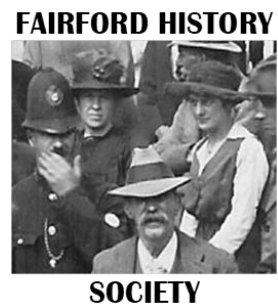


# Fairford Flyer

## Extra No 3

April 2020



This is the third online FHS newsletter, which we hope will be of interest during this difficult time. 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). What about those Fairford memories?

### FHS Membership

Janet and Martin Wyatt contacted FHS recently to ask what we knew about Fairford brickworks. (<https://www.fairfordhistory.org.uk/fairford-brickworks/>). They have moved into a Tallet Barn conversion at Waiten Hill. (A tallet was a hayloft with an outside staircase above a barn). They have joined FHS and this takes the total paid up membership for the 2019-20 season to the highest number of members ever. (155). Welcome to Janet and Martin.

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### A Christmas Railway Tragedy

In 2009 Chris wrote a FHS occasional paper about the great Railway Disaster of Christmas 1874 near Hampton Gay, Oxon. The Fairford connection was that members of a Hannington family travelled from Fairford to Oxford to catch this train and were killed. A new website <https://www.hamptongaystory.co.uk/> has been set up and the organisers were asking if they could make a link to our website and Chris also had some additional photographs of the site. Check out <https://www.fairfordhistory.org.uk/a-christmas-railway-tragedy/> to see the story.

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### Whilst waiting outside Londis .....and other items of note in London St



In the boredom of queuing outside a favourite food shop, one of our members noticed the sundial on the wall of Bomar House, his eyes dropped to the squarish holes at pavement level by the front door and wondered what it was and wrote to ask FHS. This is thought to be a boot scraper, they had a metal rail inside, some of still have and there are some fine examples all



along London Street.

A few doors along from Londis if you look above the door of a private house (no 27) you can see Boot Repairs this was Constable's boot and shoe shop (1930s), it was the Old Snobber off licence in the 1980s.



Back towards the Market Place notice the fine ceramic plaque on the Plough and looking up on 34 London St notice the Insurance plaque high in the eaves. The fire plaque was issued by the Royal Exchange Assurance Company of London and was used to mark houses that belonged to the company's members. It is made of lead with the serial number 85679 stamped below the moulding of the Royal Exchange



building. The company was founded in 1720 and this plaque probably dates to the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Fire plaques were no longer issued after about 1825.

In the wall of Hughenden /Terrance house there is a brass plaque marked 'letters.' This used to be the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Post Office. Notice the architecture of the house is different to other buildings in the street, it is similar to other old post offices in the county and is just a facade built on to an older house.

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Another item from Eric Jones' research you may remember an article in Fairford Flyer 25 about Farmor's School headteacher John Taylor's research on butterflies and moths.

### **A GI Scientist at Fairford in 1944 by Eric Jones**

Having noticed that the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, had posted 2.8 million images free to view, I put 'Fairford' in the search box. Eight hits came up, all of them herbarium specimens of algae taken from the Coln at Fairford in September and October, 1944. The finder was a Dr William L. Tolstead (1909-2000), who before and after the war was a botanist in the Department of Survey and Conservation at the University of Nebraska.

An enquiry to that university's archivist was of little help but I googled all sorts of likely subjects and had several scores of 'hits'. Most were bare reports of botanical specimens found by Tolstead in a number of mid-Western states, or simple citations of his work. Eventually I found something adding personal information, an autobiographical article he wrote for the *Journal of the American Rhododendron Society*.

Tolstead emerges as an assiduous botanical collector, field naturalist, ecologist and plant breeder. He may have started out in the horticultural industry (he took his PhD rather late). During the war he was drafted into the US Army and stationed in England. He made good use of his spare time by visiting rhododendron collections at Kew Gardens and the Lansdown estate (presumably the Lansdowne estate, Calne) – and of course visiting Fairford. It was here he collected algae. Years afterwards he presented 75 specimens from England to the Chicago Museum of Natural History. How had he managed to prepare them in wartime? A later revision of the systematics of the algae pointed out that at least one species requires unpolluted water, indicating that in 1944, before the present run-off of farm chemicals, the Coln was pollution-free!

Tolstead eventually became Professor of Biology at Davis & Elkins College, West Virginia. In 1958 he bought an old farm there, staying for 31 years, using it as a teaching laboratory and returning to what I suspect was his first love, plant-breeding. He had already been breeding daffodils and rhododendrons in Nebraska but now made 1,499 seed collections and grew thousands of plants. Apparently he revisited England after the war, looking again at rhododendrons. Whether he came back to Fairford is unclear but some of his correspondence for 1942-1944 is held at the University of California, Berkeley. Perhaps one day a Fairfordian will be able to examine it.

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#### **Eric's new book**

Barriers to growth: English Economic Development from the Norman Conquest to Industrialisation by Eric L Jones, 153pp, 1 ill. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. £74.99 (Palgrave Studies in Economic History)

## FROM THE NEWSPAPERS

### **Giant Vegetables**

The growing of giant (and often inedible) vegetables is by no means a modern phenomenon. Nineteenth century newspapers abound with reports of these monstrosities as an item in the Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard of 31 May 1851 illustrates:

“**GIGANTIC BROCOLI** – In Monday a remarkably fine head of Brocoli, the “Mammouth Brocoli,” was exhibited in the window of Mr. Gregory in the Market Place at Fairford. The plant was grown by David Bowly, Esq., of Siddington, and measured 54 inches in circumference, and 18 inches in the broadest part.”

From further afield another instance of vegetable gigantism was reported in the Worcester Journal of 4 November 1865 which stated that an American gourd had been grown on a rubbish heap in the grounds of a Mr. A. H. Royds of Crown East near Worcester and which reached the amazing size of seven feet and five inches in circumference. That would have made one terrifying Halloween lantern!

The American gourd dwarfs the giant marrow grown at Cowley and reported in the Oxford Chronicle of 3 October 1868 as being four feet and five inches long, three feet and eight inches in circumference and which weighed 40 pounds.

Even further afield the village of Orton in Westmorland (now Cumbria) seems to have specialised in outsize vegetables. The Penrith Observer of 12 November 1867 reported a turnip that had a circumference of 40 inches and weighed 27 pounds and eight ounces. Three years later the same newspaper reported that a farmer of Orton had grown a cabbage which measured 12 feet and two inches in circumference.

No doubt there are more recent record-breaking giant vegetables but I will leave those to the Guinness Book of Records.

### **Married by an Assembly of Clergy**

From: The Oxford Journal 5 February 1887

“Feb. 2, at St. Leonard’s, Streatham, by his father, Canon Bush, Rector of Duloe, and his brother, the Rev. H. Cromwell Bush, Curate of St. John Divine, Kennington, and the Rev. Arthur S. Loxley, Vicar of Fairford, the Rev. T. Cromwell Bush, M.A., Hertford College, Oxford, Assistant Curate of Fairford, to Gertrude Julia, daughter of the late George Coles, of Elmfield, Streatham.”

To be married by in church by a clergyman was the norm in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century but to be married by three clergymen seems rather excessive! Thomas Cromwell Bush was appointed assistant curate at Fairford in 1886 but left in the summer of the following year to become vicar of Queen Camel in Somerset. Sadly, Gertrude died on 13 June 1888 possibly as the result of complications following the birth of her son Paul. Thomas remarried in 1892 and retired as the rector of Burwarton in Shropshire in 1908 and died on 4 March 1919. He was a descendant of Oliver Cromwell.

### **Art for Art’s Sake**

Art, in its many and various forms, has been an important aspect of Fairford’s social life for many centuries. From the precious jewellery found in the Anglo-Saxon cemetery, to the beautiful early 16<sup>th</sup> Century windows of St Mary’s church and the Three Choirs Festival of the present day. Art combined with entertainment is featured by the two newspaper extracts that can be seen here:

From: Oxford Journal 18 December 1784

**FAIRFORD, GLOUCESTERSHIRE.**  
**O**N Tuesday the 28th of December Instant, 1784,  
will be performed, at the BULL INN,  
**The MASQUE of ACIS and GALATEA.**  
Instrumental Performers from Cheltenham and Cirencester;  
the Choruses by the Fairford Choir.  
*To begin at One o'Clock, after which will be a BALL.*  
Tickets 2s. 6d. each, including the Whole.

The Masque of Acis and Galatea was composed by George Frederic Handel with the lyrics by the poet and dramatist John Gay. This was a very popular piece in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and was performed in many parts of the country. It is interesting that the musicians from Cheltenham and Cirencester were accompanied by the Fairford Choir, the nucleus of which would have been the church choir.

From: The Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard 14 February 1852

**GEORGE BARKER'S**  
**ENGLISH BALLAD ENTERTAINMENT,**  
**At the King's Head Assembly Room,**  
**CIRENCESTER.**

Messrs. BAILY & JONES beg to announce to the Gentry and Inhabitants of Cirencester and its vicinity, that they have succeeded in engaging that celebrated Composer and Vocalist

**GEORGE BARKER, ESQ.**  
Composer of the "White Squall," "Mary Elane,"  
"The Irish Emigrant," &c. &c.

To deliver A LECTURE at the KING'S HEAD ASSEMBLY ROOM, on TUESDAY EVENING, MARCH 2, 1852, on the

**BALLAD MUSIC OF ENGLAND**  
**WITH VOCAL ILLUSTRATIONS.**

As given by him upwards of one hundred consecutive nights, at the Royal Polytechnic Institution, London.

Admission—Numbered Stalls, 4s.; Unreserved Seats, 2s.; Promenade, 1s. Tickets may be had at Messrs. Baily & Jones', Standard and Express Office, Cirencester.

The above Entertainment will also be given on Wednesday Evening, March 3rd, at the CROFTS HALL, FAIRFORD. —Admission, Front Seats, 2s.; Back ditto, 1s.; Children and Schools to the Front Seats at half-price. Tickets to be obtained of Messrs. DANCE & WALL, Book-sellers, Fairford.

The Crofts Hall was often a venue for musical and other events. George Arthur Barker was the composer of a large number of songs which were made available as sheet music. Many of his songs were published in 1853 in a 10-volume work titled 'Song Albums' and this was followed two years later by another collection titled 'Songs of the Army and Navy'. Some of his songs have been reprinted in recent years in the book 'Street Ballads'. George Barker toured the country throughout the 1850s with his ballad entertainment and was very successful, perhaps the Andrew Lloyd Webber of his day! As well as a prolific songwriter he was also a well-known tenor singer who performed in operas in London and elsewhere. He was also an accomplished recitalist. George Barker died on 2 March 1876 at the age of 63.

The advertisement notes that the cost of front seats in the Crofts Hall was two shillings but you could sit in the back seats for just one shilling (children and school parties could sit in the front seats for half price).

ADVERT - Fore and Aft : lost ships of the Severn Sea by Paul Barnett. The 192 page well illustrated guidebook details the final resting place of the 121 vessels at Purton, Lydney and Sharpness. Signed copies for £14.95 +n £2.50 p&p (via cheque to 19 Lea Road, Brockworth GL7 4JD) or contact Paul at barnadillo@aol.com