

Fairford Flyer

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FAIRFORD HISTORY



SOCIETY

This is the fourth 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. What about those Fairford memories?

On a recent rainy Saturday the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society (BGAS) Transactions plopped on to our doormat. There are always items of interest. This time there was a one liner about the dig at Coln House School, a report on the dig on land south of Cirencester Road that we already had seen and, most interestingly, a report on archaeological investigations which preceded the cable laying along the Cirencester to Fairford road. At the Meysey Hampton cross road was found an Anglo-Saxon field burial site. These articles prompted Chris to write a short summary of these and other local archaeological investigations of recent years that will shortly be on the website under News.

Syd Flatman's memories of Frank de Bono

I wonder how many of our members can remember Frank De Bono? It can't be many more than you can count on one hand. For the rest of you, who never had the pleasure, Frank was one of the last great characters of Fairford. He had a greeting catchphrase for all and sundry as he rode past on his old bike, it was "Aye Aye Sir, Aye Aye".

Old Boneo, as we called him, lived in the old Catholic School House, next to St. Thomas's cemetery. He was a shambling man, Maltese by birth, with a wizened face, unkempt black hair, mahogany complexion and the hollow cheeks of a man with no teeth. To us youngsters, he was a figure of fun, as he rode around Fairford on his bicycle with no tyres. You could always hear him coming on his steel rims.

He eked out a living breeding pigs in his triangular-shaped garden. Through the hedge you could see the perimeter fence was made up of anything Frank could lay his hands on. Rusty corrugated tin sheeting, iron bedsteads, and chicken wire, anything to stop his weaner's from escaping.

Frank also delivered newspapers around the town, the Football Pink and the Echo. He would be seen waiting by the Marlborough Arms pub for the delivery van to drop them off, grubby canvas bag on his shoulder, penknife in hand. (The papers in those days were broadsheet and came rolled up together like a carpet and tied up with string).

I remember once stepping inside his front door, the room to the left was stacked everywhere with piles of unsold newspapers, the room to the right which was the old schoolroom, was half full of old scrap iron, cast iron kettles, fire grates, flat irons etc., another means of making a few bob.

Every so often Frank would turn up at Sonny Godding's Fish and Chip Shop at the top of Milton Place with a bundle of out of date papers, give them to Mrs Westbury who served, in exchange for a large bag of chips.

This almost tramp-like existence was not always so for Mr De Bono. Rumour had it that during World War II he was a Radio Operator, perhaps that's what brought him to this area. A smartly dressed man marrying into

the Luker family from Crabtree (Hatherop Road) riding a motorcycle, he worked at Fosse Cross Stone Quarry (now the recycling centre) and played football for Fairford.

A couple of tragedies in Frank's life may have been the reason why he became the way we knew him. Firstly, his wife died early on in the marriage and secondly he had the misfortune to knock down and kill a pedestrian whilst riding his motorcycle.

Father MacSweeney, the Roman Catholic priest at St Thomas's and Frank looked out for each other, Father Mac, alone in the presbytery and Frank, alone in the old school house. Whether he paid any rent to the Church we may never know.

What religious denomination he was I'm not sure, but he always attended Mass on Sunday, never sitting in a pew, taking communion or confessing his sins, always standing at the back next to the door ready for the off once the service was over.

Throughout the service his dark brown eyes would be transfixed on Father MacSweeney and mumbling Umm's to himself at the end of every Latin sentence as though he understood the gobbledegook. "Mea Culpa, Mea Culpa, Mea Maxima Culpa."

Frank would turn up on the stroke of 10.30. McSweeney would listen out for the loud clunk of the wrought iron latch as he entered through the large Victorian Gothic door, it was as if this was the signal to start the service. Father Mac would then emerge from the sacristy resplendent in his glittering green and gold chasuble, George Rowe and myself trailing behind in our cardinal red cassocks heading up to our places in front of the altar, George on the right, me on the left.



1957 25 Years at Fairford for Father MacSweeney

Front Row: Amelia Corso, Mary Rowe, Angelo Corso, Ann Corso, Rosemary Corso, Syd Flatman, Sally Hunt, Terry Hunt, Peter Hunt, 3 unknown, Winnie Hunt, Mr Gannon 5th from right.
Far Right: Frank de Bono, next to Lord Howard of Penrith: Back in front of window. John Row and Mr Hunt, George Row behind little girl with Eddie Hunt behind him: From left 4th Mrs Rowe next to Lady Howard, Father O'Donnell next to Father MacSweeney, Mrs Corso with Mr Corso behind, and next Mr Corso Mrs P Taylor

I have one abiding memory about Frank and his pigs. Les Radway, my neighbour, also used to breed pigs. Les always had a plentiful supply of good quality swill, thanks to being part of the Radway baking family. Any stale bread and cakes his brother Bill (Bill the Bread) had leftover, the other brother Sid (Radway's delivery driver) would drop them off at West End Gardens.

Les didn't get all the cakes he was expecting, us West End youngsters would see the grey Morris Minor Van coming down the track from Dynevor Terrace and raid the back of it as Sid pulled up, grabbing a few leathery Chelsea buns and dry Lardies for ourselves.

Back to Frank, he would sometimes run short of swill and Les would help him out. On this one particular occasion (I must have been about 12 at the time) I happened to follow Frank down Coronation Street on my bike. There were two swill drums swinging like pendulums on each end of his handlebars. As Frank put the breaks on at the Marlborough Arms crossroads the front wheel, not having a tyre on it, slid out from under him. Swill went everywhere. He was unhurt, but the air was blue with what I would imagine were unvarnished Maltese swear words.

But what a man, what an individual, they don't seem to make them like that anymore and how can we ever forget those wonderful words, "Aye Aye Sir, Aye Aye".

FROM THE NEWSPAPERS

Fairford Celebrations

Although there may be little to celebrate at the moment there have been some special occasions in the past when the town 'partied on'. Many of us will remember the televised wedding of Prince Charles to Lady Diana Spencer in St Paul's Cathedral in 1981. This was the first marriage of a Prince of Wales for 118 years because it was on the 10th of March 1863 that Prince Albert Edward, Queen Victoria's eldest son, was married to Princess Alexandra of Denmark in St George's Chapel, Windsor. For some reason this event wasn't televised (odd that!) but there is a superb painting of the ceremony by George Housman Thomas which can be seen on the website of the Royal Collection Trust <https://www.rct.uk/collection/406997/the-marriage-of-albert-edward-prince-of-wales-10-march-1863>

Prince Albert Edward succeeded his mother in 1901 as King Edward VII and was the great, great grandfather of Prince Charles. A report in the Oxford Journal of 14 March 1863 gave a detailed account of how Fairford celebrated this right royal event.

"A fortnight ago a public meeting of the inhabitants [of Fairford] was called, and presided over by the Rev. F. W. Rice, the Vicar, to take into consideration some plan of public rejoicing on the occasion of the marriage of the Prince of Wales. A Committee was appointed, composed of Dr. Eastwood, chairman; Mr. Wakefield, treasurer; Rev. W. Frise; Messrs. Waine, Kingsley, Ferris, A. Iles, J. Cornwall, R. Iles, Lea, Caldicott; and T. Brown. By the active exertions of the Committee, to whom much praise is due, the quiet and pretty little town of Fairford was completely roused from its slumber, and a degree of enthusiasm called forth which the "oldest inhabitants" could not remember. All classes, from the Lord of the Manor, J. R. Raymond Barker, Esq., and the respected Vicar, down to the humblest resident, seemed to vie with each other how they should best show their loyalty and good wishes for the event which has everywhere been held as a national occasion for rejoicing. Triumphal arches of evergreens, with flags and banners upon them, were erected over every entrance into the Market-place, by the Committee; and a number of others were scattered about the town by private individuals, giving the place a very festive appearance. The flags of England and Denmark were everywhere conspicuous, and others bearing suitable devices and words of welcome for the fair Dane. The bells of the church, so interesting to antiquarians for its beautiful stained glass windows, rang forth at intervals a merry peal.

The school children, the drum and fife band, the clubs, and many of the inhabitants formed a procession round the town, after which they entered a large temporary tent erected in the Market-place. A substantial dinner of beef and plum pudding was provided at two o'clock, and not less than 1100 persons, of all classes, and of both

sexes, sat down to partake of it. There was sufficient for all, and some to spare for the sick and poor. After dinner there was a variety of amusements, and a general illumination during the evening. The pleasure which all persons seem to take in the proceedings, together with the satisfactory arrangements of the Committee, and the fineness of the weather, contributed to render this day one not to be forgotten by the inhabitants of Fairford and the surrounding villages. Probably in no town in the kingdom was a greater amount of enthusiasm publicly shown in this little place, and the auspicious occasion was one which seemed to rouse the loyalty of the usually quiet inhabitants. A large amount of volunteer service was given, and many thanks are due to the ladies, who boiled the puddings and potatoes and made the flags and banners, as well as to those whose labour was of a different kind. The number of happy faces at the dinner table during the onslaught made upon the substantial pieces of beef and the excellent plum puddings was a sufficient reward to those who had contributed to the general enjoyment. It is satisfactory to state that the rejoicings throughout were of a very innocent character."

Old Fossils

This item isn't about the FHS membership but real old fossils! In 1852 a number of brief reports in local newspapers mentioned that the Cotswolds Naturalists' Club had met in Fairford and had been shown a collection of fossils collected by a resident lady but failed to mention her name. A lengthy article in the Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard of 20 August 1853 provided the answer. The Club met in Cirencester that year and visited the church, the Roman pavement found in Dyer Street, and the town museum (apparently in a "very disordered and unarranged state") before sitting down for lunch at The Ram Inn. The newspaper went on to report:

"The after dinner proceedings were of a most interesting description, a tray of very beautiful Corals was introduced by the Secretary, which had been collected by Miss Anne Slatter of Fairford, and excited great interest not only from their novelty to science, but from their being the result of original field investigations by a lady; a lengthy discussion took place upon their geological position, which called forth remarks from all the geologists present."

Apparently the journalist had not heard of Miss Mary Anning, one of the earliest and most famous of British palaeontologists who had been collecting fossils near her home at Lyme Regis since the very early years of the 19th Century. The realisation that ladies might actually be interested in science obviously still had some way to go in the 1850s!

Anne Slatter was born in Gloucester in 1801 and lived in Milton End with her husband Thomas, a corn and coal merchant, and their son, also called Thomas. The family had moved to Cirencester by 1861 where Thomas continued his trade as a corn merchant and later a miller. Anne died and was buried in Stratton in 1886, although her place of abode is given as Gloucester in the burial register. It is not known if she maintained her interest in fossils or what happened to her collection.

The strata called the Fairford Coral Bed lies over parts of the White Limestone in the English Bathonian sequence of rocks and it is only in the last quarter of the 20th Century that the bed has been found to be much more extensive than was originally thought. By 1975 a total of 61 species of scleractinian corals (corals that have a hard skeleton of calcium carbonate) had been found and identified in the Fairford area. Many of these fossil corals have the appearance of flowers and the largest can be up to 25cm (10 inches) across.

A royal response

What did Richard III say when a planning proposal was submitted for building car park?

"Over my dead body"

Marx's drink of choice

Why did Karl Marx dislike Earl Grey tea?

Because proper tea is theft.