

Fairford Flyer

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FAIRFORD HISTORY



SOCIETY

We hope you are enjoying these online newsletters. If anyone has anything they would like to contribute or have any local history questions please email enquiry@fairfordhistory.org.uk

Field-walking at Fairford by Eric Jones

During the past eight years I have been tramping the fields in an arc stretching over two miles from west to east for about a mile-and-a-half north of Fairford. The area covered is mainly towards the west but includes both sides of the river Coln. My real purpose has been watching birds but my eyes have often been on the ground at my feet. This form of field archaeology is not entirely systematic because it concentrates mostly on the field edges but nevertheless over the years I have tallied hundreds of hours of casual observation. The dry summer of 2020 made it easier to walk out on the plough-land (with permission) and because there were not many birds to count I spent tens of hours consciously looking at the surface of the land.

My finds fall into six categories. First, there are fossils. In *An Account of the Parish of Fairford in... Gloucester* (1741), Ralph Bigland states that Fairford is 'very productive of extraneous fossils.' Presumably he meant on the surface but perhaps in the many small quarries likely to have been open in his day. I cannot say I have found the same in the fields. The number of fossils is very low and they are of poor quality. Most are small molluscs plus two or three gastropods, and show up because their shape is noticeably different from the litter of tens of thousands of limestone fragments. Shape is what draws attention to the bulk of the finds listed in this note.



Secondly, there is a wide scatter of Bunter Sandstone (*Bunt Sandstein*) pebbles, some marble-sized but others as big as a good-sized tomato. They vary in colour (Bunt in German means colourful) and are occasionally veined with quartz. (Photograph 1) The sources are not very clear about their origin but they seem to have been washed down by glacial melt water or some great river of the remote past (a proto-Thames?). I might find as many as three or four in a morning if I am keeping a lookout for them. They reveal themselves as rounded and shiny amidst the jagged limestone, although a majority have now been partly broken or chipped by farm machinery.

Thirdly, comes the one prehistoric find, a hammerstone (also Photograph 1, on the left). It is not a neat specimen but fits nicely in the hand, which is one of the identifying criteria. Hammerstones occur all over the world and are the oldest human tools, used to chip flint. They have been made for millions of years and are individually undateable.



Fourth in my list are tile or pottery fragments, always small but noticeable because of their red colour. (Photograph 2) They are widely dispersed, with no clustering to suggest occupation sites. A potter tells me that my green-glazed examples are medieval and that the bits of brown glaze are also of that period and result from a difference in the firing. Bits of pottery used to be scattered over fields from the muck cart, where they had been picked up in the farm-yard manure, but there are virtually no fragments from obviously modern dates.

In fifth place is a handful of pieces of pipe-stem. (Photograph 3) The number is tiny, especially in contrast to a heap that Syd Flatman recovered from the site of the nineteenth-



century allotments at West End Gardens. The very thin piece may be older than that. Possibly it may date from when tobacco was especially dear and local men had to economise on its use.

The sixth and last category consists of what I have not found: Roman sherds or any coins at all. The pottery illustrated lacks the bright red of Roman Samian Ware. The saying may be, 'scratch Gloucester and find Rome', but it does not seem to apply in Fairford's fields despite the popular habit of attributing (too) much to the Romans. Moreover no coins of any date have come to light. A dozen or so years ago the Corinium Museum held a session in Fairford to which people were invited to bring their finds. Quite an array of coins was assembled, although no record was kept. The biggest collection belonged to a metal detectorist. All the coins displayed came from gardens in the town. Our ancestors do not seem to have sprinkled their loose change over the fields.

The Swing Riots at Fairford by Chris Hobson

This month is the 190th anniversary of what was one of the most serious civil disturbances in the long history of Fairford. In the early years of the 19th Century several factors resulted in a serious decline in the state of agriculture in England. Most badly affected were the farm labourers and their families. Wages were cut, living conditions were poor, and several bad harvests (some followed by severe winters) culminated in rising desperation for many of the poorer members of society. The situation came to a head in 1830 when the growing use of newly-invented threshing machines meant that fewer agricultural workers would be needed during the winter when threshing and other work was carried out. Without this winter work it was feared that increased poverty and starvation would inevitably follow.

To the Peasantry

OF THE

COUNTY OF GLOUCESTER.

The Government has required the Magistrates to take immediate measures for putting an end to the disorderly meetings now existing in open defiance of the Laws.

The Magistrates have called upon all well affected Persons to aid them in organizing a vigorous resistance to the disturbers of the public peace.

A Force is thus collecting, against which it will be impossible for you to contend.

We are most anxious to prevent the exercise of it.

We assure you, there is every disposition on the part of the Landowners and their Tenantry to listen to your grievances, and to afford all just and reasonable redress. But, it is impossible for those who are intrusted with the maintenance of peace and order, to enter on the consideration of your grievances, while they are made known to them only by disorder, and acts of violence.

For your own sakes, therefore, we implore you to return quietly to your work, to enable us to call a Meeting of your Masters and their Landlords, to take your condition into their consideration, which we pledge ourselves to do; as soon as your return to good order, will justify our interference on your behalf.

SHERBORNE.
APSLEY.
JAMES DUTTON.
J. RAYMOND BARKER.
J. TREVOR.

JOHN BROWN.
H. E. WALLER.
I. B. NEWELL.
JOSEPH CRIPPS.

EDWARD CRIPPS.
CORNELIUS PITT.
WILLIAM PRICE.
WILLIAM LAWRENCE.

WILLIAM FOWLER, PRINTER, GIRENCESTER.

From the autumn of 1830 the sporadic destruction of threshing machines and incidents of arson at farms across the southern half of England gradually escalated until what became known as the Swing Riots broke out posing a challenge that the Government could not ignore. On 26 November a group of local men (one account mentions 100 but is probably an exaggeration) attacked the premises of John Savory and Richard Rose, both machine makers of Milton End, Fairford. The mob also destroyed a chaff-cutting machine (value £3) on the premises of wheelwright Joseph Jenkins of East End. Blows were struck on both sides and the Savory family had to barricade themselves in their house and £85 worth of property was destroyed; this would be equivalent to nearly £6,000 in 2020 terms. Richard Rose had four of his threshing machines completely destroyed. The lord of the manor John Raymond Barker was unable to persuade any of his tenants or other residents of Fairford to be sworn in as special constables to help him quell the riot. Undaunted he went alone

to meet the rioters in an attempt to encourage them to disperse and go home but he was met with threats of violence and had to return to Fairford Park and request help from the Government. The Reverend John Keble also made a courageous but futile attempt to stop the rioters from causing further destruction. It appears that no more damage was done after the 26th but the men identified in the trouble at Fairford were rounded up within the next few days, fortunately before a troop of Lancers arrived in the town on 1 December.

The majority of the 18 men arrested at Fairford lived in Milton End with others living in East End and in Horcot. One man, James Clappen, was not resident in Fairford but lived in Down Ampney. The average age of the men was 27 years and 7 months with the youngest, William Sparrow, being 16 and the oldest, John Lewis, being 46. All the men were recorded in the court records as labourers with the exception of John Draper who was a carpenter. Remarkably John Draper's father was also a machine maker in Milton End but his premises were not attacked. However, his son's presence in the mob probably caused some family tension although Mr Draper senior's competitors were put out of business for a while, which might have been seen by him as an advantage! The 18 men were committed to trial at the Gloucester Quarter Sessions on 5 January 1831 by Fairford's magistrate John Raymond Barker and Kempsford's vicar Reverend Thomas Huntingford.

At the trial John Raymond Barker gave good character references for several of the accused which probably goes some way to explaining the variations in sentencing. Isaac Boulton was seen to have been gathering the mob and then lead the attack on John Savory's premises but he must have been a well-respected and hard-working resident because several letters were sent to the court appealing for clemency on his behalf. Richard Iles sent a petition supported by John Raymond Barker and Jacob Vines and letters of support were also written by the Reverend John Keble and Fairford's curate the Reverend Robey Eldridge. Remarkably even Mr. Joseph Cripps, MP and Chairman of the Quarter Sessions lent his support when forwarding the petition to Lord Melbourne, the Home Secretary. Even though Isaac Boulton was known to have been one of the ring leaders of the riot in Fairford, the volume of local support resulted in a free pardon and his sentence of seven years transportation quashed.

The 18 men arrested in Fairford were:

Richard Adams (discharged)	George Hignell (discharged)
Isaac Boulton (discharged)	William Jones (9 months gaol)
James Carver (discharged)	Edward Keylock (discharged)
James Clappen (discharged)	John Lewis (6 months gaol)
Robert Cowley (transported for 7 years)	William May (discharged)
John Draper (discharged)	John Mitchell (transported for 7 years)
Charles Ferris (2 years gaol)	Thomas Mitchell (discharged)
Charles Gillett (discharged)	Christopher Ponting (transported for 7 years)
Charles Harvey (9 months gaol)	William Sparrow (discharged)

Three of the men were transported to Australia along with 221 other convicts leaving on the *Eliza* which sailed on 2 February 1831 and arrived at Hobart, Tasmania on 29 May. All three Fairford men received a free pardon on 3 March 1836 after just five years but two of them, Robert Cowley and John Mitchell, remained in Australia. Christopher Ponting had returned home to Mount Pleasant in Fairford by 1841 and remained an agricultural labourer for the rest of his working life. He died in March 1878 at the age of 88.

Fairford was not the only place to experience serious disturbance during the Swing Riots of November 1830. The court at Gloucester also tried 84 others (including one woman) who attacked machine makers at the following locations: Beverstone (22 committed for trial), Eastleach Turville/Martin (13), Bibury (12), Southrop (9), Coln St Aldwyns (3), Quenington (3), Coln Rogers (2), and one each at Horsley and Turkdean. Twenty one of these were transported to Australia.

To the majority of agricultural workers and their families the rioters were seen as heroes while to the authorities, especially those in the centres of power in London, they were seen as villains and the Government acted swiftly and imposed severe penalties; 19 men from other counties were executed. What is interesting and perhaps surprising is the degree of support that many of those who took part in the riots received from local

authorities and from middle class residents, not just in Fairford but in other towns and villages in Gloucestershire. This perhaps reflects the tacit recognition by many of the real hardship being faced by most farm workers. Many of the rioters were of previous good character and had their sentences reduced and others were discharged on their own recognisance thanks to petitions and letters of support. The farmers and machine makers who had their property destroyed and their livelihood affected presumably did not share these views.

The Swing Riots are now a largely forgotten episode in history but one in which many of the small towns and villages in the southern part of Britain, like Fairford, became briefly involved in national political life.

More information on the Swing Riots can be found in ‘*Gloucestershire machine breakers: the story of the 1830 riots*’ by Jill Chambers.

Common Lane

You may not know that the public footpath that runs from Cirencester Road (opposite the electricity sub-station) up to the Welsh Way (formerly known as Blackford Road) and comes out next to Saxon Way was once called Common Way or Lane and marked on the 1754 Inclosure Map. Having walked up there recently there are all the signs of it being a well-defined track across the Common Fields, east of Fairford which was the area being inclosed, i.e the common land divided up and separated by ditches and quickset hedges and sold off as parcels of land.



1754 Inclosure Map

North at the top (Common Lane runs north to south to the left)

The Byes Farm on the map is Milton Farm (the small group of trees two thirds up) The green path across the map called the Milking Path.

Common Lane 2020

- the northern end
- the southern end



Gloucestershire Echo, April 1968

Dr Who, Zoe and Jamie in Fairford

A crowd of more than 50 children gathered outside the Bull Hotel at Fairford last night in the hope of seeing one of their favourites from the BBC Television series Dr Who.

Stars of the series are in Fairford for the filming of the outside sequences for the new series Dr Who and the Invasion which is due to be screened at the end of October.

The autograph hunters did not see Dr Who himself (Patrick Troughton), but they did meet his companion Jamie (Frazer Hines).

They were filming at Williamstrip Farm and at RAF Fairford using the Hercules aircraft based there.

(The DVD of this series is available but actually it is a little disappointing. I didn't recognise Williamstrip Farm and there was only a very short sequence at RAF Fairford).