

# Fairford Flyer

## Extra No 1

April 2020

FAIRFORD HISTORY



SOCIETY

As FHS meetings are suspended it has been decided to issue interim online newsletters, which we hope will be of interest during this difficult time. Included will be a summary of the meeting that would have been held and anything of interest that occurs in our researches at home. If anyone has anything they would like to contribute or any local history questions please email [enquiry@fairfordhistory.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@fairfordhistory.org.uk).

For your information: FHS is still hoping to have their commemoration of Henry VIII's visit to Fairford on September 5<sup>th</sup> in the evening in St Mary's Church and Fairford Festival has been rescheduled to the weekend of September 11-13.

Happy 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday to our Chairman, Geoff Hawkes

Eric Jones has sent a brief outline of his talk which would have been held on April 16, 2020

### The Grand Drain: Fairford's contribution to agricultural history

Summer 2018 was unusually dry. Syd Flatman and I took the opportunity to clamber in and out of the many ditches which run approximately south through the parish of Fairford and to trace field boundaries surviving from the mid-eighteenth century enclosure. Above all we examined the Grand Drain which collects streams at Horcott and flows in a channel along Totterdown Lane. Today it runs below ground across the airfield, re-emerges - still flowing - parallel with Washpool Lane in Kempford, turns east and eventually joins the Coln. At the last point there was once complex equipment. The scheme was developed in the late 1790s by Edward Webb, surveyor from Stow-on-the-Wold. About the same date Webb's famous pupil, William 'Strata' Smith, the Father of English Geology, engineered similar arrangements at Down Ampney. Two other major schemes took place nearer to Oxford but not until the 1850s and 1860s. Fairford's Grand Drain was the first or second on the whole Upper Thames.

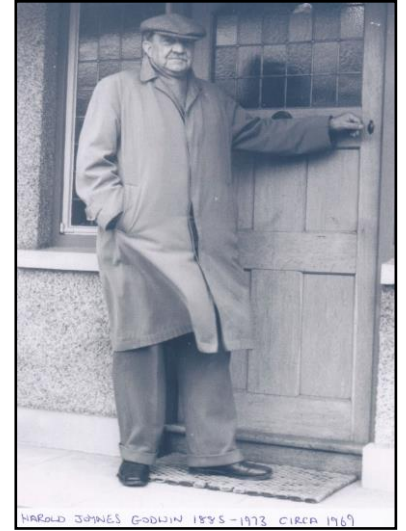
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### The Fielding Engine at Godwin Pumps by Syd Flatman

I left school at the start of the Christmas holidays in 1962. I was fifteen years of age, being part of the last batch of pupils ever allowed to leave at this time of year. I didn't enjoy school, only being interested in History, Woodwork and PE.

The Employment Officer came to Farmor's School in the November. After having a chat with him and saying about my interest in engineering, he gave me a green card and said go over to Godwin Pumps at Quenington, and ask for Mr Chamberlain, the Works Foreman, to see if they have any vacancies. On my father's advice I got my hair cut and put two pens in the top pocket of my school blazer and off I cycled to Quenington. I secured myself a job with an apprenticeship by the shortest job interview ever known. It went like this..... "Got your green card? Do you want to do an apprenticeship?" My stuttering reply was "Yes, Mr Chamberlain". With that, he thumbed the pages on the wall calendar and said "Start on 3<sup>rd</sup> January." And, with that, he was gone. I stood there in amazement thinking I should have been taking some kind of exam.

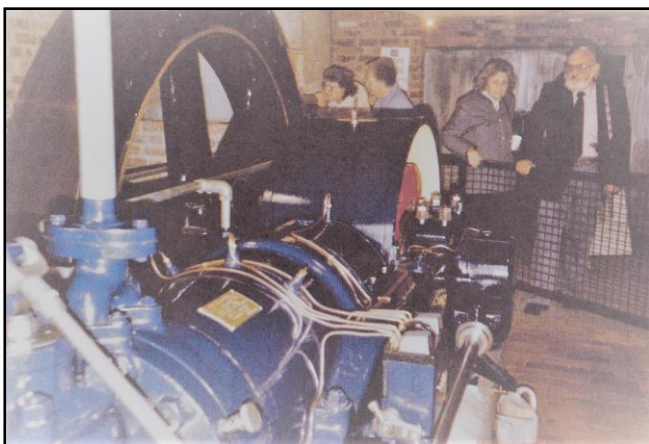
So I started work on the 3rd January 1963, right in the midst of the worst winter snows since 1947. I was late for my first day at work, this was no fault on my part, due to both Quenington roads out of Fairford being blocked with snow. The company had laid on transport to get us to work, the only way into Quenington was via the Red Lion Pub at Ampney St. Peter. On arrival at Godwin Pumps Mr Chamberlain greeted me, walking me down the central gangway that ran the whole length of the factory. I was to work in the stores until I was sixteen and ready to start my apprenticeship. I remember a great sea of faces staring at me, the new boy, as I walked down. First going through the Fitting Shop, then the No. 2 Machine Shop and finally into the side of the No. 1 Machine Shop and into the No. 1 Stores. What struck me, as I passed between the No. 2 Machine Shop and the No. 1, was this cast concrete building within the high roof of the factory, painted white with iron window frames and within was this monstrous navy blue engine with a giant flywheel on one side. I thought it was some kind of museum piece left over from the Victorian period and hadn't worked for years.



My job in the Stores was to push the trucks up to the Fitting Shop laden with the many components required to assemble the pumps, which there were many. The pumps in those days were mainly piston types, A1E's, OH and H types. As I settled in, I developed quite an interest in the big engine and noted from the cast brass plate on the side, it was made by Fieldings of Gloucester. I was told it was manufactured about 1929 and once drove the shafting in the roof that then in turn drove all the machinery. By 1963 the Fielding Engine only drove a giant generator sat on a high concrete plinth at the foot of the engine. This was driven via a wide flat belt only being used in times of power cuts.

The engine house was a no-go area for employees, it was the private domain of the engine master, Mr Alan Miles. He was thrice times married and from Meysey Hampton. He was an ex-guardsman, tall and very upright, a man of few words. I remember his large framed black bike, with its rod brakes, sprung Brooks saddle and the Ever Ready battery lights.

As well as looking after the engine, his job was to unlock and lock up the factory, also he drove the Lister Auto truck, air cooled and powered by a Jap engine bringing the castings in from the yard to be machined. When there were power cuts, which in those days seemed to be often, Alan came into his own, fussing around the engine like a mother hen.



Near the front of the engine was a large air cylinder, about three feet in diameter and about six feet high, galvanised and riveted, always full of air. There was a four inch brass pressure gauge on the side of the tank, I can't remember the pressure. From the pressure tank to the cylinder head of the engine was a two-inch air pipe with a lever valve. Ensuring the engine was just over top dead centre, Alan would slam open the lever valve forcing the engine into motion.

Once the engine was running there was no exhaust sound, only the clicking of the valve mechanism and the rumble of the checkerplate flooring covering the exhaust pipe that ran under the floor. The exhaust then ran up the side of the engine house and on up through the corrugated tin factory roof. The steel pipe was four inches in diameter and about thirty feet high. To hear the exhaust you had to go outside, then you would only hear the occasion huff, huff.

The engine had about an eight foot diameter flywheel that the belt to the generator ran on. The flywheel had a series of holes on the outside rim, these were for cranking the piston back to just over dead centre ready for the next time the engine was needed.

There were a series of 1/8<sup>th</sup> inch bore copper pipes on top of the crank case for lubricating various parts of the engine, fed from a glass oil reservoir, the pipes were polished and when the engine was not in use were covered in oil moist cloths.

Diesel was supplied from a 200 gallon open topped galvanised tank that stood directly above on the cast concrete engine house roof. Also on that roof were two twin cylinder V belt driven air compressors, powered by Brook Crompton Motors. These compressors ran continuously to supply the factory's air tools, e.g. hand grinders, pistol drills and blow guns.

At the back of the engine house, beyond the generator, was a caged area where the main electrical supply came into the factory. In the cage were the fork-type changeover switches and large Bakelite amp meters. When the factory was producing its own energy the outside supply had to be isolated. The in-house energy produced was not enough to run all the machines so there was always a mad dash to turn off lights, large lathes and boring machines.

I left the company in 1970 but was persuaded to return five years later. During my absence, the whole country went onto a three day week, but not Godwins. Thanks to the Fielding engine, they stayed on a full week.

I mentioned earlier about the shafting in the roof driven by the Fielding engine, that was all gone by the 1960's, but what did remain were the wooden pulleys, dozens of them of all diameters and widths, stacked along the boundary wall next to the bike shed. Harold Godwin, the founder of the company lived next door to the factory. Although his son Bill now ran the company, Harold still visited daily. I can only presume he wanted the pulleys kept for sentimental reasons.

The pulleys stayed there until 1967 when sadly Bill, or 'Big Bill' as we called him died at the young age of 53. Harold then sold the business to the John James Group of Bristol for £365,000.

The demise of the Fielding Engine came at 3 pm on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1980, a hot Saturday afternoon. Godwins caught on fire. At that time it was Gloucestershire's worst ever fire. Eleven fire tenders fought the blaze which was intense due to much of the old factory being constructed of wood and clad in corrugated tin. The engine, though housed in its own cast concrete building, still took a scorching.

Planning Permission was hurriedly given and a new factory was erected on a different plot, the old site being turned into a car park for the employees. The cast concrete engine house was jack hammered to the ground, leaving the engine exposed to the elements until a year or so later when it was dismantled and taken back to Gloucester where once again she sits in her own engine house.

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## FROM THE NEWSPAPERS

### **A Heated Church Service**

The winter of 1846/47 was one of severe frosts and heavy rain. The short report below from the Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard of 19 January 1847 illustrates one of the measures taken to keep the faithful a little warmer:

"It affords us pleasure to record that the comfort of the inhabitants of the town of Fairford, who attend church, has been materially promoted during this severe weather, by having two good stoves placed in the centre aisle of the church. They were procured and fixed by Mr. Chesterman, of this town, and are found to answer well their intended purpose. About £30 was readily subscribed to effect the object, and we think the contributors well satisfied with the outlay."

Mr. Chesterman was either William or his son Charles, both of whom were engineers of Fairford. In 1843 Charles placed advertisements in local newspapers for what he called 'Chesterman's Reflecting Cooking Apparatus'. The advertisement claimed that "all kinds of cooking may be performed in front of a small fire,

either in a grate or on the hearth, joints of meat, poultry, or game, may be roasted, and pastry baked, with half the fuel usually required." Charles was also selling 'American Ovens', as well as iron fencing, palisading, kitchen ranges and carriage springs. The miraculous 'Reflecting Cooking Apparatus' may not have been a best seller as Charles and his family emigrated to the United States in September 1848.

### **Crushed**

A truly horrific accident was reported in the 18 July 1840 issue of the Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard:

"Fairford - An appalling but rather strange accident occurred in this town on Saturday last, to a poor woman named Bowles. She was at work at a thrashing machine on the farm of John Raymond Barker, Esq., when some part of her clothes became entangled in the machine, and were literally dragged from her body; not, however, before the poor creature had been crushed in so dreadful a manner that her life was despaired of. It is worthy of remark, that although she appeared to have been reduced by the pressure to one half her natural size: and also that her clothes had been entirely stripped from her body by the machine, yet not the sign of a scratch appeared upon her skin; nor was there any bone broken, as was the expressed opinion of the medical gentleman who attended her, under whose judicious treatment we trust the sufferer will speedily recover."

Despite being "reduced by the pressure to one half her natural size" the poor woman seems to have recovered as nobody of the surname Bowles was buried in Fairford in the summer of 1840. Mechanical threshers and other farm machinery accounted for many accidents in the early and mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century as they were new to many farm workers and Health and Safety regulations were fairly minimal at that time.

### **Very Punny!**

"At the County Court [in Gloucester] on Tuesday, Judge Francillon tried a case in which Mr. Cross, of Fairford, was the plaintiff, and the defendant was represented by his wife, who, on being questioned regarding her husband's income, exhibited a very acrimonious temperament. "My good woman," said the Judge, in his usual pleasant way, "if the plaintiff is Cross, there is no necessity for your being so too!"

Who said judges don't have a sense of humour. This report appeared in the Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard issue of 12 January 1861 but it was also widely copied by other newspapers including the Gloucestershire Chronicle, the Cheltenham Chronicle, the Cheltenham Examiner; and further afield including the Salisbury and Winchester Journal, the Hereford Journal, the Birmingham Journal, and the Derby Mercury; and much further afield in the Dundee Courier, and the Stirling Observer. The Mr. Cross concerned was probably Robert William Cross who was a grocer and tea dealer in London Street according to the 1861 census. He sold his stock in July that year and moved to Oxford where he died in 1895.

### **A Fairford Party**

Fairford folk have always known how to enjoy themselves as a report in the Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard issue of 30 January 1841 illustrates:

"The ball and card assembly, on Thursday evening, at the George Inn, in this town, was one of the gayest and most interesting ever witnessed. All the youth and beauty of Fairford and its vicinity were collected together, and presented such a galaxy of elegance and fashion as we never recollect to have seen surpassed - seldom equalled. Dancing was kept up with great spirit until the period of retiring, when nearly 100 persons sat down to partake of a most tasteful and choice display of delicacies for refreshment laid out highly to the credit of the host of the George Inn, Mr. R. Foresheew. Dancing was renewed after supper with increased animation, which the gay votaries of Terpsicore did not relax until returning morn gave notice of time for separation. A most excellent band was in attendance from Cheltenham, and played during the evening several fashionable waltzes, etc."