

# Fairford Flyer

## Extra No 35

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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](mailto:enquiry@fairfordhistory.org.uk)

As it is Remembrance month the next meeting on November 18th is by a representative from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Barbara Cooper is going to talk on the history of the CWGC. In St Mary's Churchyard there are seven CWGC headstones, four from the First World War and three from the Second World War. On special offer that evening will be copies on sale at £5 of *Fairford's Local Heroes*, the story of Fairford's War Memorial and a record of the sacrifice of a Gloucestershire town in the two World Wars.

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David Nathan gave an interesting and informative talk on the toy manufacturer Frank Hornby (1863-1936), the inventor of Meccano and Hornby Trains and subsequently Dinky Toys.

Frank was a bookkeeper but his passion was to create educational toys for boys. He started making a construction toy for his sons out of metal and soon realised if the parts were made interchangeable then the building of complex mechanisms was fairly simple. His first toys were marketed as Mechanics Made Easy but the name was changed to Meccano in 1908.

What came across in the talk was that he was a brilliant entrepreneur, starting off small in the early 1900s and gradually building the business until he had large factories and sold his products all over the world. He was able to see the change in markets adapting to different social circumstances of the early

decades of the twentieth century. He worked out that it was more profitable to have only one retailer per a certain proportion of the population and to these retailers he 'sold' good-looking display cases to show the products off to the best effect, which was very appealing to small boys and their parents. It is interesting that Meccano has still kept to the Imperial measurements of the early pieces but today is being made in France and is owned by a Canadian company.

Around 1920 the Hornby clockwork 'O' Gauge enamelled trains and accessories were introduced which were later developed into electric train sets. These train sets were very popular but required a lot of space and many post-war houses were not large so in 1938 the table-top Hornby Dublo 'OO' model railway system was introduced.

In the early 1930s Dinky Toys die-cast miniature model cars were produced. There were difficulties with the type of metal being used and during the Second World War metal toys were not made because metal was required for armaments so Dinky Toys did not really take off until after the war.

Frank died in 1936 and his son Roland took over the business, however he was not such a progressive thinker as his father and was slow to convert to plastic materials. The firm went from healthy profits to serious debts and was sold in 1964 to Tri-ang.

David Nathan brought along a number of items for members to look at including books and the very interesting Meccano magazines. It was certainly a talk that brought back memories of childhood for many of the audience.

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## Local connections

Recently we were on holiday in North Devon; we are always interested in the local history of the place we stay in. Imagine our surprise when we found a connection to Fairford, albeit somewhat tenuous!

You may remember the story of Brictric and Matilda. Brictric was a Saxon thegn, son of Algar who owned a great deal of land all over south west England. As a young man Brictric was the English ambassador to Flanders at the court of Count Baldwin V. Brictric was said to be very good-looking. The teenage daughter, Matilda second daughter of the Count, took a fancy to Brictric, however Brictric rejected her advances and prudently he returned back across the Channel. In about 1051 Matilda married William, Duke of Normandy who later conquered Britain in 1066 and became William I, King of England. All Brictric's lands were seized and Matilda, not one to forget her rejection, had Brictric thrown into prison at Winchester where he later died. This story is recorded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by Master Wace in his Chronicle of the Norman Conquest titled *Roman du Rou* which was later translated by Edgar Taylor 1837. The Domesday Book of 1086 records that the Manor of Fairford had been owned by Brictric but was then given to Queen Matilda.

The Manor of Northam near Bideford in North Devon was part of the lands owned by Brictric. A document dated 1068 was found in Caen in France and it records that William the Conqueror's Queen leased the Manor of Northam to the Bishop of Caen, presumably for helping in the invasion in 1066. When Matilda died in 1083 she gave the Manor of Northam to the Bishop of Caen to receive its revenue, which must have been a good income for the Bishop. Queen Matilda and William I were buried at Caen around 1083. In 1449 the Manor of Northam reverted to the Crown.

In Fairford's case the Manor remained a Royal Manor (the Tame's had leased the Manor of Fairford from the Crown) until 1546 when the younger Sir Edmund Tame's widow Katherine married Walter Buckler and in 1547 the Crown granted them the manor in fee as part of an exchange of land.

From Northam Burrows by Philip Waters North Devon Museum Trust, 2005  
Victoria County History Vol 7 Fairford

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## Southrop Airfield

The U3A Industrial Heritage Group along with FHS members were taken on a walk led by Syd Flatman to view remains of Southrop Airfield and the wartime buildings of Macaroni Woods. The first stop was to see the top of an old airfield defence pillbox left on the edge of the airfield, the bottom of it having long gone. It would have looked like this, picture 2. This is a design called the Norcon pillbox, one of two built of pre-cast concrete and erected on the airfield.



Then we went on to the edge of the old airfield which had grass runways covered with metal planking. Parts of the concrete paths and tracks remain. There is also a pill box of a unique style (possibly a double Norcon pillbox design) embedded into a wall which surrounds what seems to have been a farm yard. However, the Pillbox Study Group (<http://www.pillbox-study-group.org.uk/>) suggests that the concrete house might have been the airfield's Watch Office. Some of us were able to get a glimpse of a barn owl; a nesting box has been placed into one of the buildings. Not far from the house was a circular concrete structure that looked very

much like a well but the Pillbox Study Group suggests that it might have been a transportable Lewis anti-aircraft machine gun position.

We went on to another concrete pathway where there was the remains of a blast shelter (a roofless air raid shelter) hidden in the woods. This was a brick construction and was quite well preserved



Blast shelter



Wartime buildings in Macaroni Woods

Bases of old RAF buildings were still visible and Syd said that they were not taken away until as late as 1969. Southrop Airfield was a relief landing ground for the wartime flying schools at South Cerney, Brize Norton and Little Rissington. It was opened as a satellite to No. 2 Service Flying Training School, Brize Norton in August 1940. A variety of training aircraft used the airfield including single-engined, two-seat Harvards and biplane Audaxes as well as the larger twin-engined Airspeed Oxfords. Flight training took place by both day and night, flares being used to mark the runways in the dark hours. The Southrop site also accommodated armament and navigational training rooms, an intelligence library and a photographic block. The WAAF quarters, RAF barracks and a hospital block were sited in Macaroni Woods. The maximum accommodation was around 820 RAF and 126 WAAF and although not all would have been there at the same time. Southrop was one of the largest relief landing grounds in the country in terms of personnel. Flying ceased by the end of 1945 and the airfield was closed in following year. In Macaroni Woods were many old buildings including Maycrete huts and an old air raid shelter which was in fairly good condition with an impressive ribbed and bolted interior although the entrance was slightly difficult.



Being a flying training school it was inevitable that there would be some aircraft accidents and in fact 12 airmen lost their lives at or close to Southrop during the War, although not all of them were from units based at Southrop at the time.

Thanks to Syd and Pete Evans the leader of the U3A Industrial Heritage Group for an interesting walk on an autumnal afternoon. Photos Chris and Nick Hobson.

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November marks the 191<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the Swing Riots in southern England. The agricultural workers were desperate to better their circumstances, because of poor living conditions, low wages, 3 years of poor harvests and the threat on the introduction of threshing machines. Below are two newspaper cuttings referring to the event in Fairford. Mr Barker had tried to get local men to enrol as special constables but they had refused.

### **Oxford University and City Herald 27 November 1830**

We understand from the Bath coachman, that a mob of peasantry were assembled at Fairford, Gloucestershire yesterday morning, and broke all the agricultural machinery they could come near; and as the coach passed through them, they held up their hammers and cheered the passengers.

### **Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette 2 December 1830**

On Friday morning, the Swindon troop was again under arms, Captain Goddard resuming the command. The men were again marched off to Highworth, Cricklade, etc. where, however, there was, fortunately, no absolute occasion for their services. During their march an express came to Captain Goddard, from Fairford, in Gloucestershire, earnestly requesting the assistance of his troop at that town, a large body of tumultuous persons having assembled there, and there being no force to oppose them. After consulting a magistrate of Gloucestershire Capt Goddard proposed to his men, to comply with the requisition; and though not enrolled to act out of their county, they gallantly consented to go, and proceeded to Fairford, where they dispersed a mob of upwards of 200.

## **Fairford History – Month by Month**

### **From the Newspapers & other Records**

#### **100 Years ago this month**

‘The one that got away’. Fox hunting is a very controversial and emotive topic. Fairford was a regular meeting place for the Vale of White Horse hunt for many years. The following report of an unsuccessful hunt was printed in the Gloucestershire Echo on 28 November 1921:

“Finding an afternoon fox at Cat’s Lodge, hounds hunted slowly by Furzey Hill, over the Fairford-Cirencester road, entering Lord Bathurst’s country. Going by Fairford Park, through the Grove to Lea Wood, he doubled back across Fairford Park and through the Grove, holding Lea Wood on the right. Hounds were run out of scent at Hatherop after a slow 90 minutes.”

#### **200 Years ago this month**

The Bristol Mirror of 10 November 1821 had the following small advertisement which was inserted by the Royal Mail and General Coach Office of Corn Street, Bristol:

“OXFORD. ROYAL MAIL, every morning at 7 o’ clock, through Bath, Tetbury, Cirencester, Fairford, Lechlade, Farringdon, Kingston, to the Angel Inn, Oxford.”

Kingston is Kingston Bagpuize just off the A420 road to Oxford. The Angel Inn was a hotel and coaching inn in the High Street in Oxford. It closed in 1865 and most of it was demolished in 1876 to make way for the Oxford University’s Examination schools but No. 83 and 84 High Street, which were the hotel’s coffee rooms, still survive.

#### **300 Years ago this month**

There was only one entry in the Fairford parish register in November 1721 when Mary Ratcliff, a widow, was buried in the churchyard on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

#### **400 Years ago this month**

The only entry in the parish register for November 1621 was that William “the reputed son of William Browne and Ann Greene” was christened on the 18<sup>th</sup>. Sadly baby William was buried by the Reverend Christopher Nicholson on 10 December having lived just a few weeks. He was recorded in the parish register under his mother’s maiden name.