

Fairford Flyer

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FAIRFORD HISTORY



SOCIETY

This is the sixth 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?

About the May Fairford History Society talk

In May Liz Davenport was going to talk about Woodchester Mansion, south of Stroud, the unfinished mansion set in a beautiful valley and surrounding landscaped estate. FHS tries as far as possible to keep to talks with local connections, and although this talk may not seem to have one, it does have a tenuous link to Fairford.

William Leigh the estate owner had originally asked Augustus Pugin (designer of the Palace of Westminster) to design alterations to his Park House but after falling out as they could not agree, Leigh went to Charles Hansom of Bristol instead. It was his brother Joseph who designed the Hansom Cab. Charles Hansom had working with him a local architect named Benjamin Bucknall. Construction of the house began in the 1850s, but eventually the funds ran out before it was completed. William Leigh died and his son, also William, was left with an unfinished mansion. In 1874 he asked Benjamin Bucknall to produce a report on the building. Bucknall reported that as well as being very expensive to complete he concluded that the Woodchester Estate was too small to support a building of that size and so it was just left unfinished.



St Thomas of Canterbury Roman Catholic Church at Horcott was built in 1845 at a cost of £700. In 1863 Father Peter Seddon was appointed as resident priest in Fairford. He was responsible for opening the grave yard and for erecting the presbytery, the school and schoolhouse. These buildings were almost certainly designed by Benjamin Bucknall. The presbytery contains many interesting stone features including window seats and a stone staircase. In 1878 Benjamin Bucknall went to live and work in Algeria for his health although he left his family in Gloucestershire. In Algeria he was influenced by Moorish architecture and designed many buildings. The move was a good plan as he did not die until in 1895 at the age of 62.

(Liz has agreed to reschedule her talk to next year. Do any of you remember Barry Bucknell, the TV DIY expert, this was a useful memory trigger for the architect's name!!!)

Hopefully meetings will be resumed in September. In June the meeting due to be held was the AGM, which will be postponed until the next meeting. 'Show and Tell' was also planned; either that or another topic will be arranged when we know what is to happen.

Error correction: The quote 'property is theft' is attributed to the French politician Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the first person to declare himself an anarchist, he died in Paris in 1865.

Fairford Windows

The Man in the Red Hat: the creation of a remarkable late medieval glazing scheme by Keith Barley is the publication of Keith Barley's MA thesis at York University. His theory is that Michael Sittow was the designer and has a hidden portrait in the Judgement of Solomon window, the messenger, top R in red hat. Etheses puts good theses on-line free so you can download them. etheses.whiterose.ac.uk

Three-mile Cut by Eric Jones

Just before the present crisis Syd Flatman and I managed a visit to Waterhay near Ashton Keynes, ten miles from Fairford. We were following up remarks in a history of Leigh, Wiltshire, by David Britton and Richard Rumming. They made a persuasive, if circumstantial, case that at Waterhay the remains of a wharf, dock and a tree line across country represent the start of a Three-mile Cut which would have joined the Thames to the Avon at Charlton, Malmesbury. Who knew that the Thames and Avon came so close together? Or that the Thames was once navigable so high up?

Dreams of the project went back to the reign of Elizabeth. The most promising proposals came in the seventeenth century when from time to time interested people paid visits to assess the chances. The main projector under Cromwell and Charles II was Francis Mathew but his schemes were blocked for unknown reasons by a Wiltshire bigwig, Sir James Long. Mathew could not himself afford to fund digging a canal. He had been 'undonn by the warres' and had 'no purse', so John Aubrey said, yet the cut was still marked (though as a suspiciously straight line) on a 1715 map drawn by Herman Moll. If the work had been completed Forest of Dean coal could have come through to London, with every chance that relatively cheap waterborne supplies could have reached Fairford via Kempford.

Syd Flatman and I visited the site on a windy March day. We could not reach the abandoned church at Waterhay because the track was flooded and we got wet enough trying to cross the fields. They were full of ploughing rig, said to be medieval. But at Waterhay bridge the floods did us a good turn because they filled and made visible a channel from the site of the wharf and also a squarish expanse of water that may have been the dock. On the day we could not search further but are prepared to believe Britton and Rumming that these are the archaeological traces of what was said to be 'the most famous of the canal schemes of the period.' It could have changed the economy of Fairford and district one hundred years before the construction of the Thames and Severn canal.

VE Day Memories updates

Miriam Scott explains her memory of VE Day at school.

'Our headmistress got very excited and bravely invited the airmen from the nearby RAF station to share our bonfire. They mostly behaved very well, but one whom we thought was drunk, seized a flag and stood in front of the bonfire conducting. I suppose we were singing. We were allowed to

stay up until the end of the proceedings so it was unusually late when we returned to our dormitories. The open windows with the lights on attracted the May bugs which we had not met before. Their zooming and banging both excited and alarmed us in the same way that the airman had done!

Liz and Phil Hope's wartime memories

Phil Hope's sister Ann Godwin can clearly remember the bonfire in the market place, and the noise etc., which as a small child frightened her so much her mother had to go to her but said she couldn't stay as they were so busy in the George Hotel (now Coffee Post) which their parents ran.

Syd Hope, landlord of the George, was chief fire officer throughout the war for Fairford and district. Their meetings were always held in the back cellars of the George, when 2 firemen always stayed on duty again throughout the war.

Liz Hope's father (Tom Puzey Rymer) was a sort of warden throughout the war, he helped organise all the land that had to be requisitioned for war food supplies.

We had a land girl on Waiten Hill farm where we lived throughout the war. I have a photo of her, but we cannot remember her name. I also have photos of some of the evacuees that stayed with us.

A Mrs Creasy and her daughter Maureen aged about 8 then, her husband was away in the war. Maureen called at our shop some years ago now. She was working for the foreign office in Lima, Peru... probably now retired. I would love to trace her to give her some photos but I contacted Lima to no avail. Also an Opera singer Marguerite Natalia, (driving dad mad when she practiced), also a schoolteacher who ran a small private school in the top room, for local business peoples boys. She was called Miss Pritchard. We have photos of these people too.

Palmer Hall was the centre for entertainment. Films both for children and for adults were shown there, Joyce Ross (evacuee) remembers attending. Ivor Tully remembers creeping in through a window to watch secretly with the adult films and hiding under the soldier's legs.

Red Cross dances were also held in the Palmer Hall, in aid of the war funds.

Wartime Memories in the FHS Archive

Saturday's Child: the story of a wartime childhood by Joyce Davies (evacuee up to 1943)

Tiddly Music by Ivor Tully (evacuee who has returned to Fairford to live)

My war memories by William Gardner

Memories of Fairford 1930s and 40s by Peter Thompson

and in June Lewis's Cotswolds at War there are many references to Fairford.

A PASSAGE TO AUSTRALIA

In the 19th Century there was a mass migration of people from Great Britain to Australia. Contrary to popular belief it was not just convicts who got go 'down under', although between 1788 and 1868 about 160,000 convicts were transported to Australia. By the early years of the 19th Century Australia was in need of skilled workers and unskilled labourers so assisted passage schemes were instituted by the Australian States and the British Government and by the middle of the century over a quarter of a million immigrants had arrived from Britain. The decline in the number of people needed to

work in agriculture and the poor living and working conditions in the growing towns and cities of industrialised Britain together with the discovery of gold fields in Australia saw an increase in the demand for travel to the colony.

The only way to get to Australia in the 19th Century was a long journey by ship which, until the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, meant a voyage through the treacherous seas around Cape of Good Hope; a journey fraught with danger and extreme discomfort. The voyage from Britain to Australia in sailing ships took an average of 109 days but in the 1850s steamships were able to reduce the journey time to an average of 80 days. One of the earliest and best known of the steam-driven immigrant ships was Brunel's SS *Great Britain*. Completed in 1845 the ship and its owners had suffered a series of problems but in 1852 it commenced a long and very successful career taking immigrants to Australia.

GREAT BRITAIN TO AUSTRALIA.
CARRYING A MAIL.
NOTICE TO PASSENGERS AND SHIPPERS.

The "GREAT BRITAIN," S.S.



Will be despatched for MELBOURNE, PORT PHILIP, 10th June, booking passengers for Sydney, Adelaide, Launceston, and Geelong. Cargo can now be sent alongside.

PASSAGE,—£30 to 70 Guineas.

No Cargo will be received after Monday, 5th June; no *extra* luggage after Tuesday, 6th; no other luggage (hat boxes and carpet bags excepted), after Wednesday, 7th. All Lower Cabin passengers must be on board the vessel, in the Wellington Dock, by nine A.M. on Friday, the 9th June, to be passed by the Government Inspector. The Ship will leave the Dock and proceed to sea on Saturday, the 10th June.

Letters can be posted at any Post-office, but must be addressed "*per Great Britain via Liverpool*," prepaid. Newspapers must each have on a 1d. postage stamp.

Apply to GIBBS, BRIGHT, and CO. Liverpool.

This advertisement in the Gloucester Journal of 3 June 1854 shows that the price of a ticket ranged from about £2,500 to £5,500 in today's money but some passengers would have been subsidised by the assisted passage scheme. The connection with Fairford is that several members of families from the town: Cowley, Dawkins, Foreshew, Kimber, May, Telling and Underwood, emigrated to Australia in the mid-19th Century, some may well have travelled on the SS *Great Britain*.

The ship made its first voyage to Australia in 1852, carrying 630 emigrants, and continued to sail the Britain-to-Australia route for almost 30 years taking thousands of emigrants to their new lives. In 1882 the *Great Britain* was converted to a bulk coal carrier and had its steam engines removed, just relying on its huge sails. The ship was retired in 1886 and was berthed in the Falkland Islands as a storage hulk until 1970 when it was recovered on a pontoon and towed back to the UK for preservation. The SS *Great Britain*, the longest ship in the world when it was first built, is now preserved at Bristol and is well worth a visit – once things are back to normal.