

NEWSLETTER

Dunstable & District Local History Society
No. 56 December 2020



Chairman's Notes

I have to bring you the very sad news of the death in September of Shirley Frith.

SHIRLEY FRITH

Her husband Ron died earlier this year and since then Shirley had been living in Tudor House in West Street.

Her son David tells me that she had become very frail and rather confused since Ron died, and this eventually overwhelmed her.

Ron and Shirley had been stalwart members of the History Society for many years and they leave behind very many friends here. Shirley had looked after my three sons in the nursery at the Methodist Church, so the news was particularly personal to me. She shared my sense of humour and always described me as the chairman of the hysterical society.

I also have to report the death of another society member, Peter Hoare, who was an expert on the life of the Dunstable historian Worthington Smith and who had been working for the British Museum on cataloguing the Smith collection there.

By coincidence, it was Ron Frith who noticed that the set of Royal Mail stamps featuring various fungi had included an illustration by Worthington Smith.

Peter was born at 7 Victoria Street, Dunstable, and raised in French's Avenue, Dunstable. In recent years he had been living in Ely and had been planning to illustrate the journeys W G Smith undertook in the Dunstable area and further afield in search of artefacts. Worthington covered vast distances, many of them on foot.

MARY DAVIES

One of our members, Mary Davies, died tragically in a motor accident in October. She had been to an aquafit class in Milton Keynes and then had a picnic with friends. She was driving down the A5 near the Flying Fox when her car crashed.

Miss Davies' friend Elisabeth Pynn tells me that Mary had trained as a nurse, went to Australia for a time, and then became a special care baby unit nurse. After a period in Glasgow she came to this area to work at the Luton and Dunstable Hospital. During the war she had been evacuated to Wales with her sister Gwenda and lived with her grandparents.



Shirley Frith



Mary Davies

She was very involved in the community locally in Dunstable and in her church, All Saints in Leighton Buzzard.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

Your annual subscription to the History Society is due on January 1. It's normally £8 but we are just asking for a donation this year. We have had to cancel six of our meetings because of the Covid virus, so we have saved money on the hire of the hall and other expenses. If you feel that you haven't had value for money, just send us what you

think is appropriate. Please return the enclosed form anyway and continue to give us your support.

LOCKDOWN

Despite the lockdown, the Society's work has continued and many of our members have been incredibly busy. We agreed to become involved in Dunstable Council's bid for a 'High Street Action Zone' grant to help renovate some of the town's historic buildings. It is just the sort of thing which your Society is bound to support. In return for the grant, Historic England is requiring a consortium to be set up to stimulate interest in the town's history. Of course, we have agreed to be very much part of this. There are all sorts of ideas being pursued and you will be hearing very much more about the projects in the months to come.

INFORMATION BOARDS AND PLAQUES

I have already asked members for suggestions, and one of your favourites is for more information boards and for plaques marking the history of parts of the high street. The History Society will be taking the lead in this, and we have been asked to concentrate on providing 'talking plaques', bearing QR codes, through which an audio recording can be accessed via a mobile phone. It's thought, probably rightly, that this will be much more likely to attract the interest of younger people. So, we are venturing into a high-tech area which is likely to keep us busy for the next two or three years. Your suggestions about where the plaques should be placed would be most welcome.

Finally, let me wish you all a Happy and HEALTHY Christmas, and hope very much that we will soon be able to resume our monthly talks.

John Buckledee

The History of Dunstable Downs Golf Club



A golf course in Dunstable was first mentioned in the Herts Advertiser in 1893: 'Arrangements are in place to form a golf club in Dunstable'.



Teeing off in front of the old club house – circa 1910

Subsequently, in 1895, The Golfers Guide added: "Of so recent a date as 15th March last, we read that the indefatigable Tom Dunn (a prolific golf architect in the early 20th century) has just finished laying out a short course on the Downs at Dunstable." And in November that same year The Luton Times and Advertiser confirmed: "We understand that a golf club, called the Dunstable West Downs Golf Club has been formed, with the Mayor (Mr A E Langridge) as president and Mr L A Waterfield, hon secretary." Five years later and The Golfing Annual lists two golf courses in Dunstable: Dunstable Golf Club and Dunstable Grammar School Golf Club. But in Baldock's 'Short history of Dunstable School' and in the school's 1900 prospectus golf is not mentioned and the local maps are void of any references to either a course on the Downs or in Grove Park. Confusing? It is believed that a few enthusiasts connected with Dunstable Grammar School had formed themselves into a small private 'club' playing golf on 'Grove Park' from 1895. They were instrumental in the founding of Dunstable Golf Club in November 1906.

A GOLF COURSE ON DUNSTABLE DOWNS

Golf was expanding exponentially across the whole of the country and in 1905 over 400 new golf courses had been established. In October 1906, at a mayoral banquet, the Town Clerk had announced that among the future projects to popularise



Alfred Headey and Ollie Small outside the original clubhouse



The 9th hole on the old course – circa 1930

the town and attract new residents and visitors was a scheme to establish a golf course on Dunstable Downs.

It was proposed to put down a course of nine holes initially and if the Club's membership grew, negotiations would be entered into with the Downs Conservators for permission to extend it across the Downs towards Whipsnade. A further 13 acres of land together with the cottages and gardens known as 'California' were purchased and became the first clubhouse.

The History of the County of Bedfordshire, Vol 2, 1908, says 'Towards the end of 1906 the Dunstable Golf Club was formed. The course of nine holes, which vary in length from 100 yards to 500 yards, was laid out by Roland Jones (Roland Jones was the runner up in the 1905 Open Championship and a professional golfer of some repute) and is situated on the Downs at Dunstable, a mile and a half from the Great Northern Railway station. The foundation of the club was due mainly to the efforts of Mr J Healing. The links are laid out upon the chalk downs and all the hazards are natural. Play is possible all year round.'

Golf in those days was an expensive game and deemed the privilege of the professional and middle classes. While it was acknowledged there was a need to attract more 'residential people' to the links it was believed that if a better railway service was introduced, then more people might be encouraged to move to Dunstable, especially from London.

The relative simplicity of the course design, enhanced by natural contours meant that by the beginning of 1909 the course was pretty much complete. With the demand for golf growing, in 1911, 52 acres of land owned by F T Fossey were leased by the club and this land together with the addition of some waste land were used to extend the course to 18 holes. The clubhouse was also extended to accommodate the growing membership.



1952 – Flory Van Donck making his winning speech

The History of Dunstable Downs Golf Club



At the end of the first world war, the course was lengthened by 600 yards, given a full bunkering scheme and was unofficially opened when a professional fourball: Sandy Herd and William Duncan took on Ted Ray and the Dunstable professional James Batley in an exhibition match. In 1923 the decision was taken to change the name to Dunstable Downs Golf Club, to illustrate the healthy qualities of playing on such a course.

RELOCATING

By 1930, consideration to relocate the course had gathered momentum. The Downs were becoming more popular for leisure purposes and the new zoo at Whipsnade had increased traffic considerably along the main approach from the town. Furthermore, there was no recognised boundary to the golf course and the public assumed it all to be common land. It was not unusual for visitors to park their cars and appear on the fairways while enjoying their picnics and playing games of cricket.

Negotiations to purchase the 161 acres of Downs Farm were concluded in October 1930.

The club had chosen five times Open Champion James Braid to design the new course. Braid was at the top of his game and had come to Dunstable with a strong architectural reputation having designed many well-known courses including Gleneagles. He found that the land that was now available provided a very good golfing ground. The holes on the downland, across the road, were abandoned and by Christmas 1930 seven of the ten new greens had been completed. The acquisition of this new land meant that the golf course would now have its first tree within its boundary.

NEW CLUBHOUSE

Completion and opening of the new clubhouse in 1936 elevated Dunstable Downs into one of the most respected clubs in the county. Indeed, Tom Moore, secretary, summoned it up perfectly when he said: "There is no doubt that it is [in] an ideal position - right in the centre of the course and overlooking seven counties. When you come to think of central heating, electric light, baths, shower baths, lovely rooms with windows giving glorious views, I think we may look upon it as a perfect paradise."

In the July 4th, 1936, issue of *Golf Illustrated*, Britain's authoritative journal on golfing matters, reported: "Playing golf at Dunstable Downs was like playing on the top of the world" and it described the clubhouse as "an utterly modern clubhouse placed on very nearly the highest point of the course that drinks in every ray of sunlight and catches every whisper of the softest breeze". The author went on: "Never have I seen in this England of ours a patchwork quilt of fields of greater variety or more intense beauty."



The new clubhouse which opened in 1936

Never have I breathed purer air or seen so many larks trilling their song beneath so blue a heaven."

Improvements to the course and facilities continued throughout the 1940s and into the 1950s and it became clear that Dunstable Downs was establishing itself as a quality venue. In 1952 it held what was arguably, at that time, the third biggest golfing tournament in England; the Southern and Overseas PGA championship. 6 Open Champions, a further 14 Ryder cup players and 9 previous PGA Match Play winners all competed over two days to qualify for the British Match Play Championship final including Max Faulkner, Dai Rees, Henry Cotton and Dick Burton.

COMPETING AND ADAPTING TO SURVIVE

After the golden age of British Golf in the late 1980s when the likes of Sandy Lyle, Nick Faldo and Ian Woosnam succeeded on the world stage, an increasing number of people wanted to play golf so many new golf clubs in Bedfordshire & neighbouring Hertfordshire were constructed. This led to a massive explosion of supply and the Club had to compete and adapt to survive.

But today, the coronavirus pandemic has ironically had a major and beneficial impact on the sport. In those zones where the population has not been told to fully self-isolate then golf provides health enhancing physical activity and safe social interaction in a low risk environment.

Dunstable Downs has changed the governance of the Club with a new forward-thinking management committee. It is seeking limited company status and its focus is on maintaining and enhancing the quality of the facility, creating a good environment for wildlife, ensuring that the landscape retains its downland character and to provide the best golfing experience for the next generation.

John Winter



The current Greenkeeping Team: Dean Wingfield, James Barnett, Gary Boulton, Ciaran Mulvihill, George Little and Luke Burman

Greeting New Members

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

Joan Schneider



Sad Farewell



We are very sorry to announce the sad loss of

Mary Davies

Shirley Frith

Peter Hoare

From Paraguay to Dunstable - the life of Eliza Bagshawe



The stories of Arthur Bagshawe, founder of the engineering works in Church Street, and his son Thomas Wyatt Bagshawe, the noted local historian, have been told many times, but here is the little-known background of Thomas Bagshawe's mother, Eliza, who was born in Paraguay. It's told by Simon Cooper, who went to Paraguay from his home in Dunstable to teach English and then settled down in the South American country. His tales of the life of a Dunstable citizen now in a distant land are in his blog, available on Facebook.

Long before I had ever thought of travelling to Paraguay I was fascinated by an unusual gravestone in Dunstable cemetery. It just seemed so out of place in an English country graveyard. I always wondered what the story behind it was.

The memorial is that of Eliza Bagshawe, born in Asuncion, Paraguay, on May 15 1864 and then, after a long life, dying in Cambridge, England, on August 13 1952. Eliza's parents were James Smith Parkinson and Jane Hare. James was born in 1836 in Bubwith, Yorkshire, and Jane in 1838.

James was one of a number of British managers and engineers brought to Paraguay by the president Carlos Lopez in the mid 1800s. They were there to help modernise his country. In Paraguay James was employed as manager of the Asuncion Brick Works.

Whilst the work to modernize the country continued Carlos Lopez died in 1862. He was succeeded by his son Francisco, known as Mariscal Lopez.

The following year James Smith Parkinson and Jane Hare were married in Asuncion. They had probably met in Paraguay. The date was August 2 1863.

The following year, on May 15, their daughter Eliza was born. Eliza was named after the Irish mistress of Mariscal Lopez, Eliza Lynch. Eliza Lynch was at the time the height of Asuncion fashion and naming their daughter after her would have done the young couple no harm.

WARS WITH BRAZIL AND ARGENTINA

Eliza's early years were not however to be happy ones. The following year, following disputes with both Brazil and Argentina, Paraguay was thrown into war. It was a disastrous war that would all but destroy Paraguay.

Like many foreign workers, the Parkinsons would have sought to get away from Paraguay. It does seem that they escaped before the final devastating months of the war when, following the fall of Asuncion to Brazilian forces in late 1869, Mariscal Lopez and his ever-dwindling forces made a fighting withdraw across the country for most of the following year.

I think that was the case as they were back in England around the time of Eliza's 6th birthday. The flight however seems not to have been peaceful and uneventful. Along the way important paperwork was lost.

NO BIRTH CERTIFICATE

Arriving in England Eliza lacked a birth certificate. Something that was vital for her continuing life. The problem was swiftly resolved and, whether through her rights as a British citizen or through the influence of her family, a fresh certificate was produced. This new birth certificate now showed Eliza as having been born in Rotherham, Yorkshire.



The Bagshawe gravestone which can be seen in Dunstable Cemetery

The family was not ruined by their sudden departure from Paraguay. James quickly found fresh employment as a brick and tile manufacturer in Lancashire.

Better times were ahead and the family finances appear solid. Eliza was able to go to a boarding school in Stroud and from there to Stratford Abbey Training College in London.

MARRIAGE TO ARTHUR BAGSHAWE

It was whilst in London that Eliza Parkinson met Arthur Bagshawe. The couple were married in Fulham, London, in June 1891.

Arthur Bagshawe was born in Sheffield, the son of Richard Bagshawe. Richard Bagshawe had a factory in Hammersmith importing chains and machine parts. There Arthur worked as an apprentice to his father in preparation for one day having his own business.

Whilst in London Arthur and Eliza had three children. First Arthur W Gerald in 1892. Then Mary Christine Evelyn in 1893. Finally, Thomas Wyatt in 1901.

By the time of the birth of Thomas, Arthur was ready to set up alone in business. He wanted that business to be somewhere away from the dirt of London: somewhere with clean air and open spaces that would be ideal for a young family. Also close enough to London to maintain business connections.

DUNSTABLE AND GROVE HOUSE

He spent some time travelling around the country seeking somewhere suitable. Then in 1906 a site in Dunstable to the north of London was settled upon. Eliza and the children travelled to Dunstable and the mid-18th century Grove House in Dunstable High Street was settled upon as their residence. This was rented by Arthur in 1906 and then bought outright in 1920.

The factory itself was built a mile away on a site in Church Street. This contained an iron foundry and a chain manufacturing shop, allowing the entire manufacturing process to be carried out on one site. This would decrease costs and increase profits.

Away from the factory Arthur was a dedicated family man and a keen gardener. Grove House had a large garden and he spent many happy hours there tending to the plants. The garden also gave the children space to run and play.

The happy family life continued until the death of Arthur in 1926. Ownership of the factory and Grove House then passed to the eldest son, Arthur W.

Following the death of her husband Eliza continued to live in Grove House until 1936. At that point both the house and gardens were sold to the Borough of Dunstable. The gardens were then opened to the public.

Eliza lived on for many more years. Finally she died in a Cambridge nursing home in 1952.

She had enjoyed a full life. She had survived three wars, had fled halfway across the world as a child refugee and finally seen her husband's dream become a reality.

Her body was interred in Dunstable Cemetery next to that of her husband. There still they lie together.

Simon Cooper

Dunstable Town Directories



Our Society has a large, but incomplete, collection of **Dunstable Town Directories**.

The earliest one we have is for 1885. They are full of information and, up to the 1970s, they contain lists of local residents. These give evidence of the expansion of our town over the years. There is no mention of Dunstable in the Domesday Book, 1086, but there is of the surrounding parishes: Totternhoe, Kensworth, Caddington and Houghton Regis. Dunstable has gradually expanded into these parishes and the civil boundaries have been moved from time to time to acknowledge this.

The Directories give a clear indication of this growth. The figures below show households – not population. Unoccupied houses are not included.

NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS IN DUNSTABLE:

Year	1885	1890	1894	1900	1903	1906	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912
No.	397	436	519	509	514	1269	1718	1605	1876	1667	1965

Year	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1922	1924	193
No.	2009	2149	2137	2126	2174	2192	2267	2300	2256	2890

Year	1935	1937	1939	1940	1951	1955	1959	1961	1964	1969	1970
No.	3133	3809	4348	4662	4975	5529	6173	7219	8433	10289	10758

The population has increased by fits and starts, as the above table indicates. The civic boundaries were expanded in 1907 to include what was previously known as Upper Houghton Regis, north of Chiltern Road. The 1940 directory comments, 'In 1906-7 the Town Council at Dunstable asked for and, after a Local Inquiry at the Town Hall and further proceedings before a Committee of the House of Commons, obtained an Order for this portion of the Town to be incorporated with the Borough.' It also states, 'It was on this extension of the boundaries that the Borough was divided into Wards for the purpose of election of Councillors.'

Further expansion took place as a result of the Local Government Act of 1929, which required County Councils to review the boundaries of Borough, Urban and Rural District Councils. As a result of the South Bedfordshire Order of 1933, The Dunstable civic boundary expanded to the north, west and east on April 1st.

1939 TOWN MAP

The 1939 directory contains a town map which shows the plans for the Hadrian area although only Evelyn Road, Hadrian Avenue, Ridgeway Avenue, Ridgeway Drive and Western Way have been built. Brandreth Avenue has one house in it. The map shows a proposal that Mead Way should extend in an arc and join up with the western end of Southfields Road. It also shows plans for roads off The Avenue to the west. There is no mention of Beacon Avenue.

In 1885 there are 28 streets in Dunstable, by 1922 there are 53, 102 by 1939 and 108 by 1964. Google currently has a list of 340. I was mystified to see Frenchs Gate on today's list as it features in 1937 before becoming Frenchs Avenue in the next volume. 1937 sees the first mention of Lancot Avenue and for one year it has an 'e' on the end. Poynters Road's first entry is in 1933 and both sides of the road are in Dunstable. From 1964 onwards, only the odd numbers are listed. The original Cross Street linked St. Mary's Street with West Street, roughly where St. Mary's Gate is now, and features in the 1885 book. In 1915 a road was built linking Beale Street with Chiltern Road and was called Cross Street North, at which 'South' was added to the one off West Street. This extra word was dropped by 1918 but in 1933 it was re-named Cross Street West, continuing as such until the area was cleared for car parking. The Directories differentiate between High Street North and High Street South but in the first three volumes there are 22 entries listed just as High Street. Before I examined the map,

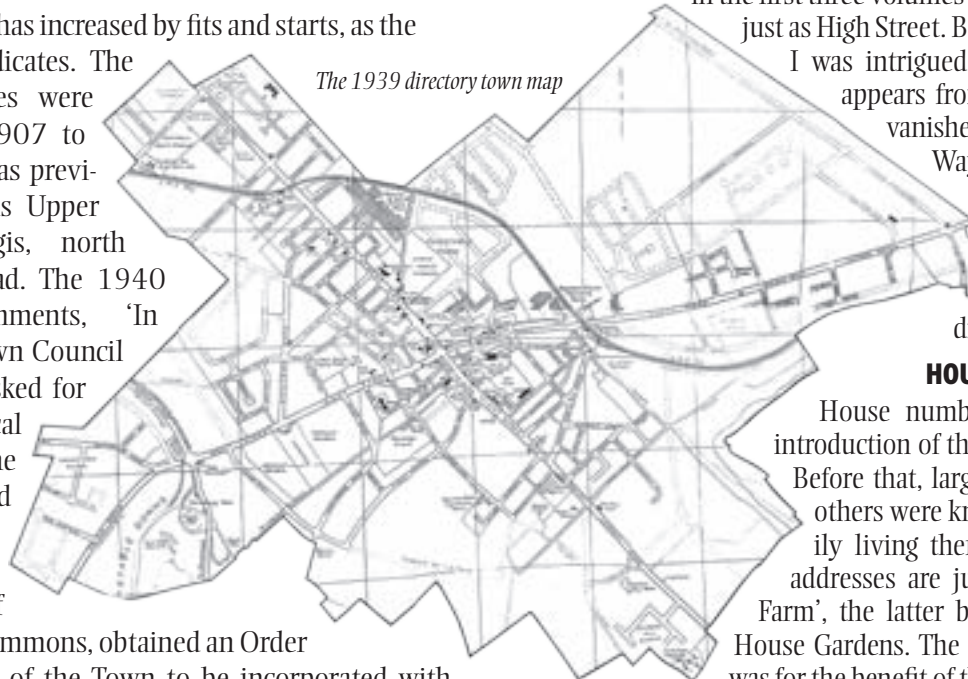
I was intrigued by Aubrey Road which appears from 1937-1955 and then vanishes to become part of Jeans Way. The latter is sometimes written as one word, as is Mead Way. Manchester Place first appears in the 1906 volume and disappears after 1959.

HOUSE NUMBERING

House numbering resulted from the introduction of the Postal Service in 1840. Before that, large houses had names and others were known by name of the family living there. Several 19th century addresses are just 'The Square' or 'Park Farm', the latter being what is now Grove House Gardens. The initial numbering system was for the benefit of the postal delivery service;

it went up one side and back down the other, so that the last numbered house was opposite the first. This was adequate until more houses were built on the end of the street. This led, in 1906 to Upper Union Street and Upper Burr Street. After WWI two demobbed soldiers were employed by the Borough Council to re-organise the house numbering system along present-day lines. If anyone has access to Town Directories not in the above table, which contain lists of inhabitants, I would love to borrow them to make the data more complete.

Hugh Garrod



The 1939 directory town map

Howitt, a Dunstable Family



Iam indebted to Mrs. Marion Howitt for prompting this article. She was having a sorting out session when she came across two copies of the Dunstable Parish Magazine.

One was dated September 1930 and the other November 1931. She was loath to throw them away but, living in the West Country, had no real use for them. She found the church on the internet and posted them off to Eileen Harrup at the Priory Office, with a covering letter. Upon inspection, Eileen wrote my name on the envelope and left it on her desk. Due to Covid 19, it was there until a friend found it and brought the envelope round to my house. Having read her letter, I sent Marion an email, thanking her and saying that I hoped to write an article about the magazines for our Newsletter.



The September 1930 Parish Magazine

THREE PARTS

The Church magazine is comprised of three parts. The inner core is made up of four folded sheets, called The Sign. This is the Church of England monthly newsletter. This is wrapped in a single folded page called St. Albans Diocesan Leaflet. This in turn is wrapped in two folded sheets of the Dunstable Priory newsletter. The whole is stapled into one fourteen-page magazine.

The Sign typically contains: a reflection on a bible passage by a prominent member of the clergy, a history of a well known institution, the story of a character from the bible, household hints, a seasonal reflection, the story of a particular church, news from around the dioceses, readers' questions and a serialised, improving tale. There are also adverts for: monumental masons, retirement homes, deaf aids, cures for ailments, C of E societies as well as Bird's Custard and Ovaltine. The Sign is published by A R Mowbray & Co. Ltd.

The Diocesan Leaflet has in it: The Bishop's Letter, news of the work on the Abbey, the activities of prominent clergy, forthcoming events, a list of daily intercessions, the progress of local appeals and a book recommendation. The Leaflet is printed by H A Richardson Ltd. St. Albans.

The cover of the Priory magazine has a line drawing of the west front, the crossed keys of St. Peter and the Dunstable coat of arms. It also lists the Clergy, Churchwardens, Sidesmen, Organist, Sacristan and Verger. Revd G C Rolfe M A, R D is the Rector and his phone number is 184. Harold Deacon is the organist, a post he held for 45 years. The names on the cover are a roll-call of many of the town's Great and Good between the Wars – Ashwell, Baldock, Ballance, Bass, Bunning, Chappell, Cheshire, Farmbrough, Franklin, Garrett, Gutteridge, Herington, Pettit etc. Page 2 contains adverts for four local firms. Page 3 details the month's services, complete with hymn numbers, the Sidesmen's and Servers' rotas, Psalms for the month and the previous month's Offertory Account, the total being £38 12s 5d. Also included are baptisms, marriages and burials. The next page contains details of last month's church activities and notice of upcoming events. There is much thanks for past efforts and exhortation to take an active part in what comes next. The following two pages and the back cover are full of adverts for local firms, four to a page. The revenue from these adverts is vital as the cover price for the whole magazine is 2d. In modern money, this is about 40p. It is printed by 'The Gazette' Printing Works, High Street North, Dunstable.'

HUSBAND'S BAPTISM

Marion found these two items because the later one has details of her husband's baptism in the Priory Church. 'October 11th John Albric, son of Edgar Albric and Marjorie Gwendoline Howitt'. The earlier one records his parents' marriage at the Priory, 'August 16th Edgar Albric Howitt and Marjorie Gwendoline Waller'. Albric is a family name, passed down through the generations. Edgar was a Sidesman at the Priory in the 1940s and 50s.

LIST OF ADVERTS

Waller is a well-known name here and both magazines contain adverts for:

'When you think of Pies, think of Waller's'. G A Waller, Luton and Dunstable. Bakery: Matthew Street.

Farmer & Co., Pianos

A Wildman, Fruiterer, Greengrocer and Confectioner, 2 High Street
W G Creamer, High Class Baker, Pastrycook and Confectioner, 61 High Street North

Flemons and Marchant, Chemist and Optician, 28 High Street North, Kodak Specialists

S W Pettit, Seedsman and Florist, Church Street Nurseries

S C Horne, Grocer, Provision, Wine and Spirit Merchant, West Street Stores

W H Bale, Tobacconist, Briar pipes given to smokers of Bale's London Shag, 8d per oz

Barker & Larking, Nurserymen & Florists, 157 Victoria Street

H Boxford, 53 High Street South, High Class Baker and Confectioner, 'Try our Hams, they are delicious'

F E Herington, Dispensing Chemist, telephone number 51

B Bunker, Corn and Seed Merchant, 44 The Square

'Keep healthy, Eat Fruit, You get the best at Gadd's' 18 High Street South

Edgar Franklin, 27 Church Street, Joiner, Builder and Undertaker

FAMILY BACKGROUND

Marion's father-in-law, Edgar, was born in Gainsborough and baptised in Oundle, where his father, Harry, and his grandmother, Selina, had been born. Harry and his wife, Rose, came to Dunstable when Edgar was about six and lived, firstly in Ilkley Cottage, Houghton Road until the end of WWI and then at 27 West Parade. Harry was in the print trade, so there would have been plenty of work for him. Harry died in 1947 and Rose in 1964. Edgar's wife, Madge, was born at Biscot. The couple lived at 53 Downs Road until Edgar died in 1969. Madge died in Swanage in 1975.

John Howitt, Marion's husband, had an excellent education, firstly at Ashton St. Peter's School and then at Dunstable Grammar School, which he left in about 1950. While at school, he was a Server in the Priory Church. He then went to Sheffield University, where he gained a Mathematics degree, with Honours. He did two years' National Service in the Navy. He subsequently taught Mathematics in Beckenham and Penge Grammar School, Seaford College and Swanage Grammar School, ending his career as Head of Mathematics at Purbeck Comprehensive School in Wareham.

Hugh Garrod

Memories of old Dunstable



The Society worked hard to help the Dunstable Gazette with research for the obituary of George Weisz, the mechanical engineer who founded Kay Pneumatics and Instruments and Movements in Dunstable.

Mr Weisz, who died on March 31 aged 90, was brought by his family from Hungary to England when he was 10, just before the outbreak of the war.



George Weisz with his daughter, Rachel

INVENTOR OF THE VENTILATOR

The Gazette was alerted about his local career by a half-page article in The Times which concentrated on his design for a ventilator used to treat coronavirus patients and his compressed-air technology used to open and close doors on trains and buses.

The Times reported: "In 1960, with some money from his father, Weisz bought a small factory in Dunstable, Bedfordshire, supplying components to Vauxhall and other car manufacturers. It was little more than a corrugated-iron building with some basic machines. Within a few months, Weisz had gone into production and signed a lucrative contract with the Ministry of Defence to provide it with parachute release activators used in emergencies by RAF pilots. In 1966, he launched a venture called Kay Pneumatics..."

As his career progressed he acquired more factories and became renowned for his attention to detail. He would gently question workers throughout his factories, making copious notes, and was good at cultivating talent.

The Gazette asked the History Society if we knew the location of his original factory, and that simple query started a lot of inquiries. Hugh Garrod's catalogue of Dunstable street directories showed that it had been on Half Moon Hill in London Road, but there was no exact address and, clearly, the building is no longer there. There is no photo of the factory in the Society's collection.

David Underwood, John Pratt and Baden Colman were among those who began searching but it was Tony Woodhouse who provided a definitive answer. He remembers Kay Pneumatics moving to premises on the corner of Half Moon Lane in part of what had once been the Half Moon Roller Skating Rink. It later opened another firm, Instruments and Movements, in another part of the building. We have photos of the rink, and there is certainly some corrugated iron there. Tony says the firm had previously been in workshops in the St Peter's Road/Richard Street area.

The premises in London Road have now been demolished and the site today is used as a garage parking area.

Once word began to spread about Mr Weisz's death, following the Times article, numerous anecdotes were published from his former

employees. One said: "When I first started working on the machine floor I was told, be careful, there's a man called George who looks innocent and asks questions. If he asks you a question, and you don't know the answer, don't make it up."

Social media has been full of fond memories, particularly of a conga line which would form down to the Greyhound pub for a liquid lunch on Fridays. John Pratt started making a list but there are too many to print here. They include tales from Colin Fountain, Paul Leuty, Lee Shanley, Carole Winter, Angela Lee, Bob Jackson, Jim Hamilton and Betty Tuffnell. Robert Wood posted information about Mr Weisz having a corrugated building by the M1 Bridge along Dunstable Road just past the hospital.

But after all that, we still have not seen a photo of Kay Pneumatics in Dunstable. How strange!

OSCAR AWARD WINNING ACTRESS

It is always great to find that Dunstable has a connection with someone famous, however tenuous. So let us record here that George Weisz's children include the actress Rachel Weisz, who worked for a time in his offices at Luton. Rachel, of course, starred in The Mummy, Enemy at the Gates, the Constant Gardener and the Bourne Legacy. She is married to Daniel Craig, who plays James Bond.

THE AUTHOR JOSEPHINE COX

We have also found, very belatedly, that the best-selling author Josephine Cox is connected with Dunstable. She died on July 12 aged 82 and her obituary in The Times noted that she was born on July 15 1938 to Bernard and May Jane Brindle. The Times reported that life in her beloved Blackburn ended abruptly when her parents split up. Josephine, then 13, and her six sisters, were taken to Dunstable, Bedfordshire, to stay with an aunt. 'Mum was eight months pregnant with my younger brother, she had just enough money for the coach journey and we only had three weeks at my aunt's until we had to move into lodgings.

Josephine was distraught, but the story ended happily. At 18, she wed the landlady's son, Ken Cox. They would be happily married for 43 years until his death from cancer in 2002. She is survived by their son Wayne, a horse breeder, and Spencer, an antiques dealer'.

As a young married woman, Cox went to night school and was offered a place at Cambridge University, which she was unable to take up because of her young family. She became a teacher, but there was further drama when her husband's haulage business failed in the 1970s and their house was repossessed.

She was 43 and recovering from an illness when she wrote her first novel, 'Her Father's Son', published in 1988.

When she became rich she donated to charities for the elderly near her home in Milton Keynes. Josephine Brindle married Kenneth G. Cox in January 1956, in the registration district of Ampthill.

SOUVENIR BOOKLET

The Society has been presented with a handsomely produced souvenir booklet published in 1938 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Dunstable Grammar School.

It is particularly notable for its photographs, some of which are quite rare, including pictures of many renowned headmasters and teachers, townsfolk connected with the school and views of its interior. The compiler (unidentified) of the booklet was particularly proud of what he called a really old and interesting photograph of the visit to the school of Prince Francis of Teck, obtained from Mrs Thring,

Memories of old Dunstable



wife of the school's founding headmaster. I reproduce it here, mainly because everyone in the picture was once very prominent in Dunstable affairs. .

The booklet has been presented to the Society by the children of the late Dr John Philip Leaver, who died in 2018. He was educated at the school from 1935 to 1938 and went on to become a research chemist with Laporte in a career which took him to Germany, the USA, Africa, Japan and Spain, where he conducted rice trials and worked in the area of food agriculture and water purification.



Front row shows, left to right, Sir E R S Sebright, Prince Francis, and Mr H C Smith. Back row is C W E Russell, an unidentified person, H Hankey, B Bennett, Canon W.W.C. Baker and L C R Thring

THE WONDER STAGECOACH

We have been able to help Joe Patton, who had been planning to cycle down the route taken by the famous stagecoach The Wonder, whose passengers included such notables as Charles Dickens and Charles Darwin. The coach travelled regularly from The Bull and Mouth at St Martin's, London, to the Lion at Shrewsbury, stopping at various inns including The Swan With Two Necks in Dunstable.

Joe wanted to take a photo of the Dunstable venue, if it still exists. Well, the building is still there, at 8-10 Middle Row, but is today the home of Ladbroke's, the bookmaker. It is the larger of Ladbroke's expanded premises, next to the archway, and is one of the town's lesser-known reminders of its stagecoach past. Alas, Joe has had to postpone his adventure because of the Covid restrictions, but he's written about what he has achieved so far on www.harlechjoe.wordpress.com

The inn was once called The Lion and Lamb and it closed in 1913. Horses pulling The Wonder were exchanged at staged intervals of 10 miles, plus or minus 3 miles according to the terrain. The Bates Directory of Stagecoach Travel reveals the villages, towns and cities The Wonder stopped at in the 1830s and 40s. Other stops on the route were The Bull at Redbourn, the White Horse at Hockliffe, the George at Little Brickhill, the Cock at Stony Stratford and the Saracen's Head at Towcester.

1914 DUNSTABLE GAZETTES

We have now collected from Mr Les Cook, a number of Dunstable Gazette newspapers published in 1914. The paper covered, in very great detail, the local effects of the outbreak of war, so it is particularly useful to have easy access to information which was previously only available locally on difficult-to-read microfilm. The papers were rescued by Mr Cook many years ago from what was once the solicitor's office near the Anchor archway. He was at the office from 1975 to 1977 while working for an engineering company, Mann's

Mechanical, which specialised in the design and production of load-handling attachments for fork lift trucks.

WAS THIS FUNNY?

One result of the Covid lockdown is that we have been given the chance to see some old tv programmes again, which have included the Ricky Gervaise stand-up comedy show about politics. It was intriguing that he mentioned being booked into a hotel near Luton at a place called Dunstable. That, for some mysterious reason, got a big laugh.

CATHERINE'S WALK

The mystery of Catherine's Walk, pictured on an old Dunstable postcard and featured in our last newsletter, was no mystery at all to John Crawley, head of Ground and Environmental Services at Dunstable Council. It's the old name of a pathway in Priory Gardens, alongside what is now the medieval garden and continuing through the trees behind the war memorial. Mystery solved!

VJ DAY RESEARCH

In among all our research into VJ Day in Dunstable and the return home of so many local soldiers who had been prisoners of the Japanese, we were very intrigued by the local reaction on social media to a very emotive photo of a wife and child greeting a soldier outside their prefab. The theory on the internet was that the photo had been taken at Downside, Dunstable. Let's record here that the picture was of Gunner Hector Murdoch arriving at his new prefabricated house at Catford. The photo was first used in the Daily Mail.

DUNSTABLE'S LEADING LADIES

Some new wall panels featuring 'Dunstable's Leading Ladies' are in preparation for the exhibition area at Priory House.

David Turner and myself undertook to produce most of these and it has proved quite a challenge!

The research has included the various visits of Queens of England to Dunstable.

QUEEN ADELIZA

One of these whose name is perhaps less familiar than most is Queen Adeliza, the beautiful daughter of the Count of Louvain. She married King Henry I in 1121, when she was 18 years old, and she would have been with him in 1122 when the king and his court, together with various foreign dignitaries, spent Christmas at his lavish new hunting lodge at Kingsbury in Dunstable.

We've checked the records of King Henry's travels to make sure that we have the right date, because some historians (including Worthington Smith) have recorded it as 1123 (there's often confusion where events have been dated by 'regnal years', starting from the date of the King's accession to the throne rather than from January 1).

There's no doubt about the 1122 date because the king had a particularly eventful time which has been documented. After the celebrations at Dunstable, he rode (on January 1) to be the guest of Ranulf, his chancellor, at Ranulf's castle in Berkhamsted. On the way, when the royal party was in sight of the castle, Ranulf fell from his horse and was ridden over by a monk. Ranulf died from his injuries a few days later.

On January 10, the king travelled to Woodstock. There, (on 4 ides of January, ie the 13th) he rode in the deer park, between Roger, Bishop of Salisbury, and Robert, Bishop of Lincoln, towards 'a remarkable place where he had caused lodges to be constructed for the housing of wild animals and their keepers'. But suddenly the Bishop of Lincoln sank down and died 'ere he can be removed to his lodgings'.

John Buckledee