

# Fairford Flyer

## Extra No 39

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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 has been on our minds of late this issue is devoted to the weather! Not surprisingly the effects of storms are similar to today but perhaps we have more warning.

The next meeting is on March 17 at 7.30pm when the topic will be the history of Lechlade 'Location, Location, Location!' by Marian Winckles, Chair of Lechlade History Society. It is easy to understand the title as Lechlade is the highest navigable place on the River Thames and the Halfpenny and St John's Bridges were important crossings. This talk was scheduled for March 2020 in return for a talk given by Chris at Lechlade History Society but was delayed due to Covid.

Photo: St John's Bridge, Lechlade



### Fairford Farms by Edwin Cuss - the February meeting

Edwin, born and raised in Fairford although he now lives in Cirencester, has been collecting postcards and photographs of Fairford for over 50 years. These pictures were from his collection. A large audience of at least 60 people enjoyed this talk swelled by a number of former local farmers and people who featured in some of the photographs. What increases the enjoyment of any of Edwin's talk is his amazing knowledge and background information about each picture.

There were nine local farms: Horcott, Rhymes Barn, Totterdown, Moor, Manor, Milton, Waiten Hill, Home, and Park Farm. At Home Farm patients at the Retreat Asylum worked in the fields, the fresh air and exercise thought to speed their recovery. As well as working at Home Farm they would have worked on the land behind the Retreat where they grew garden produce for the Asylum (photo: the Horcott Road rugby field looking east with the back of Milton Chapel visible left of centre.)



Edwin also covered the Fairford, Faringdon, Filkins and Burford Ploughing Society, traction engines, East Glos Engineering (where Edwin's father worked), and girls, smallholders, dairies and the livestock Market.

Did you know that there was a weighbridge in the road by the church wall? - now long gone. (Photo left)

Edwin then showed pictures of all the different Farms, including the surviving working farms.

As there were members of the audience who were once local farmers on or were in some way connected and/or lived in

the Farms shown this was a trip down Memory Lane. Even those who were not involved in farming enjoyed the nostalgic pictures of rural scenes with animals, old farm machinery and the 1950s wearing apparel. This was a pictorial progression of over 100 years of farming in Fairford from the use of animals on the farm to the first basic tractors and harvesting machines as illustrated below.



Photos below: Fairford Market about 1890.

The 1986 reopening of the Market with Dorothy Paton, Mayor and Maurice Jones, Town Crier



Thanks Edwin and we look forward to the next presentation.

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### The Great Storm by Chris Hobson

The February storms called Storm Dudley, Storm Eunice and Storm Franklin, perhaps so nicely named to disguise their ferocity, attracted much publicity in the press, radio, television and social media. A few journalists went way over the top calling Storm Eunice one of the worst storms in living memory; perhaps they were youngsters and had not heard of the storms of 1953 or 1987 or 1990. As bad as Dudley, Eunice and Franklin were, and Fairford got off quite lightly compared with other parts of the UK, they were nowhere near as destructive as the Great Storm of 1703. This event was the worst storm in the recorded history of Great Britain and we know much about its impact thanks to Daniel Defoe, the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, who requested people to write to him with their experiences. Fairford's vicar at the time was the Reverend Edward Shipman and he wrote to Defoe telling him about the damage inflicted on St Mary's church by the storm. In 1704 Defoe published a book with accounts of the storm damage including a letter written by the Reverend Shipman which gave an account on the storm damage on his church.



On the night of 26/27 November 1703 the southern half of England as well as northern parts of France, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands were struck by a storm of hurricane proportions. There was no form of weather forecasting in the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century so there was little warning of the disaster that was about to happen. The storm reached land from the Atlantic Ocean during the night of the 26<sup>th</sup> which was probably fortuitous as most people were in bed rather than out and about in daylight and therefore more vulnerable to flying debris. Even so the destruction and loss of life was immense. It was estimated that between 8,000 and 15,000 people lost their lives, the majority of them at sea when thousands of ships and small boats were caught in the tempest. Just in the shallow waters around the

Goodwin Sands off Kent a total of 1,083 vessels were lost with about 1,500 sailors drowned. Thirty vessels from a convoy 130 merchant ships and their five Royal Navy escorts were sunk when sheltering at Milford Haven in Pembrokeshire. Wrecks were being washed ashore along the coasts of Belgium and the Netherlands for days afterwards. The large warship HMS Association was at Harwich when the storm blew it out into the North Sea and eventually all the way to Gothenburg in Sweden before it could be sailed back to England.

In London it was estimated that 2,000 large chimney stacks were blown down. Many of the fragile houses that had been built in the city less than 37 years earlier following the Great Fire of London were very badly damaged or destroyed. The Thames broke its banks and flooded Westminster Hall while at Berkeley the River Severn flooded to the extent of over a mile inland and drowned thousands of sheep and cattle.

On land one of the earliest casualties was the Bishop of Bath and Wells and his wife who were crushed underneath two chimney stacks which collapsed on them as they lay asleep in their bed in the Bishop's Palace next to Wells Cathedral which had part of its great west window damaged. St Mary's church in Fairford suffered a similar fate to the cathedral when a large amount of the glass in its great west window and in the window to its left was blown in by the storm. The damage and loss of Fairford's famous medieval stained glass windows was very serious and early attempts at restoration did little to help. In addition to the damage to the windows three sheets of lead on the roof of St Mary's were rolled up like sheets of paper and some pinnacles and battlements were also damaged. Presumably other buildings in the town did not escape the ferocity of the storm but no written evidence has yet been found to quantify the damage.

A search of the Fairford parish register does not show any burials until 1 December when John Carpenter of Horcott was buried. It is possible that John was injured during the storm and died a few days later but this cannot be proved. Anne Tuky of Lechlade was buried there the day after the storm but she could well have died from illness. A review of burial registers for the villages within a few miles of Fairford does not readily point to any deaths likely to have been due to the storm – but it must have been absolutely terrifying.

## From the Newspapers -1947

**Wilts and Glos Standard 22 August 1857**

FAIRFORD – THE STORM – At Horcott, near this place, the storm on Friday evening was of most awful character. The thunder and lightning, the hail, and the torrents of rain far exceeded the experience of the oldest inhabitant. A fire ball descended with a loud report near Mr Kent's house, but without doing any damage.

### **North Wilts Herald 2 September 1878**

FAIRFORD – HEAVY STORM – On the afternoon of Friday in last week, we were visited by a storm of most unusual character. Towards 3 o'clock the aspect looked very threatening and heavy rain began to fall, accompanied by the rumbling of distant thunder. In a short time rain fell in torrents, and the thunder – no longer distant, and preceded by intensely vivid flashes of lightning – was appalling heavy. The storm raged violently till nearly 5 o'clock, and the sur-charged drains in the streets were totally inadequate to carry off the excess of water, which kept pouring into them; consequently the streets presented the appearance of a swollen stream, and many houses became flooded. However, after the storm slowly abated affairs assumed their normal state. Happily we hear of no damage having occurred to life or property, except in the case of many ricks of corn recently put together, and which were wetted right through.

### **Wilts and Glos Standard 1 January 1887**

The Christmas Season has on the whole been an uneventful one, save and except for the snow storm of Sunday evening, with its attendant inconveniences, effectually preventing as it has done any of the customary outdoor amusements common to the season. The greatest inconvenience, however, has been the collapse of all telegraphic communication, and although the wires have been locally repaired by the Postmasters at Lechlade and Fairford communication beyond is still totally interrupted. The mails also have necessarily been much delayed, especially on Monday last when the mail due from Swindon at 5am only reached Fairford by rail via Oxford at 2pm. Beyond this displacement of sundry lengths of eaves spouting, the partial smashing in of the roof of a greenhouse at Mr Painter's and the breaking of a number of limbs of trees, no more serious damage occurred.

### **Wilts and Glos Standard 16 June 1900**

FAIRFORD - THE STORM The close and oppressive conditions accompanied by frequent rumblings of thunder, which prevailed all day on Tuesday culminated in a terrible storm on Tuesday evening from 9.30 to 11pm. The flashes of lightning were remarkably vivid and continuous, and the rain fell in torrents. The roaring of the gale which accompanied the storm, together with the heavy and reverberating peals of thunder, created altogether an experience very seldom realised. Two horses belonging to Mr Cook were killed in a field on the Southrop – road and several trees succumbed to the fury of the storm.

This isn't Fairford but an interesting event!

### **Faringdon Advertiser and Vale of the White Horse Gazette 13 July 1912**

REMARKABLE CYCLONE NEAR WITNEY – An atmospheric phenomenon of a very unusual character took place in the quiet hamlet of Signett, near Witney last week. It was near five o'clock and the little children belonging to the hamlet were returning home after school. Suddenly, a great noise was heard, resembling that which might have come from many motors. A terrible wind sprang up just at the point where the old pike used to stand, and two of the children were lifted into an adjacent ditch, fortunately without injury, although a great elder tree just near was torn up by its roots. The cyclone pursued its way, and it's a remarkable fact that although Mr Bird's farm house and several cottages stood in its way, these were left untouched, but the people in them found it impossible to close their doors, so great was the force of the wind. A great branch from a plum tree just above then was torn off and made to dance about in the air as though it had been a cork, while the straw thatch of a shed past the cottages was carried to the height of many feet. Ten yards further on a remarkable scene was witnessed. Two huge elm trees were uprooted in a moment, and another was blown in two in the middle as if it had been a rotten stick, whilst great branches were torn off many others. The scene just after the storm baffles description, but the remarkable fact in connection with this cyclone was that it had no sooner come than it had gone. The time of its duration could not have been more than three minutes. Immediately after, calm reigned supreme. A cyclist coming from Bradwell Grove, and who could not have been half a mile away whilst the storm was proceeding was quite unaware of anything unusual in the atmospheric conditions: Mr Bird's sheep were in hurdles in the same field where the events occurred, and not more than 80 yards away. Naturally he rushed to the spot as soon as he could, expecting to find broken hurdles and panic among the animals. They were lying down resting as peacefully as though nature had not asserted itself in the unusual way here described.