

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

Syd Flatman thought readers might be interested in this.

Extract from the Cotswolds at War by June Lewis Jones. Revised edition, 2009 p139-140

Careless talk, costs lives!!

“When some of the East Enders evacuated to Fairford bridled at having to address one of the Woman’s Voluntary Service (WVS) as ‘lady’, after she had reminded them she was not plain ‘missus’, they murmured that Hirtzel had a decidedly foreign ring to it – especially as the lady in question did not seem to know anything about pease pudding! Lady Hirtzel, in turn, murmured, but rather more loudly to fellow helpers, that ‘she had heard from someone who knew someone else that ought to know’ Fifth Columnists were at Barrow Elm. ‘There were people there called Jones, who kept out of the way, and a couple called Ustinov – very east European; the husband was something in “secret service”; the wife could be seen making sketches of the Cotswold countryside, and there was a son doing something somewhere.’ The son, of course, as Peter Ustinov has related many times, served as a private in the British Army. His father, Jonah was part Russian but had German nationality in the First World War when he was in the German Air Force. He later threw his medals away and motivated by his hatred of Nazism became part of MI5 and after escaping the Russian regime with his young wife, Nadia Benois – talented artist, daughter of the architect to the Tsar, thus giving Sir Peter Ustinov British birth in 1921. In order to get British nationality to serve in MI5, Jonah Ustinov - code name Klop, had to get sponsorship and publicly declare his intention of becoming British in a newspaper to allow any opponents of the move to raise any objection. As this was too risky to do given his former role as press attaché at the German Embassy.....Klop conspired with the British Intelligence Service that the announcement should be made in a Welsh language newspaper, under the correct assumption that the Gestapo was unlikely to have sufficient experts in Welsh to decipher his intentions. Klop carried out daring and dangerous work during the war in intelligence and rescue work in Holland, Portugal and Switzerland....[After the war] Jonah Ustinov resisted pleas from publishers to write about his war work, but Nadia hinted at it in her book ‘Klop and the Ustinov family’ written after his death. They had retired to Tudor Cottage at Eastleach. Among Nadia’s friends were Lord and Lady Howard of Dean Farm and Nadia revelled in Francis’s modest account of how as a member of Commando 62, he took part in a successful raid [on a lighthouse and radio station] in Normandy... A later raid in 1942, planned to land close to St Honorine to scale the cliffs and attack a German emplacement from behind, went hideously wrong as they landed much further east, on what would later become Omaha Beach, only to be faced by Germans, alerted by a barking dog. The Groups commanding



officer and two other Commandos were killed. Lord Howard sustained a serious leg injury, which severely handicapped him the rest of his life and after a long period in a prison hospital was repatriated the following year. Typical of his wry humour he voiced his amazement that he might be the only British soldier not to receive a medal for active service in the war, whereas he had been reliably informed that the dog was awarded the Iron Cross which it wore on his collar for the rest of the war!"

Illustration 1: Klop from an oil painting by his wife, Nadia Benois

Illustration 2 Lord and Lady Howard (left and right) with Father MacSweeney at St Thomas of Canterbury Church, Horcott in 1957



Enquiries

In the last few weeks we have seen a rise in family and local history enquiries. We are always pleased to help. These range from burials in St Mary's Churchyard, patients at the Retreat, and family history. Sometimes we can help and sometimes we can't. Two of the more interesting ones recently follow and I apologise for the first as I originally said that Covid would not be mentioned in these newsletters, but this is a special case. Clive Fewins phoned, he had visited St Mary's on March 21st and was inspired to write a poem.

Fairford Church, Gloucestershire. March 21st

I crept into the church and closed the door
Empty. Silence. The perfect place to flee
from the world for timid guys like me.

I walked towards the window in the west
Those colourful Devils! They were busy then...
Now the Plague Devil's coming again.

It all came home, the terror of The Plague.
How it recurred in various forms. Today,
a different guise. Covid. Where? And how?

A quick prayer. Went out, thinking: those
vivid figures...What colour does he wear
The Covid Devil that haunts us this year?

He subsequently wrote a few more and decided to publish a book of poems to raise money for the NHS Charities Together Covid-19 Appeal. Unfortunately Clive ran into publishing delays and then his sources of distribution failed when bookshops closed during lockdown. He was just asking if FHS could publicise his book. If you would like a copy please contact me at enquiry@fairfordhistory.org.uk or my personal email. This is the blurb:

“Life under Lockdown - a (not too serious) diary in verse March -July 2020

Looking for an unusual charity Christmas gift? This little poetry book reflects one man’s day-by-day view of the unique times we have lived through this year through some 100 poems. It’s both witty and thought-provoking - a clever record of so many details we shall soon be looking back on and hardly believing: the closed churches, the quiet, the hunt for loo-rolls, the isolation, the little kindnesses, the freedom of time on our hands, the fear.... The poems are a roller-coaster of ups and downs from laughter to tears. It is a volume to treasure and to pass on to future generations who will ask ‘what was it like Grandad, living through 2020?’

This not-for-profit hard-back poetry book by Clive Fewins of East Hanney, illustrated by Stuart Roper, will be available from November for £12 with at least £5 of every copy sold going to the ‘NHS Charities Together Covid-19 Appeal’ (and much more than that if all 500 first editions sell quickly).

Judy Dewey, historian, publisher and Curator of Wallingford Museum”

From the US

Another interesting enquiry started off with a phone called from the United States, from someone who had found a picture in his attic of the Fairford Market Square with the Church in the background. He thought it was 15th century. Would we like it?

He subsequently sent the image:



When we saw it we knew it must have been painted after 1839 as that was when Foresheew was landlord of the George. It is oil on wood and 13 x 17 inches. It has a kind of rustic charm, maybe painted by someone remembering Fairford from afar. We asked what cost would be involved and have not heard a thing since, but we do have the image. If any of you art experts out there have an opinion please let us know.

From the Newspapers

Wilts and Glos Standard September 14 1995

Local people anxious to avoid a falling bomb during the last war had only to take the advice of a local clergyman, it seems.

Mr M V Goodfield of Malmesbury passes on the advice, so if you feel vulnerable, take heed.

He said 'The clergy man a local vicar, advised everyone that all you had to do during an air raid was to sit aside a low wall and then fall down on the opposite side of it to the bomb'.

Wilts and Glos Standard 17 September 1998

When the town was filled with tanks

Like most towns Fairford has its share of parking problems, but at least it doesn't have troubles nowadays with tanks.

No, we're not talking water tanks, oil tanks, fish tanks or anything so relatively easy to handle, we're talking big, heavy, noisy armoured tanks, the things men go to war in.

Peggy Edmunds, who was born in Fairford and has lived there all her life, told of us the time more than 50 years ago when the town was virtually a garrison.

"Hundreds of troops came and went through Fairford during the last war", she said.

Officers were based at Park House, which has since been demolished with Farmor's School built on the site".

Peggy, of Courtbrook, contacted us after we published a photograph of officers from the 2nd Battalion, Norfolk Regiment taken in Fairford, as the Regiment prepared to move to Fairford to India in 1942.

We asked why regiments moving abroad were sent via Fairford.

Peggy was able to tell us that the Norfolks were by no means the only regiment to do so and that many others did their training in Fairford Park. "They often stayed here for about a year," she said.

The Pioneer Corps, she had remembered, had built what later became an American service hospital on the Quenington Road.

And there were Nissen huts all over the Park for the troops", she said.

Other soldiers who passed through Fairford, she said included those from the Manchester and Essex Regiments.

And then came the American Tank Corps," she said. "There were tanks everywhere, lined up throughout the town.

"The American Cavalry also came with several hundred men."

David Perry also rang from Fairford to confirm the use of Park House as an Officers' Mess.

"Many regiments trained in the Park," he said, "and I remember seeing the troops around". Park House, he said, had been the home of Colonel Palmer, a member of the Huntly and Palmer's biscuit empire. "He died in 1940 and his widow lived there for a while," he said.

[Mrs Palmer in fact moved to Burdocks in Rhymes Lane.]

Syd Flatman, another Fairford resident, said the Palmers rented the house from the Barker family.

Eddie Cuss of Cirencester told us that Park House was in fact requisitioned by the army in 1939.

Many soldiers spent a six to eight week training course there," he said.

The Sergeant-Major growled at the young soldier: "I didn't see you at camouflage training this morning."
"Thank you very much, sir."