

NEWSLETTER

Dunstable & District Local History Society
No. 61 September 2022



Chairman's Notes

Your society has had a busy summer, taking an active part in the town's Archaeology Day in Priory Gardens and in the Ashton Square event where there was much interest in our display of photos.

In the former, Rita Swift had a particularly successful time selling our stock of spare history books and raising £82 for society funds. David Underwood's display of thatching had an extra attraction: his King Kong exhibit, rescued from his front garden in Totternhoe. At Ashton Square we heard a great number of nostalgic tales about Dunstable from visitors to our stall. One anecdote, from Michael Hubbins, led to a story in the Gazette's Yesteryear feature about the fate of one of the clock faces from Dunstable's old town hall. It had been rescued from the demolition men by Michael's father, Sid, and had been part of his rock garden for many years. After Sid died it was auctioned by Peacock's of Bedford and raised £1,700. I wonder who has it now!

In the hope that Covid will not force another lockdown, we have begun to return to our normal schedule of monthly meetings, and a full programme has been arranged. We are printing a yearly events card once again, and this should be included with this newsletter, distributed at our September meeting and posted to those members who could not attend.

QUEEN'S JUBILEE COMMEMORATION

In March, we joined with other local societies to plant a tree at Mentmore Recreation Ground as part of the Queen's Jubilee events. I am pleased to report that all the trees seem to be thriving. Ours is a June Berry (alemanchier).



Jenny Dilnot planting a tree at Mentmore Recreation Ground

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

David Underwood asked if someone else might take on the job of being the society's membership secretary.

David has dealt with a myriad of membership problems during the lockdown and has been an absolute tower of strength, so I was very sorry to receive his request. He told me he would be more than willing to continue with the task until a replacement could be found.

But I am very happy to report that Jenny Dilnot has kindly agreed to take over from David. Jenny has already been undertaking the complications involved in contacting all our members by email whenever necessary.

My grateful thanks to Jenny and, of course, to David who continues to be a hard-working stalwart of the society.

THEY WERE THERE WHEN

Our president, Paul Bowes, has written a new book titled They Were There When. I had the privilege of seeing a proof copy after his visit to our meeting in May. Paul has had the idea of creating a series of short eye-witness accounts of people who feature in the New Testament...everyone from Joseph, husband of Mary, to Pontius Pilate and Cleopas, the uncle of Jesus. Paul says he wrote it quite quickly, but it is clearly the result of years of thought and study, and he does not ignore the problems of inconsistencies between the various gospels and known historical events. There's also a section of poetic parables, almost like riddles, which might intrigue churchgoers. The book costs £9.99.

John Buckledee



Our display at the Archaeology Day in Priory Gardens

Memories of the Chestnuts



Many of the older generation will remember visiting the large garden in Friars Walk known as 'The Chestnuts' for various fond reasons, either as a Girl Guide camping there in the 1940s/50s, attending a bonfire and fireworks party every November 5th or maybe just as a neighbour or friend.

They were all welcome to Mr Cook's garden to play, swim and have great fun.

My Grandad found great joy in giving pleasure to the young and his house and garden were always open to everyone. He was great fun to be around always coming up with a new invention to entertain the youngsters. More of this later!

SCOUT, GUIDE AND BROWNIE FETES,

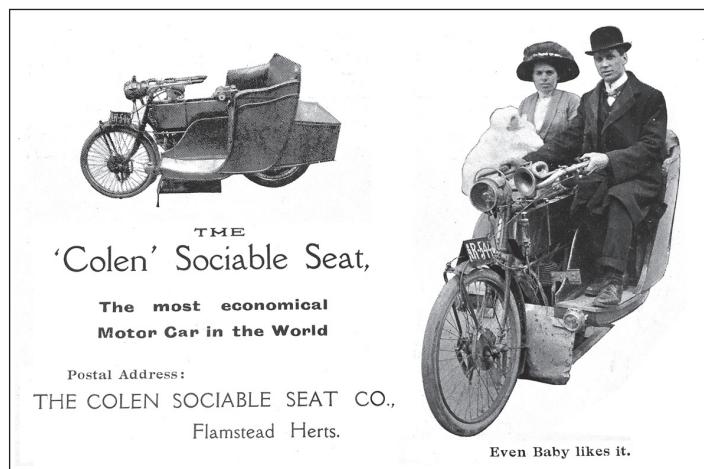
My Grandad (Mr William Thomas Cook) died in 1958 and my parents Elsie and Arthur Buck moved in and carried on the tradition of using the garden to entertain and raise funds for many associations. They had various Scout, Guide and Brownie fetes, including what was then the St Raphael club for the physically disabled which I remember as being a very happy occasion for them to enjoy the beautiful garden. There were also many garden parties. One I remember in particular was a strawberry and champagne evening for the Dunstable Rep in the early 70s to raise funds for the new tiered seating at The Little Theatre, which was converted from the old Dunstable Library.

My brother was a senior scout at that time. The scouts had nowhere to meet so they refurbished one of the old sheds and used it as their scout hut. Many a good time was held there and I can still remember Mum taking hot beverages to them all at the other end of the garden!

Bonfire nights also continued right up until 2012 even after my mother had died but before The Chestnuts was re-developed in 2014/15 to become The Paddocks, where we now live!

COLEN* SOCIALE SEAT

Back to the early days of my Grandad, who was a bit of an inventor and DIY enthusiast and who in 1914 actually made and took out a patent for what he called the Colen* Sociable Seat



Advert for the Colen Sociable Seat depicting Mr Cook, his wife and their baby in arms

*Colen is taken from the first two letters of Cook's surname, and Lennox, his brother in law's surname (they went into business to build it together)

This was a motorbike with an uncovered double seat which opened up as a picnic table! (The picture shows it with him and his wife. My mother is the baby in her arms!) He actually travelled all round Devon in this with my Mum, a six-month-old baby, in the summer of 1914. Unfortunately in July the First World War broke out and in October 1914 he joined the Royal Engineers Signal Corps. He was away for the next five years, coming home on leave just now and again. My mother rarely saw him in the war years as she was evacuated to his mother's farm at Flamstead as they were then living in London.

After he came back from the war in 1919 he was not a well man and very disillusioned, as the double 'sociable seat' he had worked so hard on with his brother-in-law since 1909 to build and manufacture was now out of date! During the war while he was away things had advanced and his model was obsolete! He didn't renew the patent and started work at an engineering company. He still lived in Willesden, London, at this time.

MOVED TO CONVERTED FACTORY IN HIGH STREET SOUTH

In 1922 he was asked by his Aunt Flora (Blackwell) if he wanted to convert the old workrooms and warehouse of her Bonnet Factory in High Street South, Dunstable, into living accommodation for his family. Her husband and only daughter had died of consumption (TB) within six months of each other so she could no longer keep the business going. She was also very lonely in the very large house and factory! My grandfather converted the buildings and the family all moved to Dunstable, not far from Flamstead where he had been born and where Mum was evacuated to in the war.

Aunt Flora's house was called Avon Lodge and stood where Viceroy Court is now. When Flora Blackwell died in 1931 my grandfather was left the warehouse, where he and his family had lived and the right of way thereto. He eventually bought the meadow behind as he wanted a large garden for the children to grow up in (he had three by this time).



The bungalow was named The Chestnuts

BUNGALOW BUILT

He had a bungalow built on the land following a design he had seen at The Ideal Home Exhibition. It was named 'The Chestnuts' after the three Horse Chestnut trees set in the middle of the meadow. The entrance to it was from Bull Pond Lane as there was no Friars Walk at the time.

He and his brother dug the foundations to cut the cost down and set to work on creating a garden from the meadow. This included a swimming pool and paddling pool, all dug out with help of his two teenage sons, his brothers and various members of his family! Various sheds were built for working on his cars/motorbikes and to store the Colen Sociable seat which he kept until about 1948 (I think it got burnt eventually at one of his bonfire nights!). A summer house was built, a changing hut, greenhouse, plus garage and an engine shed (for making the electricity)! He also set out tennis and badminton courts so there was plenty for the children to do! You had to make your own entertainment in those days with no TV!

AIR RAID SHELTER



The home made air raid shelter

concrete steps either side. He later erected posts and built a new roof. I have great memories of this as a good hide-and-seek place!

GIRL GUIDES USE THE GARDEN

In 1942 he had a serious operation and had to retire on grounds of ill health. He had always been interested in the Girl Guide movement and was a great camping enthusiast himself so it was then that he invited the Girl Guides from Markyate to use his garden. They held camps and various activities there, including cooking on fires and competitions. Many can still remember these times with great joy.

His wife then became ill and she died in 1945 at the age of just 58. Determined not to be lonely and bored he threw himself into entertaining and then invited the Dunstable Girl Guides to enjoy his home and garden as well. More inventions were thought up to entertain them, some of which I can still recall:

ZIP WIRE RIDE

He made a zip wire out of very strong cable to run high up from a tree at one end of the garden to another tree at the lower end. A wooden seat was placed on a pair of pulleys on the cable. Attached to the seat was a long cord which was pulled, with passenger on it up to the high end of the cable and then let go sailing down to the tree the other end of the garden (this had a sack full of straw hung on the tree in case the passenger got that far)! Way ahead of his time! This contraption he called the doodlebug and it was a particular attraction and favourite for the guides and neighbours. My brother and I had many happy hours playing on it.

He had a trailer behind his car in which he collected all the grass cuttings. He would give rides to us all in this around the garden! Great fun!

In the winter he would give film shows as he was a very keen photographer. He made many cine films most of which luckily my uncle transferred on to DVD before he died a few years ago. I can remember he had many fruit trees in the garden and to stop the birds from getting all the fruit he tied a long piece of string to a particular tree, sat on his home-made swing seat with the other end of the string tied round a Vim tin (some of you will remember these!). Every time he saw birds flying into the tree he would pull the string and frighten them away.

Obviously the swimming pool was a great favourite and he had a dinghy in it with a rope across to pull us from one end to the other. When I look back it couldn't have been very hygienic as, after taking nearly three days to fill with a hose pipe, it then took only three days before it started to go green with the algae building up at the bottom, caused by all the trees around! This didn't bother any of us even though it soon all got stirred up, making it a bit cloudy. None of us were ever ill!

He even tried to heat the pool in the early days making a sturdy framework to hold a large metal water tank. He then mounted a hand pump on the framework to pump water from the pool to the tank and a tap to control the flow of water from the tank to a boiler which was placed under the framework. The water would then get piped back into the pool. The boiler could burn any rubbish they wanted to get rid of! I don't remember this working in my lifetime! This pool was filled in when Viceroy Court was built around 1962 as it was no longer very private and we were teenagers by then and a bit conscious of being very overlooked!

ANNUAL BONFIRE NIGHTS ETC. WITH NO HEALTH & SAFETY!

Every year he would put on entertainment at the annual bonfire nights for friends, neighbours and relations. He went to great lengths to set up something different every year. People all wondered what he would get up to next!

In the house he had a magic trick which involved people disappearing through the ceiling. Another time he rigged up all sorts of gadgets, ranging from egg cups to saucepans and anything metal that would make a different sound, around the picture rail in the large lounge. Magnets were connected to the keys of the organ! He played 'Bells Across the Meadow' and every note played on the organ rang one of the unbelievable array of objects around the room! This will always stay in my mind as one of my favourites but there were many, many more antics and acts he put on for bonfire parties which he held until his death.

I think I have given you a bit of an insight into my Grandad's life and sure it will stir a few memories for those who remember him and Chestnuts. Quite a character and, just as well, no health and safety in those days!

Liz Bentley

Sad Farewell



We are very sorry to announce the sad loss of

David Fookes

John Hockey

Greeting New Members



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

John Buckley
Alexander Smith

Eileen Dearlove
Jo Smith

Linda Hallam
Graham Taylor

Priory Rocks

When I first became interested in the history of the Priory Church, I was told that all the stone came from Totternhoe Quarry.

WHERE DID THE STONE ORIGINATE?

When I started doing conducted tours of the building, this is what I told my audiences. There was then talk that some of the repairs had used stone from Caen, as Totternhoe Quarry was no longer in use. Over a period of time it became obvious to me that the North aisle did not fit either category as it looked quite different. Last year some of us met Dr. Jackie Hall, a building archaeologist, and Sarah Tattersall, an engineer, who were comparing the stone in the Priory with that in the Undercroft of Priory House. Jackie was particularly interested in the origins of all the stone used in our church. Allied with this, Historic England undertook an in-depth geophysical survey of Priory Meadows.

GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY

All this work culminated in a free event on Saturday 30th April called 'Priory Rocks' in which accounts were given of the history of our Augustinian Priory and the recent research associated with it and with Priory House. In the morning there was a talk about local building stones and an exhibition of Romanesque Sculpture in Britain and Ireland. Later in the morning, historic England gave tours of the 'Hidden Priory', with emphasis on new discoveries shown up by the latest geophysical survey.

The afternoon session was conducted in the church and introduced by Revd Rachel Phillips. Jean Yates was billed to talk about our Augustinian Priory from its foundation to the 16th century. Unfortunately, Jean was in hospital, so Revd Stephen Williams, vicar of Harlington, gave the talk, using Jean's images and notes. Copies of the Medieval Dunstable book and other local merchandise were available at the back of the church. Refreshments were also served. Sarah Tattersall gave an illustrated talk on the stone in the Undercroft and the repairs which are necessary there and in other parts of Priory House. Jackie Hall then talked about new research into building stone and the results, so far, of the investigation into the origins of the stonework round about us.



ROMANESQUE SCULPTURE

Ron Baxter talked about Romanesque sculpture and particularly our font. He said our font had characteristics of being Aylesbury-style and showed examples and their distribution. He said that most of it was 19th century with a few pieces of medieval font incorporated. I fundamentally disagreed with this verdict and, at the interval, had a talk with him about our story of the font. Our research tells us that, as the Puritans disagreed with infant baptism, Cromwell's army smashed up fonts if they found them in churches. The local people did not want this to happen to their font so they broke it up into three or four pieces and hid them around the church and the churchyard. After the Restoration the pieces of the font were gradually re-discovered and put back together. New sections were made for the few pieces which could not be found. Ron Baxter agreed that this was quite possible.

THE ORIGINS OF THE AUGUSTINIAN ORDER

Matt Bristow, of Historic England, talked about the origins of the Augustinian Order, in which I understand, Bernard our first prior played a vital part. I also talked to Matt afterwards and he agreed with my account of Bernard and his older brother, Norman. The last talk was by Neil Linford and Sarah Newsome about the results of the latest geophysical survey of Priory Meadows. There was then a Q & A session, in which I was invited to join. I got questions about Kingsbury Manor and what it was about Dunstable that attracted so many pilgrims. Sarah Newsome and Neil Linford then took us on a tour of the Hidden Priory and showed us the newly discovered features, particularly the apse. It was a wonderful day and very invigorating. I met some really interesting people and made many useful contacts. The afternoon session was well attended. The speakers said, afterwards, how impressed they were by the number of people who came. There will be more research and investigations and hopefully more free events like this. Jean, Stephen and I hope that one day there will be an Augustinian Conference in Dunstable. Pre-pandemic, they happened every few years and, as our Prior Bernard was involved in the Augustinian Order coming to England, it's about time the Conference came here.

Hugh Garrod

Our Research Rooms

No sooner had the Society moved its research material out of Priory House into Grove House, than the pandemic struck and all activity in this area ground to a halt.

We are now taking steps to make amends and to arrange and label all our material so that we can find what we are looking for. Our stock includes books, maps, photographs, slides and past displays. We are in the process of cataloguing our books and many of the photographs and slides have been scanned on to our computer.

We have two rooms, one for Research and the other as an Office. My thanks go especially to Rita for co-ordinating all our efforts, to John for his oversight, recommendations and sorting out the new printer, to Pat and June for initiating some of our computer systems, to Jenny and June for cataloguing books and slides and Chris for finding and installing a wonderful addition to our shelving. Among other things, we have large collection of Street Directories

and some bound copies of the Dunstable Gazette, from 1932. These latter are housed in the loft.

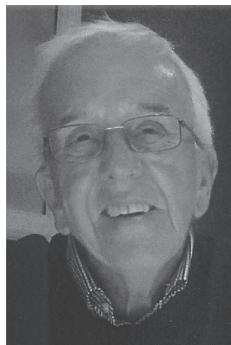
We are aware that many members have no idea about the Research Rooms and what they contain. We are anxious to remedy this situation. Access is limited so, to aid this, Rita and I are willing to, by appointment, show you what we have available. We hope that it will inform you of the materials we hold and encourage you to think about areas of local history which you would like to investigate. Please refer to the past copies of the Society's Newsletter as there are previous items which could be up-dated, also, it will save you researching something which has already been covered. Normally, anything may be copied but not borrowed.

Hugh Garrod

Archive Team Leader

(*whose invaluable alphabetical listing of all the residents named in the Street Directories is accessible on the computer and which is used frequently by our chairman for his weekly Yesteryear articles in the Gazette – Editor*)

David Fookes and John Hockey



David Fookes

DAVID FOOKES

David Fookes, who had been a member of the history society for many years and was our honorary auditor, died in February.

He was a true Dunstablian, born in Poynters Road in 1939 and educated at Evelyn Road Junior School and Dunstable Grammar School.

He had worked for a large number of local companies, including Skefko, Cross's, Bagshawe's, Kent's and De la Rue, and in later years was accounts director at Grundfos Pumps Ltd in Leighton Buzzard.

He was a member of the Rotary Club and used his accountancy skills to help a number of local organisations including the Guide Dogs Association and Hospice at Home.

His most-recent activity in the history society had been to research the story of the early banks in Dunstable, resulting in an article for the society's newsletter.

His funeral service at Eaton Bray Church heard much about his career and about his love of golf, gardening and, in particular, his children and grandchildren who had many fond anecdotes of holiday exploits and early-morning biscuits in bed!

JOHN HOCKEY

John Hockey, whose particularly tragic death in May from brain cancer, was another regular member of the history society and had given us a talk recently about the Ashridge estate. He was our "go to" contact whenever queries about coats of arms arose: he was chairman of Dunstable U3A's heraldry group.

John came to live in Dunstable in 1958 and was educated at Ashton St Peter's School and then Kingsbury. He was apprenticed at Vauxhall in Luton and became product designer at Du Pont in Hemel Hempstead. He met his wife Jacky at a nightclub in Leighton Buzzard.

There were so many of his friends at the funeral service at Bierton Crematorium that even the large hall there contained insufficient chairs. The congregation heard many stories about his kindness, his lovely sense of humour and his wide range of interests. He enjoyed walking and talking, golf, photography, flora and fauna, and writing for local publications such as the village Focus magazine.



John Hockey

A Victorian Melodrama of Love and Murder!



In 1865 David Dumpleton married Elisa Walton in Houghton Regis. After 9 years, now both aged 32, her considerable income from her sewing and his as a groom to Dr Farr allowed them to live comfortably in St Marys Street Dunstable.

But on the night of 31st January their neighbour, Job Bunker, gardener for Messrs. Munt, Brown & Co. heard Mrs. Dumpleton screaming at around 11 at night so he got dressed and went to investigate. David Dumpleton answered the door saying that he had killed his wife, that she aggravated him to do it; and threatened his life. The neighbour went for the police and Dr Farr was sent for, she was still alive, but unconscious on the floor. Dumpleton had split her head open with a poker, bending it. Two blows had been struck with considerable force as well as various knife wounds to the throat and head. There was a lot of blood, but the room was not disturbed. There were tea things out on the table, and she had been sitting sewing. Elisa was still alive when Dr. Farr arrived, but she died shortly afterwards. Before his wife's body was taken away, Dumpleton knelt down and kissed her.

FOUND HIS WIFE DOWNSTAIRS WITH ANOTHER MAN

A couple of years earlier she went off to London alone without his knowledge or consent and stopped there several days at Christmas time. Recently Dumpleton woke to hear a noise in the night and found his wife downstairs with another man, Curtis, a frequent visitor to the house. In the previous week she never prepared a meal for him, he had to help himself to food from the dishes he washed and get what he could catch. One morning he

asked a neighbour for some water for his breakfast, his wife threw the water away. She sometimes acted as if she was possessed. A few days earlier he had turned up at work with a lacerated face from his wife's clawing at him and on the night of the murder she had bullied her husband frightfully and threatened to stab him with a knife.

The Coroner stated that if he had only struck with a poker and had not concealed the knife in the ashes, it would have been self-defence, but the knife as well constituted clear murder. Magistrates also ruled it as wilful murder.

A fund was set up to pay for his defence and was widely contributed to reflecting his popularity.

FOUND GUILTY OF MANSLAUGHTER

Dumpleton was taken to Bedford Prison by train from Dunstable to Luton and at Luton a large crowd came to see him. In Bedford he chose to go by foot and the officer bought him a glass of ale in the Star before he entered the prison.

David Dumpleton aged 32 did kill and slay Eliza Dumpleton his wife at Dunstable on the 31st January 1876 and was sentenced to 12 years of penal servitude. The Jury found him guilty of manslaughter on the grounds of provocation.

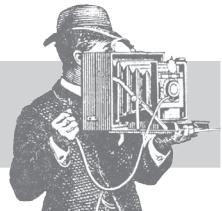
He was sent to Bedford Prison, later transferred to Pentonville and towards the end of his sentence, to Chatham Prison.

David Dumpleton died 23 April 1895 aged 47 in St Albans workhouse from broncho pneumonia.

Patricia Larkman

Based on the research carried out by Rita Swift

Dunstable Photographers



At the beginning of the 20th century photography was still a relatively new art.

Although some of the processes had been known for centuries, it was only in the early 1840s that photography really started to develop. Following experiments at Lacock Abbey in Wiltshire, William Fox Talbot developed and patented the negative and positive process which was to form the underlying principle of photography for many decades to come.

In the early 1850s Frederick Archer further refined the procedure and reduced the exposure time from minutes to just a few seconds. Immediately this opened up new horizons for photography. By the end of the 1850s there were over 200 photographic establishments in the UK. By 1860 there was a photographer working in most of the major towns and cities. Dunstable was no exception.

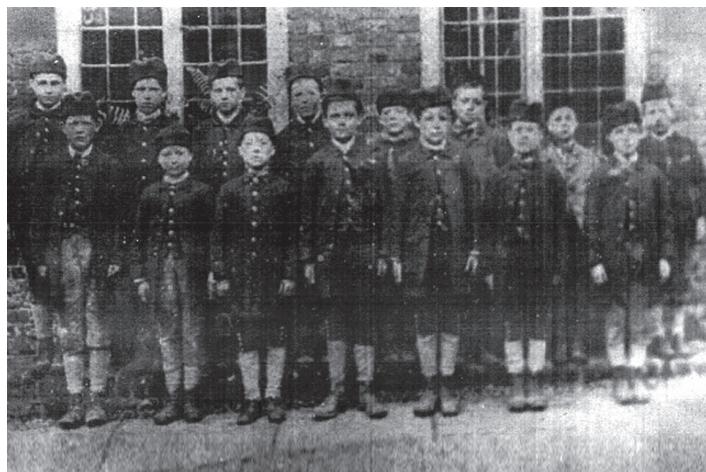
Trevor Hunt has been researching the history of Dunstable's pioneer photographers and has collected many examples of their work. He has written a series of articles, concentrating on the photographers who began operating here in the decades before the First World War. Here is the first.

WILLIAM HOUSEHOLD STAPLES

William Household Staples was Dunstable's first photographer. Actually he described himself an ambrotypist and also a photographic artist (ambrotype was a name from the USA for a photograph on glass). William was born in the early 1830s at Littleport, Isle of Ely, Cambridgeshire. His father, John, was initially described as a farmer and later a builder. By 1841, William had moved to Hilgay, Norfolk with his family. Ten years later at the time of the 1851 census he was living at nearby Downham Market and was an apprentice plumber, glazier and painter to Walter Mallett of Downham Market.

By 1859 we know William had moved to Dunstable. On 25th February 1859 he married Martha Norris at the Register Office, Luton. Martha was born in Houghton Regis about 1836. At the time of his wedding William described himself as an artist. Two years later at the time of the 1861 census William and Martha were living at 121 West Street, Dunstable. He was shown on the census as a photographic artist and Martha was a bonnet maker. William was shown in a trade directory of 1864 as a photographer at West Street, Dunstable.

It is not known how long William worked in Dunstable as a photographer. At the time of the 1871 census the property at 121 West Street was empty and it was noted the residents were "temporarily abroad". It may be that William had been working in Dunstable for over ten years by this time but we cannot be sure.



An 1879 photograph by Frederick Mills of scholars at Chews Charity School

What is certain is that by 1881, Martha had died and William was living at Westgate, Bradford, Yorkshire.

It has not been possible to find details of Martha's death and there might be a chance she died whilst the couple were abroad. In 1881, William was described as a photographer, born Littleport, Isle of Ely. William continued to work as a photographer/photographic artist until his death on 23rd September 1884 at Westgate, Bradford. He died of pulmonary disease aged 49. No children have been found from his marriage to Martha.

Very few photos exist of Dunstable from the time when we know William was in the town and it has not been possible to find any Dunstable related photos which can be directly attributed to William. His address at 121 West Street, Dunstable, was re-numbered and became number 37 in the early 1920s but has long since been demolished. The site is now a car park.

JOHN BUDD

John was one of eleven children born to William and Elizabeth Budd. He was born at Goswell Street, St Luke's, Middlesex, on 25th September 1822.

John's father was a wealthy leghorn and straw-hat merchant who also had numerous property interests in London and the home counties. William died when John was just ten years old. Under the terms of William's will, John inherited £1,000 (a substantial sum in those days) on attaining the age of 21.

Elizabeth Budd continued the business of her late husband and around the late 1830s she moved to Dunstable with some of her family.

Dunstable at this time was at the centre of the straw hat trade so it was a logical move for Elizabeth. Initially she leased the southern part of the present-day Grove House from William Frederick Brown, also a straw hat merchant. Around 1841 she then moved to a long since demolished house which stood roughly on the site of the current Argos store. Elizabeth lived in the same property until her death in 1864.

John was living with his mother in the High Street, in both 1851 and 1861. In 1851 he was described as a draper but by 1861 had become a house agent and accountant.

Around 1864 (the time of his mother's death) he started to trade as a photographer from a property on The Square, Dunstable. An advert in the Dunstable Gazette of 4th March 1865 shows J Budd, Photographer, The Square, Dunstable - "Portraits taken daily from ten to four, the Glass House is thoroughly warmed".



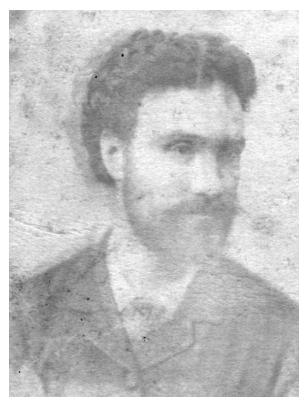
Two photos taken by John Budd, probably from the late 1860s to the early 1870s



The address from which he traded was almost certainly the property which for many years was occupied by Alexander & Co, Estate Agents. In a trade directory of 1869 John Budd was shown as a Photographer, High Street, Dunstable. This was almost certainly the same property. On the 1871 census he was still shown as a photographer at High Street South, Dunstable. He seems to have lived and traded from the same property.

He died on 16th August 1871 at Byron Road, Greenhill, Harrow aged 48, from heart and kidney disease. There is no obvious reason why he should have been at that address although there is a chance he may have actually moved from Dunstable to that address. John never married but he had a housekeeper, Elizabeth Mobley, who lived with him at the time of his death. No will has been found for John.

John was buried with his mother at plot A318, West Street Cemetery, Dunstable, on 22nd August 1871. The wording on their memorial is still quite distinctive today.



Frederick Samuel Mills

Frederick's father died before 1851 by which time his widow, Hester, was living at Mount Street, Dunstable, with Frederick and other family members. Frederick's mother was described as a seamstress and Frederick was working as a draper's assistant. On the 1851 census the photographer John Budd was still working as a draper so there is a possibility that Frederick was his assistant but nothing has been found to directly link the two. No entry was found for Frederick Samuel Mills on the 1861 census but his mother was still living at Mount Street, Dunstable.

FREDERICK SAMUEL MILLS

Frederick Samuel Mills was born about 1827 at Odiham, Hampshire. He was the son of Henry and Hester Mills. On the 1841 census Frederick was living with his parents at High Street, Odiham.

Frederick's father died before 1851 by which time his widow, Hester, was living at Mount Street, Dunstable, with Frederick and other family members. Frederick's mother was described as a seamstress and Frederick was working as a draper's assistant. On the 1851 census the photographer John Budd

On 22nd September 1869 Frederick married Alice Houghton at Shoreditch, Middlesex, where he was resident. At this time he was working as a photographer. After the wedding Frederick and Alice moved to Dunstable, and the following year their first child, Henry, was born at Regent Street, Dunstable (almost certainly 3 Regent Street, which was renumbered to five in the 1920s).

On the 1871 census the family were still living at Regent Street, Dunstable, and Frederick was still working as a photographer.

Further sons were born to Frederick and Alice in 1874 (Frederick) and 1876 (William).

Trade directories of 1876 and 1877 both list Frederick as a photographer at Regent Street, Dunstable.

At some point during his time at 3 Regent Street, probably about 1879, Frederick submitted plans to build a photographic studio in his garden. It was to be built of wood and glass, and measurements were 20 feet long, 12 feet wide and 11 feet high. The plans are held in the Bedfordshire Records Office.

Frederick died on 9th May 1880 at Regent Street, Dunstable, of Phthisis and exhaustion. He was buried at West Street Cemetery on 15th May 1880.

After his death his wife, Alice, took over the business for a short while and was still living at 3 Regent Street, Dunstable, with her three children in 1881. On the census she was described as a photographer. In December 1881 Alice married Sylvanus Jones at Hanover Square, London. She seems to have left Dunstable at the time of her wedding and in 1891 she was living with her husband, at Finsbury in London.

The series will continue in the next newsletter

Trevor Hunt

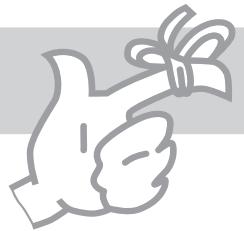


A portrait of an unknown man by Frederick Mills. Was he a master at Dunstable Grammar School?



This photo of High Street North is the earliest landscape photo in Trevor Hunt's collection and was taken by Frederick Mills probably in the 1870s. The house with the portico entrance was the home of Marshe Dickinson, a member of an influential local family, in the 1700s. It stood on what is now the entrance to Queensway. The portico entrance to the Sugar Loaf can be seen in the distance

Memories of old Dunstable



LOCAL COMPOSER JOHN DUNSTABLE

Dunstable people really ought to be more aware of the Agincourt Hymn, celebrating King Henry V's great victory in 1415 over the French. It was written by our local composer John Dunstable (c1390-1453) whose innovative music was enormously popular in his day. Today, it's an acquired taste but the opening bars of the hymn are very catchy. We were persuaded to click on to YouTube to listen to various versions and discovered an amazing range of performances. This led us to clips of the battle scenes in Laurence Olivier's famous film of Shakespeare's Henry V, where the background music is very much based on the John Dunstable themes, although Sir William Walton's orchestrations took all the credit.

TOAD THE WET SPROCKET

There's absolutely no reason why an interest in John Dunstable should prevent anyone from also enjoying the work of Toad the Wet Sprocket (picture below).

This is a Dunstable rock group which performed many times at the Queensway Hall in Dunstable in the late 1970s and early '80s. They built up an enthusiastic fan base which was hugely in evidence at the Grove Theatre earlier this year, when the group re-formed after 40 years to play at the charity concert in aid of Ukraine.

You can see them on YouTube, led by vocalist Mick Mustafa, preparing for the concert. It might be a bit of a culture shock to view them on the same evening as John Dunstable, but it can be done!



Toad the Wet Sprocket

DUNSTABLE MOTOR CLUB

Paul Rudorf, of Scott Court, showed us a Dunstable Motor Club badge at the St George's Day event in Priory Gardens. We haven't been able to find out anything about the club. Does anyone know? It doesn't appear to be anything to do with the local rally drivers, the Dunstable Sporting Owner Drivers Club.

BEACON AVENUE

There's an interesting local anecdote contained in the unpublished part of an interview with the late Alf King, of Totternhoe, who worked for the local building company of Robinson and White. He died in 2016. Alf remembered that during the Second World War there was an air raid shelter built in the cellars of the Book Castle in Church Street. It was lined for protection from bombs with heavy timber.

When the war ended, Robinson and White took the timber to Tilsworth where it was sawn into joists. These were then used for roofing on houses being built in Beacon Avenue.

So much history even in the newer roads!

CORNERSTONE

Baden Colman, son of Henry Colman who founded Hawthorn Baker of Dunstable in 1945, has been trying to discover why the company used the trading name Cornerstone. Does any history society member know the answer?

Henry Colman began the business with Jack Thomas, and the firm's title commemorated their mothers' maiden names.

The company made equipment for the printing industry, once such a major part of Dunstable life. Its first factory was in the area behind the banks, reached from High Street North through a narrow trackway known as Nicholas Lane. The Quadrant shopping centre covers the site today.

One of its products was a device which steadied lines of lead type being assembled by compositors on a desk which they called the stone. My guess is that Cornerstone might refer to this. Do any retired printers from the hot-metal days before computers know for sure?

Mr Colman, who died in 2012, was twice president of the Luton Chamber of Commerce and was a great supporter of the Boy Scout movement, hence his son's name.

HALIFAX YARD

Our last newsletter included the answer to a query about the location of Halifax Yard. It seems clear that it was in West Street, Dunstable, approached between No 29 and No 31 West Street.

Today's Yum Yum cafe is at 27-29 West Street. So Halifax Yard must have been on what is now the car park next to the cafe.

We now learn that Halifax Yard was probably named after Thomas Halifax, of West Street, who owned a small whiting works in Dunstable in the early 1800s. The yard might have been part of his works.

SECRET PASSAGEWAYS

We keep being assured that there were once numerous subterranean passages under Dunstable. Folk who ask us for information have been told about the tunnels by aged relatives who once saw a blocked-up entrance to a so-called passageway in the cellars of old houses.

Why would anyone go to the trouble and expense of creating a tunnel in Dunstable? The folk tale that it was to enable the canons at the Priory to slip out to an alehouse for a beer doesn't bear examination: there was normally a plentiful supply of beer at the Priory. There's a rather droll reference in the monastery's annals of an occasion in 1264 when the beer ran out and the monks instead drank five casks of wine "which did us a lot of good".

Dave Warren, site director of the Manshead Archaeological Society, wrote on the subject of secret passageways when reporting on the society's excavations in Priory Gardens and wondering if there was a grain of truth in any of the stories.

He wrote that the blocked-off passages were probably just extra cellar space created as cold stores in the days before fridges. A brick-lined "passage", broken into during the making of the Priory church car park, was almost certainly just a culvert, probably Victorian.

He continued: "The one passage which gets official credence is the one between Priory House and the church, which was marked on the Ordnance Survey maps as early as 1879. Even here there is a slight anomaly, in that the OS's source of information is given as Worthington Smith's 1904 book on Dunstable, Its History and Surroundings (page 97) where he records that a trackway between the two is 'popularly referred to as the roof of a subterranean passage'.

"It can be stated quite definitely that no such thing ever crossed the line of the excavation anywhere near where the OS would have it. The soil below topsoil has never until today been disturbed since its deposition circa 1700. Any possible passage earlier than this date would necessarily have needed to be at such a depth to pass under the gully that its roof could not have come within a wide country mile of the present surface,

"WGS on page 156 of the same book also recounts the tradition of another from the now Ashton Square side of Middle Row going under the High Street to - guess where! Having been in the cellar from which it was said to start, he was able to say with certainty the passage had never existed."

John Buckledee