 after it was threatened with closure

The curriculum documents produced a mixed response when they were sent to the schools. Many Heads said, in effect 'No one is going to tell me what to teach in my school.'

CHILTERN ROAD SCHOOL

When Chiltern Road School shut in 1974, the Teachers' Centre moved into the vacated premises as Beecroft School needed the extra accommodation. The Centre had its own Secretary, Mary, and initially, a full-time Warden – Greg Varley. Cleaning was undertaken by the Beecroft caretaker and his staff. Courses and meetings continued as before and the Centre was well used.

Towards the end of the 1970s there was talk of cuts to the LEA budget and they appointed a representative on to our Management Committee. The first cut was to cancel the proposed Teachers' Centre in Leighton Buzzard, for which money had already been allocated. More LEA-funded courses were run at Maryland College, in Woburn, so the day-time use of our Centre decreased gradually. Greg was appointed to a headship in 1978 and was succeeded by Julian Knowles. In late 1980 Mary, the Secretary, reported a visit from members of the LEA who seemed pleased to find that there were no teachers in the building when they came – we were all in our schools. Our committee was informed that, due to budget constraints, the Centre had to shut. We organised a petition among our regular users, but I think the decision had already been taken. I wrote to all our local politicians and was in correspondence with our MP, David Madel. I even have an acknowledgment from the Shadow Education Spokesman and rising star of the Labour Party, a certain Neil Kinnock.

THE CENTRE CLOSES

The Centre shut on 1st April 1981 despite our best efforts. The Centres at Biggleswade and Kempston shut at about the same time. There was talk of putting our reprographic equipment into Watling School so it could be used by local teachers. Instead, the LEA opened an IT/Resources Centre at Russell House in Ampthill. I was interviewed by the Dunstable Gazette and photographed, one Saturday morning in February, outside our Centre. I was invited to smile, but declined to do so, as I said I was cross about the closure. The resulting photograph can be seen below left and on page 25 of Pat Lovering's book, 'Dunstable Decade'. The site was eventually sold to Chiltern Radio, which first broadcast from there later that year.

Hugh Garrod



The site became the headquarters for Chiltern Radio after the Teachers' Centre closed

A MONUMENT TO TENACITY

HISTORY OF A FAMILIAR CHILTERNS LANDMARK

Anyone who has ventured into the Ashridge Estate in the northern part of the Chilterns will surely have made a bee line for the Visitor Centre, set deep in the forest and run by the National Trust.

Close by, and dominating the skyline is an impressive monument to canal builder extraordinaire Francis Egerton, 3rd Duke of Bridgewater. This 108 feet high column of granite stands on a ridge overlooking the picturesque village of Aldbury and offers fine views to anyone energetic enough to climb the 172 steps to the viewing platform, where a magnificent copper urn sits on the top.

Over one and a half miles away, straight down beech-lined Prince's Riding, lies Ashridge House, now an award winning business school but in a previous incarnation the childhood home of Henry VIII's daughter, Princess Elizabeth, later herself Queen of England. Shortly after Elizabeth's death in 1603, her Lord Keeper, Thomas Egerton, bought the estate and his son received an earldom. The fourth Earl became the first Duke of Bridgewater and it is his youngest son who is commemorated by the Monument. On the plinth of York stone at the base is an inscription which reads:

IN HONOUR OF
FRANCIS THIRD DUKE OF BRIDGEWATER
"FATHER OF INLAND NAVIGATION"
1832

Born in 1736, Francis Egerton inherited the title and estates when he was just eleven years old. Various described as morose, ill-mannered and ignorant, he was not a willing pupil. Later, in an effort to instil some social graces, Francis was sent on the 'grand tour' of Europe by his guardians. A hidden spark was clearly ignited and he was impressed by Louis XIV's mighty Languedoc Canal which crossed France from the Bay of Biscay to the Mediterranean.

CANALS

By inheritance, Francis owned coal-mines at Worsley, Lancashire, and needed to transport the spoils to the industrial centre of Manchester. At this time the established means of transport was by horse and cart over poor roads and Francis realised that if somehow he could build a canal, coal and all manner of goods could be transported faster and more cheaply - a barge carrying some thirty times the load of a cart. Work began on the canal in 1759 and was finished in 1761. With a further extension, it stretched some 40 miles, cost £200,000 and was the first canal in England not to follow an existing water course. Though faced with seemingly insurmountable problems such as land disputes, the necessity of constructing aqueducts and the ever-present pressure of finding money, somehow Francis Egerton and his brilliant engineer James Brindley saw the project through in record time. Their persistence laid the foundation for canal transport throughout England which in turn had a profound effect on the success of the Industrial Revolution. Nearly bankrupting himself in the process, Francis nevertheless came to see incomes of £80,000 from his canal work (worth over £4 million today).

MONUMENT

Francis died in 1803 and is interred in the family vault at nearby Little Gaddesden where, fittingly, there is a pub called The Bridgewater Arms. Having never married, the Dukedom ended with Francis and the estate was passed to his cousin (technically his first cousin, once removed). On the latter's death, the title and lands passed to a brother, another Francis Egerton, who bequeathed some £13,500 for an obelisk to be erected in memory of the 'Canal Duke'.

SIR JEFFRY WYATVILLE

The Doric, fluted column of Aberdeen granite was designed by Sir Jeffrey Wyattville, who finished the refurbishment of Ashridge House started by his uncle, James Wyatt. (Jeffrey changed his name to Wyattville to distinguish himself from several other architects named Wyatt, and was knighted in 1828). He received £400 for designing the monument, which was built by Philip Newell of Pimlico. The urn or vase at the top is of copper, reputedly imported from South America, and is surrounded by iron railings. From this lofty viewpoint it is possible to see both Wembley Stadium and Waddesdon Manor in the distance. Immediately below is Monument Drive, the metallated road built by Belgian troops during WWII leading up to the edifice.

BRASS PLATE

Inside the monument on a brass plate is an inscription which neatly encapsulates the relevant history and provides a fitting tribute to this enterprising and tenacious man:

This column was erected conformably with the intentions of John William Earl of Bridgewater according to the testamentary direction of Francis Henry Earl of Bridgewater and with the approbation of Charlotte Catherine Anne Countess of Bridgewater in honour of Francis Third Duke of Bridgewater who by devoting the energies of his mind to the accomplishment of the most splendid works of inland navigation opened a new field to national industry and rendered the most important services to the commercial interests of his country.

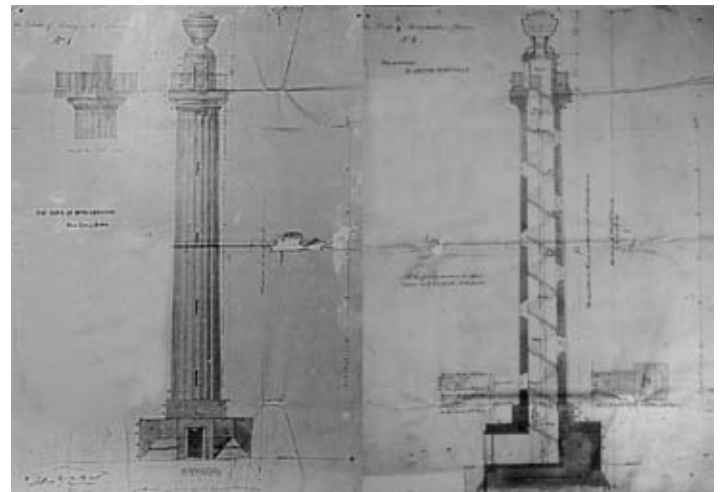
Despite receiving 'the approbation of Charlotte Catherine Anne' wife of the Duke's cousin, it appears that she did not wish there to be an obelisk and ordered the monument to be built as far away from Ashridge House as possible, so she did not have to look at it. As she lived a further 17 years following the monument's erection, this was perhaps astute!

THE GRAND UNION CANAL

It is fitting that just over a mile away lies the Grand Union canal. Francis Egerton, 3rd Duke of Bridgewater, was instrumental in laying the groundwork, both literally and metaphorically, for all the canal builders that came after him. Although that mode of transport was itself superseded by the railways, we should surely admire his tenacity and look with pride on the monument built in remembrance of him at Ashridge.

John Hockey

This article was previously published in the Chiltern Magazine, June 2012, issue 204



Sir Jeffrey Wyattville's plans for the Bridgewater monument

The Grand Junction & the Dunstable Canal



The Grand Junction was one of England's premier canals.

It was built between 1793 and 1805 in order to improve the route from the Midlands to London, bypassing the upper reaches of the River Thames near Oxford. This not only shortened the journey but the upper reaches of the Thames was in a poor condition for navigation compared with the modern canals. The river suffered from shallow sections and a shortage of water led to delays at locks involving frequent conflicts with mill owners over water supplies. The 1793 Grand Junction Canal Act authorised the cutting of a canal from the Oxford Canal at Braunston, to the Thames, at, or near, Brentford. The aim was to connect with existing or proposed canals at Birmingham, Northampton, Leicester, the Potteries and the North. Engineered by William Jessop, it was the longest barge canal built. Completed in 1805, it was 93½ miles long with 101 locks and two great tunnels, one at Braunston and one at Blisworth. It had cost over a million pounds in total, though it quickly became busy with traffic and profitable to its shareholders.

BRANCHES

Branches were built, notably to Paddington, Aylesbury, Buckingham and Northampton.

Later the company was strong enough to set up a department to compete for business with the railway, and to build a new branch to Slough.

DUNSTABLE BRANCH

Although the main aim of the canal was to shorten the distance travelled between London and the Midland industries, branches were also planned to Aylesbury, Buckingham, Chesham,

Dunstable, Hemel Hempstead, Newport Pagnell, St. Albans and Wendover, presumably to feed business to the main canals. All these were surveyed but it was decided not to build those to Chesham, Hemel Hempstead and Newport Pagnell.

OPPOSITION FROM LANDOWNERS

It was later decided not to proceed with the Dunstable branch, due to opposition from landowners. The Dunstable branch had been planned to run in a straight line from Slapton to the foot of Chalk Hill. There was never any intention to extend the canal over the hill into the centre of Dunstable. Cargoes destined for Dunstable were subsequently off-loaded at Bulbourne and transported by horse and cart to its destination. Unfortunately, no original plans have yet been found showing the planned route.

Hugh Garrod

Ref: 'The Grand Junction Canal' Alan H Faulkner, David & Charles 1972



Map showing the approximate route the Dunstable canal would have taken from Slapton to the foot of Chalk Hill

© Ordnance Survey

The History Research Room

As some of you already know, but newer members may not, the History Society has a Research Room in Priory House in High Street South.

OFFICIAL KEEPERS OF ITEMS

Courtesy of Dunstable Town Council we have the use of a room off the upstairs exhibition area where we keep our collection of items relating to the history of the town. When the Society was first formed in 1991 people began to bring us books, photographs, maps, documents etc. for safe keeping and we are now the official keepers of these items. All of these things are there for anyone to consult and this list will give you an idea of what we keep.

MOST OF THE BOOKS EVER WRITTEN ON DUNSTABLE

We have most of the books ever written on Dunstable, old and new. and a very large collection of photographs, some on the computer and some prints; the printed parish register up to 1812 and an almost complete set of Dunstable directories which were printed annually from 1905 until 1939/40; a collection of local maps, including the tithe map of 1841 and the first OS map of the town in 1880; census returns for 1841, 1851 and 1881, and tax lists from dates going back to the 17th

century, as well as files on various topics compiled by researchers, some of them Society members.

CONTRACT WITH DUNSTABLE COUNCIL

In return for the use of the room we have a contract with Dunstable Council which sets out certain obligations on our part. The Society is the 'lead agency for delivering and coordinating all aspects of Dunstable heritage and history' and will offer a service to research historical records relating to Dunstable. It will 'offer assistance for related activities and events' where necessary and possible.

So, as you can see, there is a lot more going on than a meeting once a month.

OPEN ON THURSDAY MORNINGS

The research room is open from 10.00 a.m. to 1.00 pm on Thursday mornings, and Joan Curran and Rita Swift are there to help you. It saves you time if you make an appointment in advance, of course, but you are welcome to come at any time.

Note: Donations of written and printed material are always welcome, but unfortunately we cannot accept artefacts as we have no space to store or display them.

Joan Curran



A Vicar who Broke the Law

Last year a 'Yesteryear' photograph in the Gazette featured the Collegiate School in Dunstable, about which we knew nothing at all.

But since then we have discovered that the man who ran it, the patriarchal looking man in the picture, was the Rev. Charles Butler Harris. And he had quite a history.

He was born in Surrey in 1817, graduated from Cambridge in 1845 and was ordained as a priest in the Church of England in the same year. He then went north and was a curate in two parishes in Westmorland before becoming Vicar of Helsington, in the Kendal area. In 1846 he married Elizabeth Toyne and they had two children, a boy and a girl. It was an ordinary, conventional start to his career.

HE MARRIED HIS SISTER-IN-LAW

Then in 1856 his wife died and two years later Charles remarried. But this time his marriage was less conventional and, in England, illegal. His second wife was half-sister to his first wife, and thus his sister-in-law, and his marriage was therefore illegal. A bill attempting to legalise such marriages in this country had been defeated in the House of Lords. However, in some countries such marriages were allowed and so Charles and his new wife had married in Switzerland.

CURATE AT ST MARY'S, LUTON

Charles was forced to leave his post in Helsington and brought his family to Luton, where he was appointed curate at St Mary's, the parish church. The family moved into a house in Farley Hill and at first there appeared to be no problems. The first signs of trouble were when a new vicar, the Rev. Quirk, arrived. However, he only stayed for 18 months and though he did raise the issue of the illegal marriage no action was taken. Then, in 1862, the Rev. McNeill, arrived.

At this time St. Mary's was undergoing a huge programme of restoration, which meant that half of the church could not be used for Sunday services. A wooden church had been erected in Albert Road as a 'chapel of ease' for some of the congregation who lived in that area and the Rev. Harris, as curate, or 'officiating minister', took the services there and was very popular.

FORBIDDEN TO CARRY OUT BAPTISMS

Perhaps relations between the two clerics had never been over friendly, the vicar being strongly evangelical, or low church, in his views and the Rev. Harris being high church, indeed almost Anglo-Catholic. Whatever their relations had been in the past, the Vicar suddenly wrote to Rev. Harris in January 1866 forbidding him to carry out baptisms or the sacrament of Holy Communion in the wooden church as from the following Sunday, on the grounds that he had 'foolish ideas about the sacraments' and held 'erroneous opinions'. Rev. Harris refused to be dictated to in this way by the Vicar and wrote back to this effect, and there followed a very acrimonious correspondence between the two of them which was published in the local paper at the request of Rev. Harris. In this the Vicar also again brought up the matter of Rev. Harris's marriage, of which he disapproved.



Rev. Charles Butler Harris

MANY LOYAL SUPPORTERS

Though Rev. Harris was forced to give up officiating at the wooden church he had many loyal supporters in the town, and in the following February a Testimonial from members of the wooden church and other supporters was presented to him in the Town Hall, in the form of 200 sovereigns on a silver salver.

HARRIS CAME TO DUNSTABLE

And then the Rev. Harris came to Dunstable. While in Luton he had taken over the running of a Collegiate School in Stuart Street started by a Vicar of Stopsley who had since moved away, and he continued to run it for some months after

ceasing to officiate at the wooden church. So it was presumably his experience there that gave him the idea of starting a school himself. He had certainly known, and seems to have been on good terms with, the Rector of Dunstable, the Rev. Hose, and the Vicar of Houghton Regis, the Rev. Hugh Smyth, so he would have known something about the town. The school opened in 1867 in Upper High Street North (then in the parish of Houghton Regis), but was possibly not too successful as seven years later it was moving to smaller premises in High Street South.

BURIED IN HOUGHTON REGIS

In 1881 he left this area and spent the latter part of his life as a curate in Somerset. He died in St Albans in 1904 and is buried in Houghton Regis churchyard, alongside his first wife and his young son, who had died as the result of a tragic accident when riding a pony on a visit by the Harris family to the Smyths at Houghton vicarage.

Joan Curran

(researched by Rita Swift)



A photo of the students and staff at the Collegiate School, Dunstable in 1870

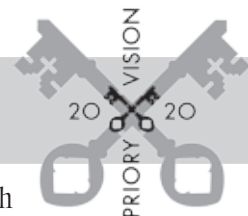


Sad Farewell



We are very sorry to announce
the sad loss of
Barry Horne

Priory Church 2020 Vision



Dunstable's ancient Priory Church has been restored and re-ordered on numerous occasions over the centuries.

Our Georgian benefactors carried out major works on the building, as did the Victorians in the 1870s. The wood-block floor and the tiles date from this time, the radiators and pipes were installed in the 1930s, and the current chairs were purchased in the early 1950s. The most recent improvement was earlier this century when the glass porch, the kitchen and toilet were installed.

UNDER-FLOOR HEATING, YORK PAVING

We anticipate another chapter of renewal in the year 2020. The current church floor contains so many trip hazards that it is not really suitable for concerts and other civic events. The '2020 Vision' plan is to remove the wooden block floor, the tiles, the radiators and the central heating pipes and replace them with under-floor heating and York paving. There will also be new stackable chairs making the space more versatile for both church services and civic events

2020 VISION LAUNCHED

The Vision was launched, in the church, on Wednesday 7th June in the evening. Members of the Town Council attended, along with the organising committee and other invited guests. Music was pro-

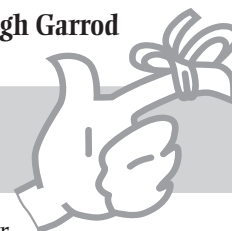
vided by three groups from our choirs with refreshments served by students from the College. A video loop showed what the interior will look like and the Rector, Rev. Richard Andrews, gave a short talk about the history of the building. He also discussed the Vision of renewal plan and the process by which this will happen. The work will take place in the year 2020, when the church will be shut for several months and services will be held in the Church Hall instead.

FUND RAISER

We are fortunate in having the services of a retired fund raiser, who will use her contacts to raise much of the money required for this huge project. There will also be opportunities for the congregation, the townspeople, businesses and organisations of Dunstable to contribute towards the cost of this amazing project.

One of the important effects of the launch will be that local groups and individuals will know about the Vision and be able to support it in any way they can. The Priory has always played an important part in the life of our town and the Vision will ensure that this ancient church continues to be an asset to Dunstable and its community in the years to come.

Hugh Garrod



Memories of old Dunstable

John Buckledee is collecting anecdotes and memories of old Dunstable. These days, most of them are arriving via the internet, but you can also contact John on 01582 703107.

WORTHINGTON G. SMITH

Peter Hoare, writing elsewhere in this newsletter about the Dunstable historian Worthington G. Smith, mentions that Smith was sometimes taken for a tramp after he'd spent a day searching for archaeological 'finds' in a wet clay pit.

There's a lovely story, recounted by the late James Dyer, about Smith arranging to meet some distinguished visitors at the Horse and Jockey pub, on the Watling Street near Dunstable. Being a teetotaler, he waited for his guests outside the pub. The landlord was not impressed to see an apparently disreputable character lingering near the door and, scowling, produced a long dirty rope and asked Smith: 'Is this any good to you?'. When Smith declined, the landlord said: 'Oh, I thought you wanted to hang yourself!'



Worthington George Smith



Tony Ward during one of his jam sessions

Soon afterwards the party of VIPs arrived in a carriage, shook hands with Smith, and everyone went inside for a splendid luncheon. The landlord ate humble pie...

Worthington Smith's wife, incidentally, always called him 'George'.

TONY WARD

The celebration in the Priory Church of the life of the late Tony Ward was exactly that, with Tony's lively jazz recordings entertaining the congregation. The reception at the Old Palace Lodge afterwards

turned into a bit of a jam session, with Tony's musician friends recreating the unofficial jazz club sessions at the Wagon and Horses pub (now the Froth and Elbow) in High Street South, where Tony and the Wayfarers Jazz Band once held rehearsals.

Tony, throughout his life, had collected details, photographs and anecdotes about all kinds of musical activities in the town. He was inspired by memories of two of his uncles who were members of Dunstable's Excelsior Silver prize band and the Bible Class Orchestra at the Square Methodist Church. This culminated in his wide-ranging book, *Strike Up the Band*, which covered two centuries of music in the district. It was published by the Book Castle of Dunstable in 2003.

RESEARCH NOTES

He was a member of the history society and his will bequeathed his research notes to us. They are now kept in our room at Priory House.

continued overleaf

Greeting New Members

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

June Byrne
Lee Kimber

Geeta Datta
Steve Lightfoot

Catherine Stacey

Memories of old Dunstable continued



STEVE CLARK



Steve Clark with his brother Jimmy on the left

Sad to report another death... the world-famous dancer Steve Clark who had settled in Dunstable after his retirement. He passed away on February 24 aged 92.

Steve became a familiar face around town, and had a wealth of anecdotes about his career in showbusiness while part of the Clark Brothers tap-dancing act. We tried very hard to persuade him to tell some of his stories to the history society, but without success. But his eyes would light up whenever he found someone who was interested in Bill 'Bojangles' Robinson or who had heard about the crazy musical Hellzapoppin, so we remained hopeful.

THE COTTON CLUB

Steve and his brother Jimmy, born in Philadelphia, danced as teenagers at the Cotton Club in Harlem with the Cab Calloway Band and were part of the Hot Mikado show there with Mr Bojangles. They worked in Las Vegas and in Hollywood, where their gravity-defying dance routines were filmed and used (without extra payment!) in nightclub scenes in a number of movies. They first came to London in 1948 to perform in Hellzapoppin, which ran for a year, and became great friends with Gracie Fields. Numerous TV appearances followed and they were part of the first show at the lavish new nightclub, Talk of The Town. They founded a dancing school which was officially opened by Princess Margaret and attended by such up-and-coming performers as Cliff Richard and Bonnie Langford.

Steve and his brother Jimmy, who died in 2009, lived at Sugden Court in Dunstable. They are buried in Dunstable Cemetery.

LOCKHART COAL CART AND HORSE

The photo, in the Yesteryear section of the Gazette, of a Lockhart coal cart and horse at Dunstable North Railway Station was a pleasant surprise for Bryan Wilson, of 43 Downs Road, Dunstable, because the man in the picture was his grandfather, Arthur Tearle.

Arthur worked for the Lockhart coal business for many years and then became yard foreman at the Lockhart builders yard which was once in Chiltern Road about six doors away from the school. The original stables for the coal-yard horses were also there.

Bryan, born in 1942, lived with his grandparents and has fond memories of playing at the builders' yard. The horses there were still delivering around Dunstable as late as the 1950s, although by



Arthur Tearle, on the right?, the foreman at the Lockhart coal yard

then the carts had pneumatic tyres on their wheels to make the haul easier. Bryan can remember occasionally hopping on the rear of a railway cart for an unauthorised lift down the high street!

Arthur was related to the family which ran the Tearle egg-packing business in Eaton Bray.

The William Lockhart business was eventually taken over to become Lockhart Bennett. One member of the family, Percy Lockhart, lived at Cordova, the large house in West Street which later became the headquarters for the Dunstable Old People's Welfare Association.

STUCK IN THE PAST

We were a little indignant when a writer in the Dunstable Gazette accused the history society of being obsessive about things like Morris dancing. But we would have probably accepted an accusation that we are stuck in the past – a criticism levelled at museums in Lancaster which prompted this headline reprinted in Private Eye.

Lancaster museums are 'stuck in the past' says city councillor

Lancaster Guardian

WALKING FROM LONDON TO HOLYHEAD

Hugh Garrod and myself enjoyed a very pleasant morning accompanying David Ellis-Williams on a walk down the Watling Street from the Highwayman to the end of the chalk cutting (and back). David is gathering material for a book about the Roman road, in the course of which he has been walking from London to Holyhead and writing an internet blog about his adventures. (A5walk.blogspot.co.uk)

Hugh and myself aimed to point out the local items of interest, but we learned just as much from David about the work of road builder Thomas Telford, whose legacy is still visible to the educated eye. For example, we clambered down the precipitous wooden steps leading from the causeway created in 1813 when the chalk cutting was dug. David was convinced that this had all the hallmarks of Telford's engineering expertise, because the mathematical judgment involved in precisely assembling the chalk rubble, without causing a landslide, would have been considerable.

THE FOUNTAIN FAMILY

The society has been pleased to try to help the Fountain family, on a visit from Australia, to discover some of their local roots. Jabez Fountain, in 1908, was running a pub called the Nightingale, which was at 24 St Mary's Street – a site now hidden under the Wilko car park. Another ancestor ran a so-called Fountain's pub which we are guessing might have been a beerhouse at 157 High Street South run by a James Fountain in 1891. This later became the Clifton Arms and stood near the Square. It has now been replaced by modern buildings. Most of the Fountain family lived in Eaton Bray and there is much information about them on the excellent Eaton Bray website, www.eatonbray.com

CHRIS THORPE

Our search for information about the Dell Hole, a place near Kensworth which is mentioned as the open-air meeting place of early Baptists, prompted an interesting reply to the society's website from Chris Thorpe, who is not from this area and who seems to have given us an incorrect email address. If he's now reading this item as a PDF on our website, we did try to get in touch!

John Buckledee