NEWSLETTER
Dunstable & District Local History Society
No. 67 September 2025

Chairman's Notes

The renovations to Priory House are still continuing, but Dunstable Council is preparing for the heritage centre's reopening when the work is complete.

EXHIBITIONS

Your history society was among those invited to a preliminary meeting with a design company whose brief is to find the best way of utilising the exhibition space at the House. The designers were seeking an overview of the local subjects which might be featured, so there was plenty of scope for discussion. Clearly your society, and other Dunstable organisations, will be needed to provide expert information in the months to come.

St George's Day history society gazebo, David Underwood, Hugh Garrod, John Pratt and gorilla!

QUESTIONS ASKED

The history society has taken part once again in a series of local events during the summer, with highlights including the Around The World Day, the Classic Car Rally and the St George's Day displays. Our large gazebo at the two-day Kite Festival on Dunstable Downs was particularly busy where we found ourselves trying to answer a series of interesting questions.

There was a request for information about the tumuli which once stood on what is now Dunstable Downs golf course. We were able to trace details of Worthington Smith's efforts in 1887 to excavate the remains of the barrows, once 10 feet high, which had been levelled when cultivation of the fields there began in the 1850s. Worthington Smith found a number of skeletons, two of which he preserved and displayed in a lecture which he gave at Dunstable Town Hall.

We were also asked why Dunstable Downs is so-called, when the hills are actually in the parish of Totternhoe and were once administered by the Totternhoe Board of Conservators. The National Trust side-steps the question by calling its building, theoretically in Totternhoe, the Chilterns Gateway Centre. Some other parts of the Downs are actually in Whipsnade, other areas of the hllls are in Kensworth, and the Dunstable part reaches only as far as around Pascombe Pit.

This led to a continuing discussion about why the airfield at the foot of the hill is called the London Gliding Club, whether the war-time Meteorological Office was officially in Houghton Regis rather than Dunstable, why Manshead School is officially in Caddington and Caddington Grove is in Dunstable. I am sure history society members already know the answers.

PRINTED IN DUNSTABLE

On the subject of local names, it is nice to find that our new MP, Alex Mayer, has persuaded Amazon to include the words "Printed in Dunstable" on each of the many thousands of books being produced at its vast centre in Boscombe Road. Alex is the MP for the renamed Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard constituency, which is a welcome change from the former name which was a rather vague approximation called "South-West Beds". But the expanding town of Houghton Regis, which we are told is now bigger than Dunstable, might be a little upset at being overlooked. And, to add to the confusion for local residents, many of their vital services are organised by a council which covers an area vaguely named Central Beds and which is based at Chicksands, better known to some as the former home of the American football team, the Fighting Chicks.

YESTERYEAR

Barbara Chappell, of Croft Green, Dunstable, has given the history society a collection of Yesteryear pages from the Gazette which she has collected over many years. And that really is MANY years, Barbara is now 97 years old!

Barbara came to Dunstable from Wales when she was eight years old. Her father, Edwin Guest, had been a coal miner in Wales but found a job at the newly opened AC Sphinx factory in Dunstable where his brother was already working. He had been employed by AC Sphinx (later named AC-Delco) at Birmingham and was one of the many employees who transferred to Dunstable when the firm moved here in the 1930s.

Barbara spent many years working at the Waterlow's printing works in Dunstable. Her husband, Derrick, worked at Delco. In his retirement he spent a few years working at the stationer's shop in the Dunstable Gazette's old offices on the corner of Albion Street.

HENRY HUNT,

I am very sad to report the death, aged 95, of Henry Hunt, who had lived at Watergate Farm in Hockliffe all his life. Until recent years, Henry had regularly attended history society meetings with his wife Phyllis.

John Buckledee

The Dunstable Charters

This year marks forty years since the formation of Dunstable Town Council and 160 years since Dunstable was awarded borough status by Queen Victoria.

Dunstable was originally created by Henry I in the early years of the 1100s. Three quarters of the new town came from his lands in Houghton and one quarter from Kensworth, with the crossroads of the Icknield Way and Watling Street at its heart. The area was in thick woodland and plagued by thieves. Henry ordered that the trees should be cut down and royal lodgings built at Kingsbury, where he stayed in 1109. The Augustinian Priory of St Peter was built opposite Henry's lodgings.

The Charter of Incorporation given to Dunstable by Henry I in 1131 was a feudal grant of his Borough to the Priory, making the Prior the Lord of the Manor, responsible for law and order in the town. It confirmed the laws of the Saxon King Edward the Confessor, guaranteeing peace for those coming to the Dunstable market:

THE CHARTER OF HENRY I

'Know ye that I for God and my health and the souls of William my Son and Matilda the Queen have given to the Church of the Blessed Peter of Dunstable which I have founded in honour of God and of the same Apostle and to the Canons Regular there serving God in perpetual and free alms, the whole Manor and Burgh of Dunstable…'

Charter of Henry I

The Charter included the following clauses:

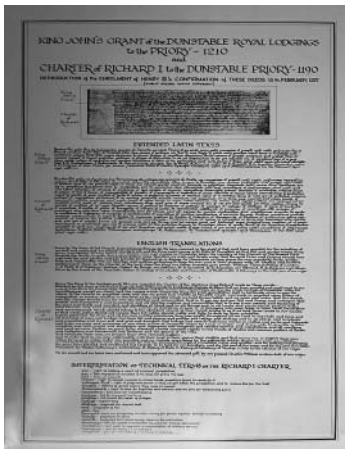
1. That the people who came to live in Dunstable should have the same rights and privileges, throughout the kingdom, as the citizens of London or burgesses of any other town.

2. That the people of the town should pay twelve pence a year for an acre of land.

3. That the people never had to appear in any court outside Dunstable: the King's justices and other ministers always made a special journey to the town and sitting with 12 burgesses, on oath, with no interference from any outsider, heard all the cases brought to court.

Also included in the grant was the quarry at Totternhoe and the right to use pasture and woodland in Houghton, Caddington and Kensworth.

RICHARD I'S MONASTIC CHARTER



King Richard's Charter and King John's Grant of the Royal Lodgings to the Priory

Richard I's Monastic Charter of 1190 was a similar grant to the Priory, bringing his grandfather's Charter up to date. It guaranteed his protection for the people of Dunstable to travel freely, without payment of feudal exactions, to trade in outside markets.

King John's grant to the Priory of the Royal Lodgings at Kingsbury was issued in 1210. By this time the buildings had decayed and all that was left were the gardens. It was normal practice for the local feudal lord (in this case the Prior) to provide lodgings for the King and his court.

THE 'CUSTUMAL'

In 1221 a list of byelaws known as the 'Custumal' was drawn up, which included rules for market trading:

Interpretation Board in Ashton Square

1. Every burgess may erect on his plot a windmill and a horse-mill, a dovecote, a bakehouse, a handmill and a malt-kiln, a wood-stack and a dung heap, as long as the two latter do not obstruct the King's highway or the Prior's market, in the opinion of the loyal men of the borough.

2. Shopkeepers may not brew in their shops for fear of fire, nor make pigsties outside their doors or drive stakes into the ground without permission from the reeve.

3. Butchers may not throw blood or filth from the animals they kill in front of their house or elsewhere in the street which would be a nuisance to the neighbours or the market.

4. Burgesses or people from outside who set up stalls in the market on market days must remove them the same day.

5. If any man be killed or flees because of a criminal act his goods shall be forfeit to the Prior.

6. No traders, from this or any other town, may buy food before the first hour (sunrise) nor go outside the town to meet sellers before they reach the town.

7. If a purchaser has bought goods by the cartload that are usually sold by number or weight he may not lessen the amount or sell them on the same day at a higher price.

8. Bread made for sale at the price of a farthing may not be refused to anyone who offers a farthing. The same rule applies to beer on sale at four gallons for a penny.

9. The regulations about ale are not enforced where a sign is not displayed outside.

10. When a widow resigns her freebench she must release to the heir the fixtures fastened to the ground by nails or pegs. Also the main table with stools, the best wine cask, the vat and kneading trough, basins and hatchet and the best cup, the coulter and share and the well-bucket and rope. Other things she may dispose of by will or gift. She shall not be bound to answer for damage to buildings as long as she has not done it after the prohibition by the King.

HENRY III'S CHARTER

Henry III's confirmation of Henry I's Charter

In 1227 Henry III's Charter was a confirmation of both Henry I's and Richard's Charters, establishing the right of the Priory to tax the town according to financial need through feudal aids, mercies, suits and customs, along with confirmation of King John's grant to the Priory of the Royal Lodgings of Kingsbury:

'We have granted moreover …. That the said Prior and Canons may have and hold forever the Burgh of Dunstable…'

When the Priory was dissolved in 1540 Dunstable's borough status lapsed. The rights of the Priory passed to the King and Dunstable became a manor instead of a borough, being governed by parish and county authorities.

JAMES I'S MANORIAL CHARTER

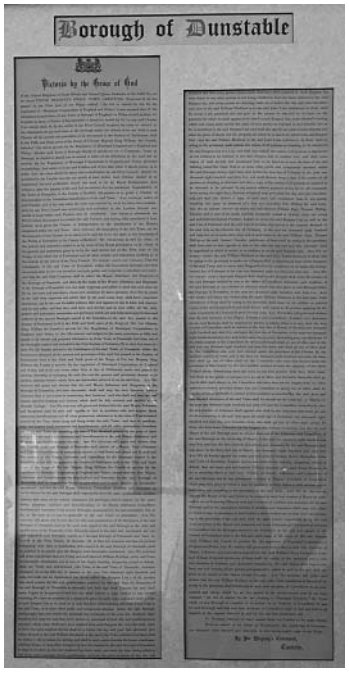
In 1607 James I's Manorial Charter clarified that the town was a separate Royal Manor and had not reverted to being part of the older Manor of Houghton Regis. The medieval custom was confirmed that in order to become a townsman an agricultural peasant must remain resident in the town for a year and a day without being reclaimed by his lord. The town's taxes would be paid to a Crown landlord. The town had no representation in the House of Commons.

James I's Manorial Charter

QUEEN VICTORIA'S CHARTER OF INCORPORATION

The Duke of Bedford had acted as Lord of the Manor of Dunstable but in 1839 his lease of the town came to an end and the ownership of the Manor reverted to the Crown.

For a period of 250 years the Manorial Court was an important part of Dunstable's local government, shared with the Parish Council.



Queen Victoria's Charter of Incorporation

By the 1860s the townsmen desired change and the opportunity to manage their own affairs independent of the Manorial Court and Parish Council. A Local Board was set up in 1863 enabling urban government to return to the town. Soon after this the town petitioned Queen Victoria for borough status. This was granted by Royal Charter which came into force on 1st December 1864.

THE FIRST ELECTION

This Statutory Charter of Incorporation provided for the drawing up of a list of burgesses and the holding of elections for councillors. The first election was held in March 1865. The Corporation could own lands and apply to the College of Heralds for armorial bearings for its exclusive use. (It designed its own coat of arms instead.) The town could also apply for a separate Commission of Justices of the Peace. The Manor of Dunstable was purchased from the Crown.

DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

The Borough of Dunstable existed for 110 years until local government reorganisation in 1974. The Borough Charter lapsed and local councillors on South Bedfordshire District Council representing Dunstable Wards became custodians for the traditional rights of the town as the Charter Trustees.

In 1985 Dunstable was granted Town Council status, able to provide and maintain a variety of important local services.

Elisabeth Pynn

Greeting New Members

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

Carol Beer Ann Cassidy Brian Cassidy
Angus Tozer Clare Tozer

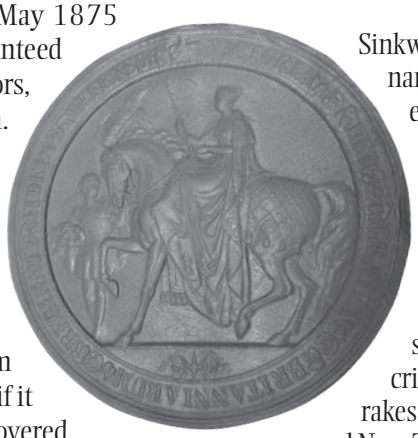
A Wonderful Invention!

Last October, Jana Veyres, Rita Swift, Tony Woodhouse and I (Hugh Garrod) were in the Society's research room, in Grove House, when we were presented with an old manuscript, on waxed paper, which had a cylindrical tin attached to it.

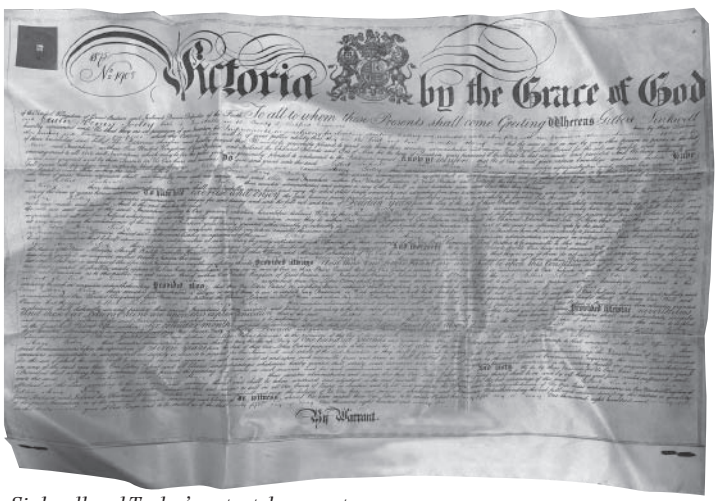
Alderman G Sinkwell, Mayor of Dunstable 1885/6 and 1891/2

We unfolded the manuscript and assumed it was an indenture. We were surprised to see that the top edge was straight, not torn, and that we could see that the writing began with 'Victoria, by the Grace of God,....' The writing was difficult to read so Jana photographed it in its entirety on her phone and promised to transcribe it and email it to us all. Inside the round tin was a yellow seal. Most seals are red but we discovered that this was not a Charter but a Patent, hence the different colour. We could see two names, which recurred throughout the text, Gilbert Sinkwell and Edwin Henry Tooley. I recognised Gilbert Sinkwell as a Victorian Mayor of Dunstable but Mr. Tooley was new to me.

Having read the text which Jana emailed to us, we discovered that Sinkwell and Tooley had jointly been given a patent for 'an invention for improvements in machinery for elevating, shooting, loading and unloading sacks when filled with corn, produce or other merchandise, also applicable for other hoisting and loading purposes'. The patent was sealed on 25th May 1875 and was valid for 14 years. The document guaranteed the exclusive rights of both men, 'their executors, administrators and assigns' for the duration. The whole is couched in watertight legalese so that there can be no misunderstanding. The essence is that the product is safeguarded for sale in 'Great Britain, Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.' No one is allowed to counterfeit the product and can be sued if they do. Anyone copying it needs a licence from the Patent holders. The Patent becomes invalid if it is subsequently discovered that the product is covered by an existing Patent. Stamp Duty of £50 must be paid on the Patent to register it.



The yellow patent seal



Sinkwell and Tooley's patent document

Gilbert Sinkwell was born in Minchinhampton, Gloucestershire, in about 1840. His parents were Alexander and Maria and he had three older siblings. In the 1861 Census, he is described as an Agricultural Implement Manufacturer. He married Mary Ann Maclaine in 1870. They are recorded as living at 37 High Street North, Dunstable, with a similar description of his employment, at the Albion Iron Works in Winfield Street. Houses were renumbered after WWI. 37 became 81, which is Chiltern House. The Sinkwells lived here until 1911. In 1912 they moved to 263 High Street North. After WWI, this was re-numbered as 122 High Street North. Gilbert was a long-time member of the Town Council and was Mayor in 1885 and 1891. He died, in Dunstable, at number 122, on 2nd October 1928 and is buried in our Cemetery. He left £4,516.5.2d in his will; worth about £350,000 today.

Edwin Henry Tooley is listed in 1876 as a Corn Dealer, trading in Great Northern Road. At the time of writing, Rita and I have found no further information about him. He does not appear to have been domiciled in Dunstable. If any member has further information about him, we would be pleased to hear of it. If any member has time to research him further, Rita and I will acknowledge the work done.

ECLIPSE MACHINE

Sinkwell & Tooley gave their patented machine the name of 'Eclipse'. It combines the functions of elevating, filling or emptying, loading or unloading sacks of grain. They claimed that with this rust-proof 'self-acting machine' a 'strong lad' can deal with '40 sacks of corn' an hour 'without assistance'. In July, that year, it won a silver medal at the Preston Agricultural Show. Also on show at Preston were their improved sack barrow, sack holder, wrought iron cattle crib and other iron implements such as horse rakes and drinking troughs. In 1877 the Australian and New Zealand Gazette noted that they also made chaff cutters, plain wheel press rollers, clod crushers, harrows 'and other useful implements for agricultural purposes'.

THE PARTNERSHIP DID NOT LAST LONG

By 1879 Tooley is registered as the Gem Horse-Rake and Implement Company of Dunstable. He lists the 'Eclipse' as his own invention. His company are Iron and Brass Founders, making all sorts of agricultural implements as well as green houses and their boilers, fences, gates, railings, iron roofing, plough-shares. He will also supply, 'competent workmen' to deliver, fit and repair his products. Sinkwell was still based at Albion Iron Works and in 1884 is advertising chaff cutters, root pulpers, turnip cutters, bean mills, oil cake mills, ploughs, harrows, corn drills, sheaf binders, harvesters, reaping machines and 'all descriptions of agricultural machinery'. In 1898 he is advertising as an insurance agent, for fire, accident, plate glass, burglary and employers liability. There is no mention of agricultural products.

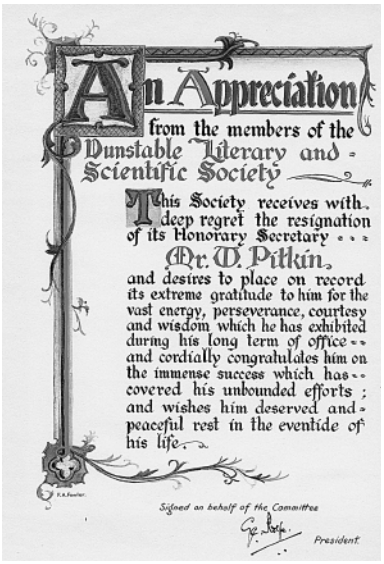
Hugh Garrod, Rita Swift, Jana Veyres, Tony Woodhouse

Dunstable Literary and Scientific Society

I was in Dunstable Library at the beginning of May, searching through the indices of volumes of Bedfordshire Historical Record Society (BHRS), looking for references to Dunstable.

WILLIAM PITKIN

I noted the page numbers, starting at Volume 1 and then consulted those pages to see if it was anything interesting or something we did not know about. When I got to Volume 7, I noticed that inside the cover it said, 'Dunstable Literary and Scientific Society, 21 Nov 1923'. When I Googled this I came to the article in our Newsletter, No. 47 p 354, which Patricia Heath (nee Pitkin) had written about William Pitkin, who had been the Honorary Secretary of the above mentioned Society.


An Appreciation
from the members of the
Dunstable Literary and Scientific Society
This Society receives with deep regret the resignation of its Honorary Secretary
Mr. W. Pitkin,
and desires to place on record its extreme gratitude to him for the vast energy, perseverance, courtesy and wisdom which he has exhibited during his long term of office and cordially congratulates him on the immense success which has covered his unbounded efforts; and wishes him deserved and peaceful rest in the eventide of his life.
Signed on behalf of the Committee
President.

A certificate awarded to William Pitkin by the Dunstable Literary and Scientific Society on the event of his resignation from the Society

I went through our collection of Town Guide books and found the first mention of it in 1914. The last I found was in 1935. It seems to have started in 1911. The leading lights in 1913/14 were: President, LCR Thring Esq MA JP, Headmaster of Ashton Grammar School; Treasurers, Mr. J Flemons and Mr. W Pitkin; Chair of Council, Revd CWA Brooke MA, minister of Regent Street; Librarian Mr. W Marchant, minister of the Congregational Church; Secretaries, Mr. W Flint and Miss Hayter. Soon afterwards, William Pitkin became Secretary, a position he held until 1933. Meetings were held weekly, on Fridays, starting at 8.15pm, from September to Easter. They were held alternatively in the Grammar School theatre and at Marchant's Rooms, West Street. After WWI, they also met at the Town Hall. There was a Library, of 'nearly 400 works', at Mr. Flemon's Shop in the High Street and regular whist drives were held. Subscriptions were '3/- per session'.

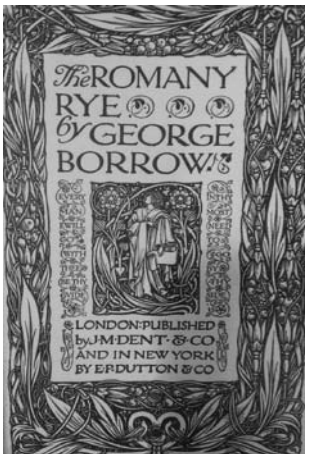
RITA'S RESEARCH

Rita Swift then did much research, for which I am most grateful, on newspaper websites and found me lots of references which suggest that the Society started in 1911. Rita sent me many reports from different local papers about the Society's activities. Many of the lectures were illustrated by magic lanterns or slide shows. In March 1911, Mr. Marchant gave a talk on Field Botany in and around Dunstable. Later that month there was a lecture on Colour Photography. The following month Revd E Lucas' theme was 'Dante and the Divine Comedy'. There was much speculation as to whether Beatrice was married. The final sentence says, 'Mr. Pitkin surprised the company by mentioning that Dante visited Dunstable, sleeping a night at Kingsbury House, in Church Street.' As Dante's dates are 1265-1321, this is impossible. Even if he was thinking of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1828-82, this is most unlikely! In June of the same year, the Society held a ramble, of 'nearly 40' to Totternhoe. It was led by Mr. EE Edmunds MA, BSc and Mr. James Saunders. They visited Maiden Bower, went for a walk along the Green Lanes and then ascended the Knoll, where James Saunders gave a short talk about the surrounding geology. After tea, they visited the low-lying fields on the west side of the village and 'found several moisture-loving plants, among them being wild caraway and carum carul' which is another type of caraway.

Some reports are more detailed than others. For February 1912, it simply says that Mr. GR Lyoch gave a talk on 'The Nature of Gothic'. In October of the same year, 'Miss Thring will lecture on Freearm Drawing' demonstrating as she talks. Other pre-WWI talks included, Mendelssohn, The Law of Gravity, Totternhoe and its Antiquities, Cambridge Town – University and Customs, Living English Novelists and the Voyage of the Beagle. Many accounts relate to 1913. Topics covered included, German Legends, Ellan Vannin – the Gaelic name for the Isle of Man and a Manx steam ship which foundered in 1909 with the loss of 36 lives, Plant Parasitism, A trip to Norway, Esperanto, Experiences of Authorship, St. Francis of Assisi, Coal and Coal Mining, The Adriatic, Ralf Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and The Priory Church. There was also a talk by Miss Gertrude Bacon 'the well-known aeronaut'. She had flown in balloons, and was the first lady to fly in an airship and in an aeroplane.

WAR-TIME TALK

The only war-time talk reported on was by JW Tomlinson, about the author George Henry Borrow, 1803-1881. Borrow was a linguist, who travelled all across Europe and Northern Africa. He used his experiences to write novels, and the people he met as inspiration for his characters. In 1925 Tomlinson gave a talk on Ether Waves. Other talks in 1925 included Three Thousand Miles Along The Nile Valley, The History of London, The History of Art in Britain. Professor William Miles, an elocutionist, performed monologues including The Feast of Belshazzar and scenes from Quo Vadis.



Romany Rye, a novel by George Heny Borrow, dated 1857 who developed a close affinity with Romany people on his travels

At the start of 1926, Mr. TJ O'Connor gave a lecture, illustrated by lantern slides, on Wildest West Africa. He was an officer in the West African Frontier Force and spent a year in Nigeria. He described what everyday life was like and how strange it seemed to Europeans. Other subjects include Shipwrecks, Jerusalem, The South Downs in Literature, In Normandy, Popular Fallacies and Life in a Lancashire Village. Professor S Wilden gave a talk on Adventures in the Secret Service. Unfortunately, or sensibly, the newspaper report gives no details of what sounds like a most interesting subject. The year ended with a recital by a male quintet calling themselves the Westminster Singers.

FRED GOSTELOW

Fred Gostelow

In October 1927, the Society was given a talk by Mr. Fred Gostelow (see Newsletter No. 55 p 416) about John Dunstable (1390-1453) whom he describes as the 'Father of English Ecclesiastical Music' and a 'great man about whom nobody in Dunstable seems to know anything.' He also suggested that 'some memorial should be erected in his native town.'

Mr. Pitkin resigned as Secretary in 1933 after many years dedicated to the well-being of the Society.

The report of the 1934 AGM stated that membership had fallen and expenses increased. Although the lectures were of a good standard, there were more competing activities and few younger people were coming to the Society's meetings. Talks this year included Adventures Along The Mexican Border, Old English Pubs, The Romance of A Big Store, Mesopotamia- the Cradle of the World, Castles and Fortresses of Medieval England, A Tour through Morocco from Tangier to the Atlas Mountains, Forty Years at Fleet Street, Land of the Pharaohs, a Tour through Canada and California and A Tour of Pacific Islands. Mr. TW Bagshawe gave a lecture on Worthies of Old Bedfordshire, ranging from the Bronze Age people buried in the Five Knolls, the early owners of Totternhoe Castle, the wealthy Durant family, Sir Nigel Loring, John Lord Wenlock of Someries, Sir John Cornwall of Ampthill, Sir Reginald Bray who was granted the Eaton Manor in 1490, John Bunyan, Elkanah Settle, and many others.

THE LAST AGM

At the last AGM, in 1934, the Officers were, Mr. AE Bunning, President; Mr. JA Nobbs, Secretary; Mr. PF Room, Treasurer, Mr. FA Hudson, Auditor. Other Committee members were Messrs. WG Connett, A Gray, FE Herington and W Twaddle. It is surprising that the Society went out of existence, given the number and quality of the lectures in 1934. Maybe this is a warning for our own Society – no matter how good the talks and speakers, if people don't come – the end is nigh!

Hugh Garrod

(*with many thanks to Rita Swift)*

Memories of old Dunstable

It has been fascinating to learn more about the Dunstable people who were among the "founding fathers" of America.

THE THREE CRANES

We now know of a local connection with a historic pub named The Three Cranes in Charlestown, now part of Boston. The pub was destroyed during the American War of Independence.

Zechariah Long's grave in Boston, Massachusetts

Past issues of this newsletter have included details about the Dunstable clergyman, the Rev Zachary Symmes, who emigrated with his family in 1634 and helped to found the town of Charlestown in the USA. And, of course, the town of Dunstable in Massachusetts is so-named because of early settlers from Bedfordshire.

Sarah Long of Dunstable

Now we have had the pleasure of meeting Ellen Marie Herbert of Chicago who came to Dunstable in June to try to trace details of her ancestor Sarah Long of Dunstable. Ellen is descended from Sarah's son Zechariah who died in 1688 and is buried in Boston, USA.

Ellen and her father travelled by rail and busway around Beds and Herts and we are delighted to report that the British transport system worked perfectly. The only snag might have been that the main object of their visit, the Priory Church, would have been closed but church warden and history society member Martin Wilde was on hand with the key to the door.

The Dunstable parish registers record Sarah Long's burial here on December 12, 1631, although no gravestone has survived. The birth of her son Zechariah (Zachary) is recorded on October 20 1630.

Sarah's husband, Robert, emigrated to America after her death. He was among the passengers aboard The Defence which docked at Boston in October 1635. He brought with him his second wife, Eliza, and his ten children, including Zachary and Joshua, whose christenings are recorded In the Dunstable parish registers dated September 14 1634.

Robert (whose surname is spelled "Longe" in the old records) is described as an innholder on the passenger list of The Defence so one of the questions which still needs to be answered is whether he was in charge of an inn at Dunstable before he emigrated.

Charlestown

At any rate, he purchased an important building in Charlestown in 1635 and converted it into a tavern called The Three Cranes. The Long family operated the pub for over 140 years and it is a celebrated part of Charlestown's history.

Massachusetts State Records say that The Three Cranes was originally known as the Great House, the home of Governor John Winthrop who had led colonists into Boston Harbour in 1630 to build "a holy city upon a hill". They named their new community Charlestown, in honour of King Charles I of England.

The Great House also served as a meeting-house for the families in Charlestown until 1635, when Robert Long, newly arrived from Dunstable, bought it for £30 and established a tavern. He named it the Three Cranes, after a famous London pub, and it became a popular venue next to Charlestown's busy marketplace and close to the seaport.

The foundations of the Three Cranes tavern in Charlestown

Battle of Bunker Hill

It came to a fiery end in 1775 during the famous Battle of Bunker Hill. Rebellious colonists occupied the hill and British troops were sent to remove them. Rebel snipers in nearby Charlestown shot at the soldiers from windows, so British cannon-fire was directed on the town. By the end of the night most of downtown Charlestown, including the Three Cranes tavern, had burnt to the ground.

Today, the foundations of the Three Cranes have been uncovered by archaeologists and remain on display. The Three Cranes tavern in London stood in Thames Street and took its name from the cranes which unloaded cargo from the ships moored in the nearby docks.

DR CHARLES FARR

Dr Charles Farr came to Dunstable in the 1780s and founded an influential dynasty of doctors based at Montpelier House in High Street South. He has been described as "a bit of a character" and details about him have been gathered by Janet Richardson who is researching the Farr family tree.

Born in London in 1758, Dr Farr set up practice here when he was about 26.

In later days, Dunstablians remembered him for his hair tied in a pigtail and his costume of long-tailed coat, knee breeches, black silk stockings and shoes with silver buckles. He used to walk up one side of the high street and down the other side when he was visiting his patients and could not be prevailed upon to cross the road when asked to call on some particular case.

DR JOSEPH FARR

His son, Dr Joseph Farr, also became a familiar figure in Dunstable where his plaster bust stood for many years in the foyer of the Sugar Loaf (he was related to John Johnson, landlord of the hotel). We've written about the bust in a previous edition of this newsletter, on page 371.

A bust of Dr Joseph Farr

DR FREDERICK FARR

Joseph's son Frederick was also a Dunstable doctor. Frederick's daughter Mary was married to Harry Bowen at the Priory Church in Dunstable in July 1872 on what was clearly a very grand occasion. The path from the gates to the church was carpeted for the event, a floral arch was erected inside and the gas standards there were wreathed in flowers.

Dr Frederick Farr

The ceremony was described in elaborate and delightful detail by the Dunstable Borough Gazette which reported:

"The first event was arrival of the bridegroom but the sensation was but momentary, for on such occasions the gentleman who officiates in that position is not reckoned of much account by the spectators…. The bride is the grand centre of attraction, and presently a charming vision of 'something in white' walks up to the altar, attendant fair ones clustered around her clad in diaphanous apparel…A prolonged wait for the officiating clergymen was a trying ordeal for the party as it appeared that they were earlier than expected, and the parsons were punctual…

After the ceremony the wedding party adjourned to Montpelier House where forty-two sat down to a most "recherche dejeuner."

CHEZ JEROME

Jerome and Lina Santos-Dehoux made many friends in Dunstable at their restaurant, Chez Jerome, which they opened in Mentmore House in West Street in November 2007. When they decided to retire and leave Dunstable to live in Madeira, a farewell luncheon was held which featured a brief history of Mentmore House.

The building was saved from demolition after a vigorous local campaign and a public inquiry in 1978. Details of this are fairly well-known, but the story of the building in more recent times is worth recording here before it is forgotten.

In 1979, Michele Messara, from Sicily, was given planning permission to turn the building into a restaurant featuring the

Chez Jerome Restaurant in Church Street

Filipo, Andrea and Nino Salamone at 26 Church Street

original eating menus of the 1600s. He envisaged rough wooden seats where diners would eat meat cooked on a spit oven or open fire and drink wine served from earthenware carafes.

Mr Messara did not proceed with this idea but then Nino Russo, from Italy, purchased the building. He initially opened a general store but then conceived the idea of creating an Italian restaurant in partnership with two brothers, Andrea and Fillipo Salamone. In 1981 they undertook the considerable task of renovating the building and opened a restaurant called La Botte (the Italian name for the old wooden wine barrels). Two barrels were positioned alongside the entrance and a cut-out version of a barrel was fastened to a front wall.

In later years the restaurant's name was changed to La Pinetta (The Pine Forest) and then in the mid-1980s it became La Vecchia Capanna ("The Old Shack"!).

In September 1990 the Lombardo family opened their fondly-remembered restaurant there which they called Il Millefiori (A Thousand Flowers).

The Salamone brothers still own the building but Fillipo has now retuned to his native Salerno. Nino Russo has died.

Research into the history of the building, for many years an antique shop owned by William Rixson, also revealed that the redoubtable local businessman William Derbyshire was living there in 1871, the year before he published his History of Dunstable. Later, the building became a pawnbroker's shop.

SOUTH BEDS NEWS AGENCY

Few people outside journalistic circles took much notice when the South Beds News Agency closed in August last year. But its passing marked the end of a significant source of local information, not least because local newspapers, as well as radio and tv, relied on its day-by-day coverage of the local Crown Court hearings.

The agency was founded in 1960 by former Luton News sub-editor David Pryke and was later run by journalists Barry Simmons and Ron Fairley, with reporter Ross Francis and photographer John O'Reilly on the staff.

In more-recent times its proprietor was Tim Corkett whose retirement has led to the agency's closure. It means that local criminals, whatever the judge and jury decide, now stand a good chance that their identities will remain unrevealed to the general public.

THE GREEN MAN

The Green Man at Chalk Hill, Dunstable, now extended into a pub-restaurant and renamed The White Lion, has an unlikely connection with the remote township of Murwillumbah in Australia.

The Reeve family off to Australia, Arthur Thomas Reeve is standing at the rear

In the early 1900s the landlord at the Green Man was Arthur Thomas Reeve. He took the major decision in 1910 to begin a new life as a farmer in Australia.

He and his family embarked from London aboard the steamship "Salamis". They arrived in Sydney on October 1 1910 and found work on dairy farms in northern New South Wales.

Arthur successfully applied in 1913 to farm a considerable area of bushland owned by the Crown at Commissioners Creek near Murwillumbah in New South Wales. It took years to establish the property, with Arthur's sons helping to fell trees and clear the land. They were pioneers of Commissioners Creek and Doon Doon, nearby, where they also bought land.

Arthur died in 1943 aged 74 and Sarah died in 1951 aged 82.

John Buckledee

The Green Man in the 1950s

The White Lion today