

NEWSLETTER

Dunstable & District Local History Society
No. 69 September 2026



Chairman's Notes

June, July and August are, theoretically, the history society's summer break but, in fact, we couldn't have been busier.

EVENTS IN PRIORY GARDENS

We had a gazebo at three extremely well-attended events in Priory Gardens: St George's Day, Around the World Day and the Classic Car Rally. Our photo displays had plenty of visitors and we received numerous queries about local history, mainly from visitors wanting details about their properties or businesses. Where we didn't know the answers we found out later and emailed replies.

CLASSIC CAR

On a personal level, my battered old Vauxhall Vectra, used to unload our display stands, received a round of applause from the classic car enthusiasts, which I at first thought was rather unkind but was apparently genuine!

Another event where we were represented was the conference of the Bedfordshire Local History Association, held this year at St Mary's Church, Luton. It was good to see Janet King there. Janet, a long-time history society member, has not been able to attend our meetings in recent times.

90TH BIRTHDAY

Another great event was the 90th birthday party at Woburn of Les Marsh, another long-time member of the history society who used to spend much time correcting misleading information on Facebook about local history. Les has been very ill and has moved to a care home, but he's now much better. His celebrations included much information about his footballing days when he was a notable goal-scorer and later managed some local teams including Oldhill.



Former members of the Manshead Archaeological Society together with the mayor and mayoress on the stairs at Grove House while attending the 'What Lies Beneath' exhibition

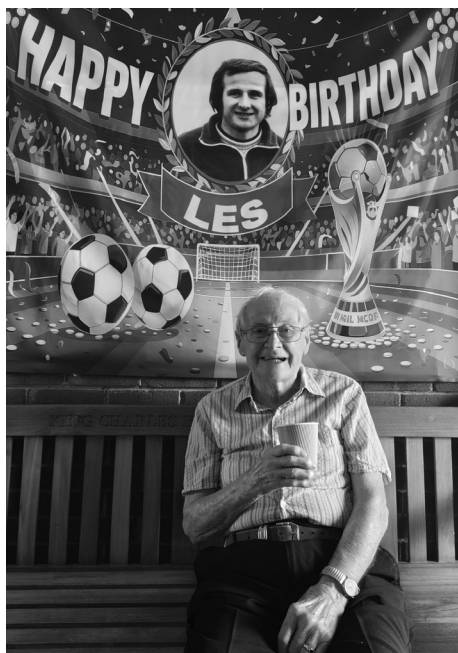
WHAT LIES BENEATH

Elisabeth Pynn and Kay Kempster initiated the "What Lies Beneath" archaeological display at Grove House in July. This attracted a large number of visitors over its two days, including many members of the former Manshead Archaeological Society who enjoyed the chance of an unofficial reunion. The event concentrated on the discoveries at Friary Field, and included a screening of the BBC Chronicle programme featuring Les Matthews and Joan Schneider. The film had been traced by Jon Hitchcock and it was very poignant to see Joan Schneider in her prime, eloquently describing the Manshead's work. Sadly, Joan died in January and her fount of expert knowledge about Dunstable will be sorely missed. Dunstable's Mayor, Richard Attwell, who is clearly very interested in local history, visited the exhibition twice and performed its opening ceremony.

Cllr Attwell, incidentally, has sent a handwritten letter to the history society praising our work, as part of his efforts to encouraging volunteering in the town.

DONATION OF AN OLD WARMING PAN

We continue to receive donations of old Dunstable books as people clear their book shelves. Nearly always, we already have copies in our research rooms but we tend to sell the spares at local events rather than see them thrown away. Margaret Brown recently presented us with a set of volumes in beautiful condition and she also included an old warming pan which we couldn't resist keeping. We will have it on display at some of our future events. Mrs Brown is a member of the Dolman family, well-known in Dunstable, and the warming pan belonged to her uncle who lived at Rutland House in Luton Road. Her grandfather was William Dolman, conductor of the old Dunstable Silver Prize Band.



Les Marsh celebrating his 90th birthday

John Buckledee

The Swan Brooch

There has been renewed interest recently in the famous Swan Brooch found in 1965 on the site of Dunstable Friary.

Manshead Archaeological Society carried out extensive excavations of the land prior to the site being redeveloped. Society member Maxene Miller discovered the brooch amidst tree roots in what had been a heap of destruction rubble left after the friary was closed in 1534.

WHERE WAS IT FOUND?



One of the special guests at the "What Lies Beneath" archaeological display in Grove House was Mrs Molly Page, whose house and garden now stand on the spot at Friary Field where the famous Swan Brooch was discovered. She is seen here with the Mayor of Dunstable, Cllr Richard Attwell.

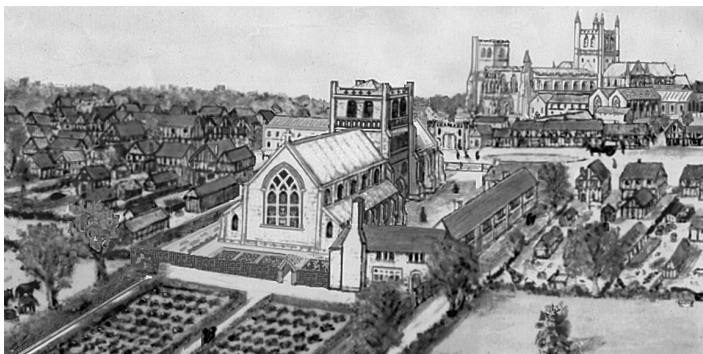
we can now identify the site. This is in the garden of Number 16 Friary Field, backing on to what is now the Thames Industrial Estate, off High Street South. Crucially, the surviving landmark, which would not have moved significantly over the years, is the boundary fence between the industrial estate and the field on which the friary once stood.

Jon has analysed measurements given in Manshead records and those published by Bedfordshire Archaeology. His findings, very briefly, are that the jewel was uncovered 23 feet from the east end of the Manshead's first excavation (Cut 1, three feet wide). The end of the cut was about 16 feet from the edge of the field. In the 1970s there was a post and barbed wire fence which separated the field from Luton Commercial Motors (now Thames Industrial Estate).

There are two new houses backing on to the Thames Industrial Estate which match the available measurements and the find spot was in the back garden of the southern house: 16 Friary Field. The clearest photographic record of the position of Cut 1 is a Manshead Society photo showing the old Luton Commercial Motors building in the background.

THE DOMINICAN FRIARY OF DUNSTABLE

The current interest in Friary Field prompts the history society to reprint parts of a detailed article about the friary written in 1927 by A.R. Martin, who must have searched through every available manuscript for mentions of the Dunstable building. Mr Martin, who was



Tony Woodhouse's illustration of St. Mary's Dominican Friary looking east

associated with local historian Thomas Bagshawe's initial excavations of the site, wrote:

The Dominican Friary of Dunstable was founded in the year 1259, and was the only house of the order in Bedfordshire. The Blackfriars first arrived in England in 1221 under the leadership of Gilbert de Fresnoy following the decision taken at the General Chapter held at Bologna in that year at which St. Dominic himself presided.

The order grew rapidly and by the time of the Dissolution, the number of their English houses had increased to 54.

Their influence with the King was considerable, and it was to Henry III and his immediate successors that they owed the foundation of many of their houses.

Henry's Queen, Eleanor of Provence, was largely responsible for the introduction of the Dominicans into Dunstable. She was an ardent supporter of the order and subsequently founded a house at Guildford, in Surrey. Henry himself was continually finding money and materials for various houses of the order, occasionally, it would appear, to the embarrassment of his Exchequer.

PRIORY OF AUGUSTINIAN CANONS

There was already in Dunstable an important priory of Augustinian Canons, and the first step which became necessary was to secure the support and co-operation of the Canons.

This was no easy task, for the older orders generally tended to regard the friars with considerable suspicion which rapidly developed into active hostility. They appear to have feared a diversion of local bequests from their own houses to those of the newcomers, while the whole teaching of the Mendicants was directly opposed to the earlier Monastic ideals.

The attitude of the older orders is nowhere more clearly shown than at Dunstable. On April 9th, 1259, the friars had apparently already acquired a site in the town, for the King, who had taken up their cause, wrote to the Prior and Canons confirming the grant of the site and requesting the Canons to treat the friars kindly. He refers to his recent request that they should permit the friars to acquire a site to which the Canons had replied that they would do so if they received the King's formal ratification.

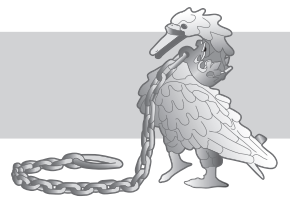
Although in somewhat ambiguous terms the request came with all the force of a command, and the Canons seem to have thought it unwise, for the moment, to take any active steps against the friars.

On 27th October, Henry wrote again, tactfully thanking them for having "kindly received the friars preachers to whom the King is specially devoted to dwell in the town of Dunstable," and begging them "to continue their kindness by giving the friars their counsel and aid in all their affairs and necessities which he would regard as done to himself," and then, evidently fully aware of the real state of affairs, he undertakes "for the security of their mutual peace," to be personally responsible if the friars should exceed the terms of the agreement with the Canons.

In spite of this letter, the real attitude of the Canons may be judged from an entry in the contemporary Annals of the Priory, which is a curious sidelight on the documents just quoted.

THEY CAME INTO THIS TOWN MUCH AGAINST OUR WILL

Under the year 1259 the Annalist records that "the friars preachers by the greatest industry and scheming came into this town of Dunstable much against our will and gained from us permission to stay here through the king and queen and other great people."



Some further light is thrown on the arrival of the friars in Dunstable by the account given by Matthew Paris in his History. The author was a monk in the neighbouring Abbey of St. Albans and, as one would therefore expect, his account is obviously prejudiced against the friars, whom he seldom missed an opportunity of holding up to scorn. When viewed in the light of other contemporary documents it is, nevertheless, of considerable interest.

GREAT INJURY OF THE PRIOR

In 1259 he records that "a house with the domain thereto adjoining in Dunstable, having been given out of charity to the Preacher brethren, some of that order eagerly, though privately, forced their way into

the same to the great injury of the prior and convent of Dunstable. They were encouraged in this by the example of the Minor brethren, who obtained a place of abode at St. Edmund's much against the will, and to the no small injury of that house, and had built such costly domiciles there that all who beheld them were struck with amazement at the sudden expenditure of so much money by those poor brethren, persons who professed voluntary poverty.

"The aforesaid brethren having gained their entry into the place, suddenly and by force, erected an altar and without waiting for leave of anyone, performed divine services there. They were, in fact, emboldened by the facility with which they obtained whatever privileges they wished and by the protection afforded them by Cardinal Hugh, a brother of their order, which was of great weight.

"Day after day they erected their buildings, and endeavoured to increase their possessions to the great detriment of the house of Dunstable by raising contributions amongst the neighbouring places from which the prior and convent ought to receive revenues. The more the preacher brethren increased their buildings and enlarged their possessions, so much the more were the possessions and rights of the prior and convent diminished, because the revenues which they had received from the messuages now given to the preacher brethren were now lost to them, and these newly-come brethren, by their urgent preachings, entirely usurped the offerings which had been usually given to them".

Though some of these accusations were doubtless justified, the account, as a whole, obviously allows of some softening.

The suggestion that the introduction of the friars had been brought about secretly and by force, is not born out by contemporary documents which, on the contrary, show that the Canons were repeatedly consulted. It is, moreover, unlikely that the revenues of the monastery were seriously affected, though the fact that the priory was about this time in considerable financial embarrassment, probably made the Canons all the more jealous of any encroachment on their rights.

The charge of excessive extravagance in building is chiefly confined to the Franciscans at Bury St. Edmunds, and there is no direct evidence of this at Dunstable.

A DAILY GIFT OF LOAVES IS ILL REPAID

In comparison with the attitude of the Canons, it is interesting to find Agnes Gobion, prioress of the small Benedictine Nunnery at Markyate, helping the friars of Dunstable, on their arrival, with the daily gift of loaves "out of pure charity," because they were engaged in building their church. The action was, however, ill repaid, for the friars subsequently insisted on a continuance of the gift in spite of the slender resources of the nunnery, and appealed to Rome to have it confirmed to them in perpetuity.



A computer generated image

Throughout the remainder of the 13th century references to the Dunstable house are few and consist chiefly of records of royal gifts and an occasional mention in the Annals of the priory. Very soon after their arrival the friars seem to have begun the erection of their church, which was probably nearing completion in 1264, when the king gave twenty oaks fit for timber from the forest of Pokesl. This was followed on 24th November by a further gift of fifteen oaks from the forest of Bernewood.

In course of time the original bitterness between the friars and the Canons somewhat subsided, and in 1277 it is recorded that the prior, William le Breton, ate with the friars for the first time, while in 1282 it was possible for the body of a woman of the parish of St. Giles, who had died, to be first carried to the priory church for the celebration of Mass before being buried at the friary.

RELATIONS WERE AGAIN STRAINED

Four years later, however, relations were again strained, and we find the Canons purchasing property in the town for the express purpose of preventing the friars enlarging their precinct.

In 1286 the writer of the Annals records that "in order to prevent the schemes and evil practices of the Friars Preachers in Dunstable, we caused Thomas, our porter, to buy a house in Dunstable, formerly belonging to Robert Franceys, next to the precinct of the said friars, and we took a feoffment of the said messuage from the said Thomas lest the said friars should extend their boundaries against our will. And the deed between the said Thomas and the seller of the house is in the Kings Court." Apparently this action brought its own reward for the annalist adds that the contract subsequently involved the priory in a heavy annual corrody and other burdens.

Gifts to the Dunstable friars were for the most part of small amount. Walter Gifford, Archbishop of York, gave an alms of two shillings on 8th September, 1270. On 1st March, 1276-7 Edward I was in Dunstable when he gave the friars seventeen shillings for one day's food, and on 29th November following, when at Bassingbourn, he sent them twelve shillings for food for two days.

AN ARDENT SUPPORTER

Eleanor of Castile was an ardent supporter of the Dominicans and had herself been admitted into the order, and after her death in 1290 the friars preachers of Leicester and Dunstable received ten pounds from her executors.

In this year also we learn of the sudden death of two of the Dunstable friars while celebrating Christmas with William de Valence at Hertford Castle. Though going to bed in good health and merry on St. Stephen's Day they were found dead in their beds by a sudden death (morte repentina) as is believed and were buried at Dunstable.

OUTBREAK OF HOSTILITY

In 1298 there was a further outbreak of hostility between the friars and the Canons, this time on account of the privilege enjoyed by the friars of hearing confessions. This question frequently gave rise to disputes and was the cause of much of the ill feeling against the friars, both on the part of the older monastic orders and of the secular clergy. At Dunstable the bishop of the Diocese interposed and ordered the archdeacon of Bedfordshire to see that the Canons desisted from forbidding and impeding the friars from hearing the confessions of the people of Dunstable.

The practice, however, increased and in 1311 it was found that the number of friars in the Diocese presenting themselves to be licenced as confessors was becoming too numerous. No less than ten applicants came from the Dunstable house alone.

continued overleaf

EDWARD I WAS IN DUNSTABLE

During the 14th century royal gifts continued to be made to the Dunstable friars on the occasion of the King's visits to the neighbourhood. In 1300 Edward I was again at Dunstable, and on 17th April he gave one of the friars, Nigel de Haukeston, 20s. for food for the house at Dunstable on that and the previous day. On 12th August 1311, Edward I sent 10s.8d. from St. Albans for a day's food when the friars met him in the royal procession into Dunstable.

ATTEMPT TO RESCUE THE DEPOSED KING EDWARD II

At this point it is appropriate to insert into Mr Martin's article the fascinating information recently discovered about the arrest of two men, John Norton and John Redmere, at Dunstable Friary in 1327. They were described as "two great leaders" of a failed attempt to rescue the deposed King Edward II from his imprisonment at Berkeley Castle.

The details were traced by historian Kathryn Warner who has been tackling the mammoth task of translating and transcribing a host of documents surviving from the time of King Edward II. She wrote in detail about her discoveries in the February 2020 issue of this newsletter. The two men were thrown in to the Prior's prison and later petitioned King Edward III, who was not yet fifteen, saying they were "at point of death".

EDWARD III WAS AT DUNSTABLE

To resume Mr Martin's account, he reports that Edward III was at Dunstable in January 1329 and presented the friars with 7s. for a day's food through friar Thomas de Whitchurche. Once only is there a record of a provincial chapter being held at the Dunstable friary. This met on the feast of the Assumption 1332 (15th August), and the friars received a special gift from Edward III towards the expenses for food on the three days during which the chapter lasted. The money was paid in advance, for on 20th June Friar Robert Moigne was authorised to receive on behalf of the convent 10 pounds from the sheriff of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire; and on 8th July a further five pounds from the sheriff of Essex and Hertfordshire.

The Provincial for this year was Simon de Bolaston who appears to have been in prison about this time for his implication in the conspiracy of the Earl of Kent, so that the conventual prior of the Dunstable house may have acted as vicar on this occasion and presided over the Chapter.

In 1342 the friars received a gift of 20s. from Maude of Lancaster, the widow of William de Burgh, Earl of Ulster, who was the lady of the neighbouring manor of Leighton Buzzard.

In 1357 Isabel, the widow of Edward II left them a "diaspinett cloth of gold" worth 2s.8d. for a vestment.

There are but few records of burials in the Dunstable house in comparison with many of the houses of the order. According to Chauncy, Hawise, wife of Sir Richard Hoo and daughter of Fulk Lord Fitzwarren who died 2nd September 1344, was buried in the friars' church.

A FRESH OUTBREAK OF HOSTILITIES

The 15th century is a period of almost total blank in the history of friars of Dunstable. Once the house is mentioned under somewhat discreditable circumstances, when there was a fresh outbreak of hostilities between the friars and the Canons, the cause of which is not stated.

On 14th May, 1444, John Broghton and others were ordered to enquire into the affair, and the terms of their commission state that "John Roxton prior of the Augustinian Priory of St. Peter, Dunstable, John Godfray, his fellow Canon, William Sampson of Dunstable 'Yoman', and William Style of Dunstable 'Yoman,' with many others, broke the close and houses of Thomas, prior of the house of friars preachers of Dunstable at Dunstable, and assaulted and wounded Peter Hobard, John Wesenham and Richard Albon, fellow friars of Thomas, and threw Peter into a pool of water and imprisoned the said John and

Richard contrary to the law, whereby divine service in the said house of friars preachers has been diminished long time, and dug soil of the said Thomas whereby he has lost the profit thereof long time."

The result of the enquiry and the sequel do not appear, but it is interesting and perhaps significant to note that on this occasion the townsfolk apparently sided with the Canons. In all probability both the number and popularity of the friars were already on the decline. After this episode little further is heard of the house until the eve of the suppression. On 5th May 1534, John Coton, prior of the friars preachers of Dunstable, subscribed to the formal declaration of the Royal supremacy in conjunction with the representatives of the Dominicans of King's Langley, the Franciscans of Aylesbury, Bedford and Ware, and the Carmelites of Hitchin. In the following year the annual income of the house was estimated at £4.18s.8d., besides 4s. which had formerly been paid to the Prior and Canons of St. Peter for the rent of three tenements.

DISSOLUTION OF THE FRIARIES IN 1538

The general dissolution of the friaries took place in the summer and autumn of 1538, when the Bishop of Dover wrote to Cromwell that he had received to the King's use the Blackfriars of Dunstable, among other houses since he was last with him. The deed of surrender has not survived, so that practically nothing is known of the inmates of the house at this date.

The friary buildings were of little value and some of the property had been let out to tenants before the surrender of the house. The Bishop of Dover had reported that the substance of most of the houses whose surrender he had received had been stolen or pledged before his coming.

In 1544, we learn that Roger Lee, gentleman, held a chamber and a house in the friary between Pyghtells on the east and "le frater" on the north (except the convent garden and two gardens one of which lay eastward, and the other westward of the buildings), and a great chamber and two smaller ones in the great court and a stable adjacent, within the priory under a lease from the friars to William Marshall for 50 years at a rent of 40s. On the latter's death, this property had passed through his daughter to Lee.

LEASED FOR 21 YEARS

No immediate purchaser was found for the property, and it was accordingly leased for 21 years to Thomas Bentley, Yeoman of the King's Guard, at a rent of 44s.8d. The lease is dated 8th May, 1539 and included the rest of the site of the house (the property in the occupation of Roger Lee being expressly reserved) together with four acres formerly belonging to the friars in Kensworth field and the three tenements which they had formerly rented from the Canons.



An outbreak of hostilities between the Augustinian Priors and the Dominican Friars

A computer generated image

Little Blue Man

There's an enduring fascination with the so-called "Little Blue Man" of Studham.

In February 1967 some young boys, playing on Studham Common on their way to school, saw a strange blue figure. Was he a visitor from space? Their descriptions of the apparition were so vivid that word spread and they became the subject of a front-page story in the Dunstable Gazette on March 3.

The paper did not publish their names but subsequent articles elsewhere have identified them as Alex Butler, Tony Banks, Kerry Cahill, Andrew Hoar, David Inglis, Colin Lonsdale and John Mickleburgh.

AMAZED THAT THE STORY LIVES ON

Now, one of the boys, Colin Lonsdale, has provided his memories of the event. But he was not an actual eye-witness. "I am frankly amazed that this story lives on after all these years," he says..

Colin went from Studham Primary School to Dunstable Grammar School and became a scientist with a Ph.D. in radio astronomy from Jodrell Bank in 1981. He emigrated to America in 1983, and began a long career in scientific research.

UNEXPLAINED PHENOMENA

He is now semi-retired and is writing his memoirs, research for which has led him to the Gazette story and also to an article by Theo Paijman, a Dutchman with a passionate interest in unexplained phenomena. This was published in the Dunstable and District Local History Society's newsletter in August 2012, which detailed his investigations.

Theo wrote that a thunderstorm had been raging in the area and, a few minutes after lightning had struck, one boy saw the strange figure of a little blue man.

"The boy shouted to his friends who came running and they too saw the strange figure. They began to run to him but then the little man disappeared in a puff of smoke. He appeared in another spot, the boys again approached him only to find the little blue man disappearing again. This occurred four times in total. The school's headmistress, Miss Newcomb, interviewed the children and pasted their written reports into a book."

COLIN LONSDALE WRITES:

As far as me in the role of eye witness, it's an unsatisfying tale I'm afraid. I was there, I got soaked by the thunderstorm.

I took shelter under a tree, and shortly thereafter I met up with a few other boys. They were talking excitedly about something they allegedly saw on the common. It was blue, glowing, and as was quickly and collectively decided, of a shape suggestive of a man, but much smaller. They pointed to the spot, but I could see nothing.

Desperate not to be left out of witnessing this obviously momentous event, I answered in the affirmative when asked if I had seen it from my panoramic perch on the hill. The die was cast, and could not retract my response without consequences from my friends too awful to contemplate. The little blue man was born, complete with independent corroborating sightings from different locations.

DREDGING UP MEMORIES

Unless I am mistaken (conceivable, given that I am dredging up memories from a mere 59 years ago, laid down by an impressionable nine-year-old), I made clear that I was not together with the other boys when this happened, but "saw" the phenomenon from further away. Who did I make that clear to exactly? Unclear. But the truth is I saw nothing, except the thunderstorm and lightning. I could not even convince myself that I MIGHT have seen something glowing blue in that direction.

CONVINCED THEY SAW SOMETHING REAL

I was convinced at the time that the others saw something real, I think because they were so agitated, and agreed on some basics like "blue, glowing" before various creative embellishments were collectively generated and agreed upon.

February lightning in England is a pretty rare phenomenon, requiring extreme atmospheric instability. Perhaps that increases the chances for additional rare phenomena during such events.

BALL LIGHTNING

The most likely explanation, in my opinion, is an instance of ball lightning following a lightning strike on the common. Such things are typically spherical or pear-shaped, are up to one metre in size (more commonly just a few inches), and last from a second or so to over a minute. A large, long-lived, pear-shaped instance of ball lightning, witnessed by my friends, could readily explain the pre-embellishment claims, and I am sad I did not, in fact, witness any part of it.

Ball lightning, which is rare in any event, yet more rare for a large, long-lived instance of it, and which still lacks an established scientific explanation, is extremely interesting and must be truly extraordinary to personally witness. Even if it is slightly less momentous an event than alien visitors.

John Buckledee



The path leading to the Dell at Studham Common, where the Little Blue Man is said to have appeared



Hat Making Poems



A real local curiosity has just been uncovered after lying unnoticed between the pages of a collection of national magazines. It's a little 12-page booklet titled *Dunstable In The Past*, comprising some 50 verses written by William Collier and printed by H.G. Fisher, of the Park Street Press, Woburn.

The description on the cover says that the verses are about the town's citizens and trade of 20 years ago. That's not very helpful, as there is no date given in the booklet, but it is dedicated to the Mayor, Arthur E. Langridge, whose first term of office was 1894-1896, so the guess is that the verses are memories of the town in the early 1870s. Alderman Langridge's second term of office ended in some humiliation when a mob stoned his house in the infamous Coronation riots of 1902.

William Collier's main subjects are the people working in Dunstable's once-prosperous hat-making trade, and a sample selection of his verses are given below. There are a few hints in the poems about the author, "a strange man named Bill, who moved from the bottom of Sewell Hill" and who seems to have been given a job at Cooper's hat factory by a Mr Underwood whom he met while walking in the town. The Cooper's factory once stood in High Street North and was replaced by the old Palace Cinema and, more recently, by what we still call the "new" Post Office. Bill's poems, albeit sometimes straining for a rhyme, do give a flavour of some local people's life in a hat factory. Leghorns, incidentally, are wide-brimmed straw hats originating in Italy.

Mr Taylor was in the bleach-house bleaching the plaits,
He washed the Leghorns, Bonnets, and Hats,
Prepares them for the stiffener to stiffen so nice,
That they may not get limp to be stiffened out twice.

You all are aware Mr Watson was in the band,
He went in the town, played his music in his hand;
He came and worked at Messrs. Cooper's machine
That was in the Blocking Room plain to be seen.

I knew a certain man who for many years
Then worked for Messrs. Cooper as it appears
He machined the Leghorns, and is living still,
And his name, I may tell you, is Mr Dockerill.



Cooper's hat factory, from Dunstablelegia 1859



Woman at work in hat factory

There were three machines stood all in a row,
And the men that worked them with their work made a show.
When the Leghorns are machined they give them in time
For us to finish them off and make them to shine.

We had some young men from Markyate Street, -
To come to Dunstable they thought it a treat, -
Who used to block the Leghorns from morn till night,
As they were industrious they worked with their might.

The ladies were at work up stairs you all know,
They there have their needles and thread and sew;
That is how we make our hats and bonnets so good,
By working hard and getting money for food.

Mrs Higgs had her warehouse quite up above,
Like the birds that soar – like the lark and the dove,
She attended to the fancy work day after day.
Packed it in boxes and so sent it away.

When the shapes were found out we had the blocks made,
As the orders came in we worked at our trade;
The plait was first bought, and given to be strung,
And then to be bleached on the rods it was hung.

When dry it was bunched, to the warehouse they take,
And give out to the ladies for hats and bonnets to make;
They stiffened. and ironed, and trimmed very fine.
They are packed in the boxes, and sent out in good time.

Bill Collier also seems to have worked in the grocery business, and his poems mention such treats as Dandelion Coffee (good for digestion), Epps Cocoa, Berry's blacking (to polish shoes), Nixey's Black Lead (to polish stoves), Sunlight soap, Lucifer matches and nobs of Blue (for washing clothes).

Memories of old Dunstable



The late Joan Schneider kept a vast collection of memorabilia at her home, which included a cutting from a German newspaper in June 1975 reporting on a visit to Dunstable's twin town of Porz by the Dunstable Rep Theatre Club.

CHARLIE'S AUNT

The Rep presented excerpts (in English) from Charlie's Aunt and it was clearly an overwhelming success.

Under a heading *Über Engländer halb totgelacht* (I laughed myself half to death at the English) the paper's critic wrote:

"There has never been such thunderous applause before at the Ensen Youth Centre", adding that there had been an extraordinary explosion of clapping. George Baker, in the title role, was particularly praised and "the applause just would not stop. For at least 10 minutes the hall raved with enthusiasm".

CALENDAR OF PATENT ROLLS

A hunt for the answer to a query about the famous Dunstable Tournament of 1309, for which the list of knights who took part has miraculously survived the centuries, led me into the volumes containing the Calendar of Patent Rolls, where various decisions by the King were recorded.

As often happens, the research uncovered other, unrelated, local information which is printed here as a source for further investigation.

The rolls report that the King, at Windsor on Dec 26 1308 pardoned John le Mareschal for the death of Nicholas, son of John de Sewelle at Dunstable, "as it appears by the record of Henry Spigurael and Nicolas Fermland, justices of gaol delivery for Dunstable, that he killed him in self-defence."

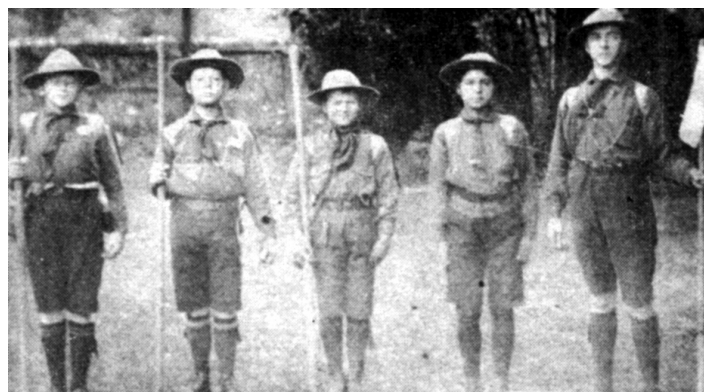
August 14 1311 at Westminster. Pardon to the Prior of Dunstable for the escape from the gaol at Dunstable of John le White of Eluestowe, king's approver, Isaak de Hungerford, John de Hungerford his brother, John Shillynger of Wotton by Northampton, Salaman atte Dune of Evre, Robert atte Donne his brother, Richard le Tournour of Essex (Dessex), William le Waylashe of Catwade and Peter de Lyndeseye, who were in his custody.

THE TOWN'S FIRST BOY SCOUTS

The history society, for this year's St George's Day events in Dunstable, featured the story of the town's first boy scouts. They were Jack Sinfield, Percy Flemons, Guy Creak, Howard Tibbett and Arthur Costin, who were inspired by Lord Baden-Powell's book "Scouting For Boys" and formed themselves into the Raven Patrol.

They built their own headquarters – a wooden lean-to hut against the back wall of Percy's garden at 7 Princes Street. The Patrol became officially registered a year later, in 1911, with Arthur Dunkley, a teacher at Ashton School, as Scoutmaster and Percy Pearce, a teacher at Priory School, as his assistant. Meetings were held at two houses in Manchester Place.

When the war began in 1914 both teachers joined the forces but the troop continued with local businessman Bert England in charge.

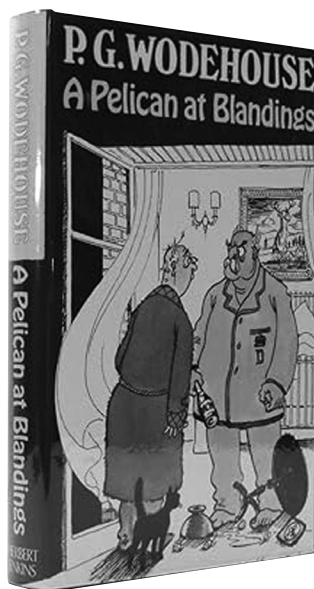


The Scouts first Dunstable troop

A PELICAN AT BLANDINGS

The Duke of Dunstable is a fictitious character who makes numerous appearances in the novels of P.G. Wodehouse, who rightly believed that the name sounds comical.

I've just come across one of the lesser-known Wodehouse books, *A Pelican At Blandings*, written when the author was 88 years old.



A Pelican at Blandings first edition

The critics at the time were a little unkind but there's lots of fun to be enjoyed in its pages, especially for those of us in Dunstable when we discover that the Duke is a major character in the story. He is large and stout, with a walrus moustache and an overbearing manner which is utterly devoid of all the finer instincts "which raise one above the level of beasts".

His extreme rudeness is perhaps not the kind of role-model we expect in Dunstable today, but it's nice for the town to have a memorable corner in English literature.

continued overleaf

Greeting New Members



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

Edward Chettleburgh	Andrew Gush	Rahul Kara
Charlotte Read	Malcolm Read	Simon Taylor
	Kim White	

Sad Farewell



We are very sorry to announce the sad loss of

Richard Barnes	Joan Schneider
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PRIVATE EYE

Someone else who thinks that the name of Dunstable is amusing is a jokester in a June issue of Private Eye who made a list of irresistible holiday attractions.

The examples included the Ministry of Defence Landmine Collection in Dartmoor, Pick Your Own Turnips in Norfolk, the Welsh Wallpaper Archive in Abergavenny and (wait for it) the Cockroach Zoo in Dunstable.

TIMES CROSSWORD

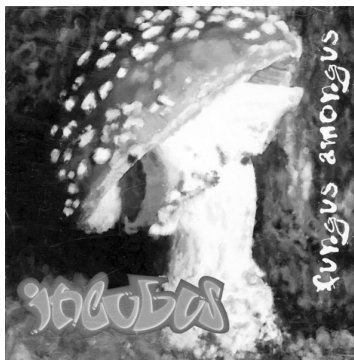
A clue in a recent Times crossword was "Night Demons". The answer turned out to be "incubi" and the dictionary tells me that a single night demon is an incubus (male) or incubu (female).

So why is the college hub on the corner of Brewers Hill Road in Dunstable called The Incuba?

I am assuming that it's a pun on its ambition to incubate learning among its students.

On the other hand, there's an American alternative rock band called Incubus whose first album, continuing this learned Latin theme, was called Fungus Amongus.

Lots of scope here for some interesting college t-shirts.



The rock band Incubus' Fungus Amongus album

NIGHT OF THE DEMON

Continuing this demonic theme, the classic movie Night Of The Demon was screened recently on television. It was directed in 1956 by Jacques Tourneur based on a creepy story titled Casting The Runes by M.R. James.

A key sequence of a man fleeing for his life along a railway track was filmed on the old Dunstable-Leighton Buzzard line, at Stanbridgeford Station.

An engine driver, the late Charlie Caines, used to talk about taking part in the film, which actually includes a shot of him and his fireman peering out of the engine.

Jim Knight of Totternhoe remembered cycling past the station late one night and seeing the place all lit up. He peered over the fence and saw film crews there. There was a steam engine and someone jumping off the train.

Eric Holmes also remembered the filming which he watched for some time.

My investigations some years ago into Night Of The Demon stirred villagers' memories about other films in the Totternhoe area, particularly some spectacular battle scenes shot in the Totternhoe quarries in the late 1980s or early 1990s. But, alas, no-one came forward with the name of the film.

Diana Rigg was in Totternhoe to make scenes for an episode of The Avengers and stopped at the Cross Keys in the village during the filming. For one stunt the film-makers built a ramp along one of the steep entrances to the Green Lanes down which cars were launched, leading to some spectacular explosions.

A TRAVELLER FROM LOS ANGELES



Evelyn Pinsker

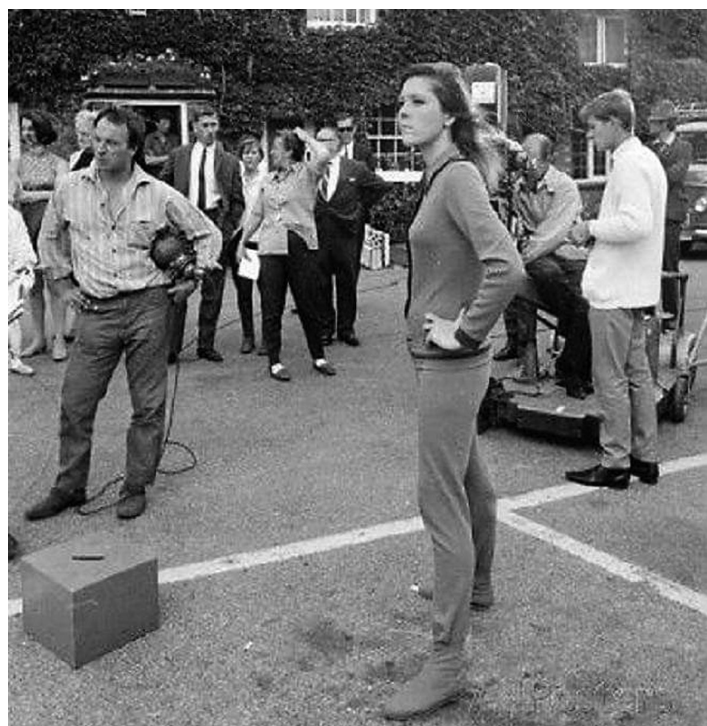
The history society was delighted to help with a welcome given to 93-year-old Evelyn Pinsker, who travelled from Los Angeles USA to see the village where she was housed as an evacuee during the Second World War.

In 1939 she was found a home in Castle Hill Road with George and Hilda Maunders. By a happy coincidence, their house now belongs to history society member David Underwood so Evelyn was able to see inside.

Despite her age, Evelyn also managed to walk up to Totternhoe Knolls where she particularly wanted to find a favourite playtime spot – seven beech trees known as The Seven Kings.

Evelyn has very fond memories of Mr and Mrs Maunders. She was provided with her own downstairs room and was thrilled to be given her own patch of garden to grow vegetables. Her London home in Holloway Road did not have a garden and her Totternhoe experience started a lifelong interest in botany and horticulture, which became her career in America when her family emigrated there after the war. Evelyn kept in touch with her Totternhoe friends, who turned out in force for a welcoming party in Totternhoe Memorial Hall. The hall proved to be a particularly appropriate venue because this was where Evelyn was brought by coach from Leighton Buzzard railway station in 1939 before being allocated to a suitable home. The hall also became her classroom because the village school was too small to take all the evacuees.

John Buckledee



Diana Rigg outside the Greyhound at Aldbury whilst filming the Avengers