

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

Gloucestershire Stone Stile Project

For the last few months during Lockdown Peter Wilson (from the Woodchester Valley Retirement Village) has have been running, with the support of CPRE and CNFC and help from local ramblers, a project collecting photographs and locations of stone stiles in Gloucestershire. A decade or so ago there was a similar exercise recording the locations of those in the AONB. In addition to that early collection of 300 stiles by Richard Keyte we have upwards of another c. 450 current photographically-recorded stiles collected by over 125 volunteers. Naturally there are overlaps. Parish Councils are helping and CPRE hopes that this Gloucestershire project will become a national pilot.

Technology having moved forward in the past decade the aim is now to create a permanent, on line, photographic record and add to it informative historical, geographical, geological and archaeological notes for the enjoyment of walkers. For example we have hints that some slab stones from stiles may be recycled millstones, also suggestions that some may have been taken from nearby barrows, and contributors are wondering, for example, if a stile was placed on a pathway diversion when a 'new' farmstead was built. Some predate the enclosure period, but most relate to the Enclosure period when the route of ancient pathways had to be maintained but barriers were erected to prevent sheep and cattle escaping. More recently there are local stiles which illustrate the transition in the mid-19th century from stone to metal stiles ...

FHS has recorded and photographed the 8 Fairford stone stiles i.e BFA 10 (Cat's Lodge path, BFA 11, 12 Mill Lane, Milton St and Quenington Road areas) and has sent these in. The question for FHS members is 'are there any more in our local area?' If you would like to get involved please contact FHS enquiry@fairfordhistory.org.uk or Peter.Wilson@woodchestervalleyvillage.co.uk

Mill Lane Stile 1960



Fairford and the rolling English road by Eric Jones

Drunkards are said to have made the rolling English road but the truth is that diversions and dangerous bends were typically made by selfish landowners. Fairford is a classic case. Before the Barkers built Fairford Park, the road to Quenington ran north alongside the river Coln. The road to Eastleach ran north-east across the park until in the 1770s it was pushed out to form what is now Leafield Road.

More obviously, what is now the A417 coming from Cirencester makes a right-angle at the town bridge to avoid a high wall which is from time to time demolished by some unwary driver. The road is then forced through narrow streets. Once – probably until late medieval times – it ran straight across the north side of the market place and along the Croft to rejoin the present main road. Nor is this absurd diversion the only one along the A417, for the twenty-five mile stretch with Fairford at the mid-point is a museum of road capture.



Start with Cirencester Park, largely the seventeenth-century creation of the Bathursts. Cirencester was robbed of its route to Minchinhampton and Bisley by the formation of the park and building of the new Stroud Road (A419 here). Who would resist, or could do so successfully? East of Cirencester along the A417 we come to Ampney Park, another unnatural right-angle. Traffic has to veer abruptly away from the high gates to the park; there have been several crashes, including fatalities. Plainly the route once went on down the drive past the big house, heading towards the church. The simplest hypothesis is indeed that early roads ran from church to church, as marking the centres of settlements. When such a route is blocked the suspicion arises that a road has been usurped.

Next to the east the road seems to bell out around Can Court and again at Easington, the latter formerly more prominent than now. The house is late nineteenth century in date but has a cottage of 1648. Afterwards we reach Fairford, a prime place for road capture. From there we come to Lechlade, where the internal roads have been much altered. And on to the last major example on 'our' stretch. This is at Faringdon, where the road bears right near the sewage works but a track shows that originally it went straight on, through Faringdon Park towards the church. This was deduced from ground evidence by a retired professor of geology. Vehicles are obliged to mount a gradient, something that mattered in the days of horse traffic. On the far side of Faringdon church another landowner, a *nouveau riche* London chemist, pushed the Burford road further out. But in 1833 local tradesmen obtained an Act of Parliament to restore a more convenient line.

How and when were deviations created? Some, like that on the A417 at Fairford, are early and undocumented, probably insisted on by some powerful man. Others show up in the records, especially once the Highways Act of 1773 made it easy for a landowner to get his magistrate pals to agree that a diversion was in the public interest, no matter the inconvenience to other road users. Many identifiable diversions date from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Ampney Park probably falls into that category since in the late

eighteenth century Viscount Torrington said Mrs Blackwell's house there would make a good park, which must accordingly post-date 1787.

What was the point of road capture? Expressed aims were privacy, freedom from passing traffic, uninterrupted views over parkland, and social display. The motive of privacy may seem strange given the number of servants in big houses, but they could be told to use the backstairs and were widely dehumanised by being renamed John or Jane to save employers the trouble remembering their birth names. The great landscape gardener, Humphrey Repton, said that when a view 'looks as if it belonged to another... it robs the mind of the pleasure derived from appropriation.' As to harm done to the public, the modern editor of Pevsner's *Oxfordshire* points out that the landed classes had no social conscience.

The Catholic School in Horcott by Ruth Dipple

(Originally published in the St. Thomas of Canterbury, Fairford and St. Mary's Cricklade Newsletter 17 January 2021 and reproduced with permission by the author)



Almost from the laying of the foundations of St Thomas's, future plans included the building of a school. In the 1860's when Catholic life was becoming more established in the area, Fr Seddon instigated ambitious plans for Swindon, Fairford and Cirencester, which included the building of the presbytery and a school in Fairford and Swindon. Work commenced on the school in Swindon by 1864, but the necessary funds to complete the work at Fairford were harder to come by and it was only in 1867 that the School House (circled in red on the aerial photo from 1961) was built.

For some time there had been concern among Catholics that the extension of education, which culminated in compulsory education for children up to the age of twelve under the terms of Forster's Education Act of 1870, would mean that Catholic children had to attend Protestant schools. Hence the decision to forestall that eventuality by building parish schools.

The Wilts & Glos Standard for 9th Feb 1867 reported: '**Catholic School at Horcutt.** A school for the education of Catholic Children has been built at Horcutt, adjacent to the chapel, Miss Mary Powell being the schoolmistress pro tem. It is under the superintendence of the Rev. P. Seddon. The building is in the Gothic style and reflects great credit upon the builder, Mr George Farmer, of Fairford.'

Miss Powell (who may have been related the Iles family) was soon replaced by Timothy McCarthy, an Irishman born in Cork in 1837, who came to live with his young family in the schoolhouse. His wife, Elizabeth, served as schoolmistress. They had probably met during Timothy's previous appointment at a small school in Coleford. Contemporary correspondence describes a rather miserable existence for the teacher and his family:

all suffered ill health through 'want of sufficient nourishment' and living costs in Fairford, especially coal, were very high.

In 1873 there were 36 children in the school, but by no means all were Catholic: by 1876 only seven out of the then 25 were Catholic. Timothy died in 1874, perhaps as a result of his privations, and was succeeded by Mr John Drake and his wife, who were experienced a severe weather event in 1877:

The Wilts & Glos Standard for 18th August 1877 reported heavy thunderstorms during that week, which resulted in water running down the High Street and Milton Street. It was also reported that 'The Catholic Chapel Schoolhouse at Horcutt, in the occupation of Mr Drake, was struck by lightning, and the tiling on the roof damaged. The lightning passed down the staircase. No one was injured'

Whether this event discombobulated the Drake family or for some other reason, by 1881 they had gone and been replaced by Miss Louisa Maria Joll, aged 36, who had been born in Middlesex and ten years earlier was teaching in Belle Vue School, Hurstpierpoint, Cuckfield, Sussex, which was presumably a small private school. The school finally closed in 1888, partly due to the opening of an Anglican school in Whelford, and partly due, one imagines, to lack of demand and the cost of maintaining a teacher by a relatively small congregation. The building was used as a parish hall for a short time in the twentieth century, but was eventually sold.

The windows adjacent to the churchyard are those of the classroom, with the living quarters behind. Next time you sit on the Millennium Garden you might want to think of poor Mr McCarthy and his family struggling to keep going in the schoolhouse.

Cotswolds Sayings

(from Cotswold Characteristics by June Lewis. Published by Estragon, 1971)

As hard as the devil's hutting bag

As happy as a cat in a tripe shop

As thin as a rasher of wind

Puffing like a broken-winded teapot

Like a pig with one ear (lop-sided)

Tough as old boots

Rough and ready as a rat-catcher's dog

Like a fool in a fit

Shines like a shilling on a sweep's bottom (I love this, it conjures up such a picture!)

As sure of God's in Gloucestershire

A slow as coming as Cotswold barley

Mumbles like a dumbledore (bee) in a pitcher

Scawts about like a rat up a drainpipe

Dialect Cotswolds Euphemisms

" 'eed take the church if 'ee could get's arms round 'un" (light-fingered thief)

"A fly by night" (unreliable)

"' as shaves once a week, whether 'ee wants one or no" (scruffy man)

" 'ees under petticoat government" (hen-pecked husband)

" ' ee 'ad a good hiding when 'ee was young for givin' summat away an' 'ent forgot it" (mean person)

" ' eed fascinate a rattlesnake" (a smooth talker)

"The chimney smokes" (a quarrel in a house)

" 'er couldn't cook a man's shaving water" (a poor cook)