

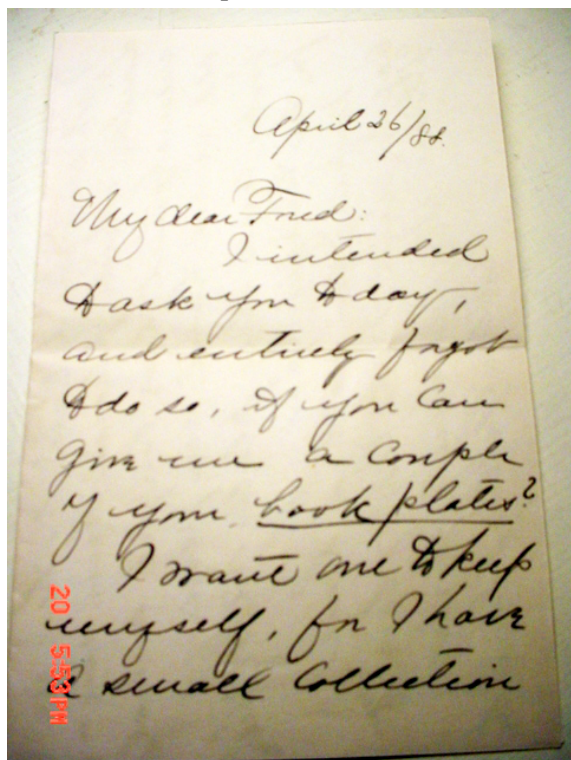
The Floridian philatelist's mystery letter

Ewelme News, Feb-Mar 2007, June-July 2007, Aug-Sep 2007.

The 'ghosts' of past Ewelme inhabitants continue to pop up in the form of unusual requests to the archive and from the most unlikely sources. We have many requests for information on long dead relatives, but one enquiry was a 'first'. It was passed on to us from the Parish Clerk who received an exploratory email from an English-born philatelist living in Florida. The sender, Barry West, had acquired several Victorian stamped envelopes containing the original letters. One, dated April 26th 1888, was addressed to: -

Mr Frederick Dunston Esq., Ewelme, Wallingford, Berks

The letter has a one penny stamp with a London WC postmark and is unremarkable in content, but it has opened up a hive of frenetic investigation. The letter was probably from Dunston's sister-in-law Alice L Dunston and the text discloses that 'Fred' had that day visited but she had forgotten to ask him for two book-plates with the Dunston [heraldic] crest, one for herself and another for a cousin.



She hoped 'Fred' had a good journey home, sent love to 'Florrie' (Dunston's wife), and put a postscript that Robin [likely his brother Robert] had eaten no dinner but a cup of tea and slice of bread as he had "been 'knocked up' since Frederick had left, or maybe he had eaten too much cream at lunch." Alice concluded by stating that "Robin was copying statistics from his California book, as if his life depended on it."

Barry was intrigued to know some details of this gentleman and his family. An initial examination of the Church Records showed a burial and four baptisms of Dunston children between 1882 and 1886. A request was then sent out to Ewelme researchers on the Archive database and within 24 hours, thanks to the modern methods of Internet genealogical research and particularly the enthusiasm of Rachel Winfield and Ray Quartermain (in Holland), a plethora of detail had been submitted for emailing to Florida.

Briefly, Frederick Warburton Dunston was born in December 1850 at Donhead St Mary, a Wiltshire village near Shaftesbury, to Thomas, a clergyman, and his wife Emma Roscoe, who married in 1849. The 1861 census shows Frederick and his 8 year old brother Robert, living with their then widowed mother at Donhead. Frederick went up to Oxford and then took a career in Law, being variously described as a 'Solicitor' and 'Barrister'. He married in 1878 the 22 year old Louisa Florence Camilla Gwatkin and in 1881 they were living in Cuddington, Surrey with their first daughter Louisa. A son, Thomas Frederick Gwatkin Warburton was born in Kensington in April 1882 but baptised at Ewelme church in July 1882. Unfortunately, the baby died and was buried in Ewelme on 27th December 1882 (there is no surviving memorial stone). A second son, who had the unenviable task of shouldering the same names as his dead sibling – A Victorian custom, was baptised in August 1883. Other children baptised in Ewelme were Robert, in December 1884, and in July 1886 a daughter, Emma.

The family left Ewelme circa 1889 and returned to Donhead St Mary to live at Burlton House where three more children were born. By the 1901 census Frederick had obviously prospered in his Law career, as in addition to his wife and children (ranging in age from 5 to 22), there were four servants recorded. Frederick died in 1915.

An outstanding question remains - where did the Dunston's live whilst in Ewelme? It is most unfortunate that their residency falls between the two censuses of 1881 and 1891. Alice felt no need to designate a house name, so the Dunston's and the property must have been well-known.

As indicated in the write up in the Feb/March News, with the help of many keen researchers it has been possible to put flesh on the Dunston bones, and only the identification of the Ewelme house was missing. As the Dunston's missed the 1881 and 1891 Ewelme census points we tried another avenue, and knowing Dunston's profession to be in the Law we contacted the Law Society's Library. Their research produced no other address but 'Ewelme' but did include further personal information about him. Dunston was educated at Marlborough College and then went up to Wadham College Oxford, became a Law student at Lincoln's Inn and was called to the bar in 1879, the year after he married Louisa Gwatkin, herself a barrister's daughter.

(From his own research Barry explained the extent of the Dunston legacy and the relevance of the book-plates was revealed. In 1981 Miss Emma Dunston, the daughter baptised in Ewelme in 1886, died at the great age of 95. She was still living at Burlton House and the entry describes her as "the last surviving member of an extraordinary family of book collectors, botanists, mycologists and photographers." Emma's Will bequeathed the "Dunston Collection" (originated by Frederick) of approximately 8,000 books to the University of Oxford, the *alma mater* of her father and brothers).

Where did the Dunstan's live?

The Benson Librarian helpfully suggested contacting Oxford Central Library for the Electoral Rolls for the period. Unfortunately, their records for the time were incomplete and they advised asking The British Library. Their records again showed no house name, but Dunston was recorded as being a **'freeholder of premises with coach house, stabling and gardens, near the church'**. So large a property - near the church narrowed the field down considerably. We examined the 1881 and 1891 Census Returns and found that although only relatively few properties were named, it was possible to retrace the steps of the enumerators using the named ones as reference points, and then to dismiss the unnamed properties occupied by agricultural workers and artisans. Of the 1881 possibilities, The [Old] Rectory was predictably occupied by Rector Walford, Hill House by Robert Franklin and Levers Farm [Church Farm House] by Mr Barcombe. (Large properties checked but not considered to be 'near the church' was the present White House with Helen Franklin and daughter, and The Mount - Edward and Mrs Glanville).

However, in April 1881 an unnamed house in the probable vicinity stood out like a beacon - being occupied by an elderly and ailing widower. Edward Rudge, (his profession was given as 'Dividends & Interest of Money') lived with three of his daughters, two nurses, a cook and a housemaid. Mr Rudge died aged 79 two months after the Census on June 30th 1881, leaving the property available to be sold to Dunston in 1882.

By process of elimination therefore, it seems that the Dunston's Ewelme home can be none other than the present Saffron House.

To find the identifying buildings mentioned, we looked at an old map of 1878 which shows the house footprint and outbuildings almost as they are now, apart from a small square building at the bottom of the garden, and a drive exiting onto Parsons Lane where now exists The Courtyard. Catherine Hare, the owner from 1966 to 1996 confirmed the existence of the coach house, now converted. Further confirmation came from Carole Knowles Allen and her brother Eric, evacuees who lived in Saffron Cottage during the war. They remembered playing in the coach house with some horse drawn vehicles still inside.

Frederick Dunston Esq., Delivered Again



So engrossed had Barry become with the Dunston story that he and his wife flew over to England. They visited Donhead St Mary, the birthplace of Dunston and to where the family moved and stayed after their sojourn in Ewelme. He provided us with photographs of the large family home, Burlton House, a stained glass window in the local church dedicated to the Dunston's, and a brass memorial to a Ewelme-born son who died young in 1901.

We welcomed Barry and Arlene West on the day of the Village Fete, and he took part in a photo-opportunity and 're-posted' it through the Dunston's letterbox at Saffron House. Barry and Arlene enjoyed the Fete, despite the un-Floridian weather, and met all the 'key players' in the story - that is the present owner of Saffron House and Catherine Hare, who owned it for 30 years. Arlene is a Historical Researcher at Gainesville University, and a further co-incident link emerged when it was found that the late Professor Hare did a visiting Professorship and Fellowship at the University of Gainesville in the 1980's!

Ewelme Village Archive