

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

The 19 May meeting will be 'Show and Tell', a re-run of the old Primary School favourite. You are invited to bring along and talk about any object that is important to you and that might be of interest to History Society members. We have successfully tried out this idea in previous meetings; 5 minutes is the maximum length allowed and a bell will signal when your time is up. So please get thinking and let Alison or Chris know if you would like to contribute. The item does not necessarily have to relate to Fairford.

As part of the Fairford Festival Edwin Cuss will be having his usual photographic display in the Heritage Room at the Community Centre. Owing to the Jubilee celebrations this year, the display will be on **Friday and Saturday, 3-4 June** 10-4pm. There will also be a Jubilee display and FHS publications for sale.

The FHS AGM is on June 16 and it will be followed by a talk on 'Woodchester - an unfinished mansion' by Liz Davenport. FHS is flourishing in member numbers, almost up to the largest number we have ever had, we would really like some new committee members with new ideas to take us forward.

The Forensic Pathology of the Female Saxon Skull discovered in the River Coln at Fairford in 2013

A talk on Wednesday 13 April 2022 7:30 pm at Royal Agricultural University by Linda Ainscough M.Sc., Ch.FA and Victoria Hardwidge, M.Sc. Linda talked about the forensic investigations that they were able to do. The results were that the bones were dated to 826 - 1025 AD of a young women probably in her early twenties, possibly of sub-Saharan descent and most interestingly from her teeth they discovered she had most likely lived in the Fairford area since childhood. There were no indications of how she died. The skeleton is at the Corinium Museum but not yet on display. The members of the audience were keen to raise money to get a facial reconstruction carried out. The investigations raise all sorts of questions and possible scenarios about her death..

The Grand Drain: Fairford's contribution to agricultural history

Eric Jones

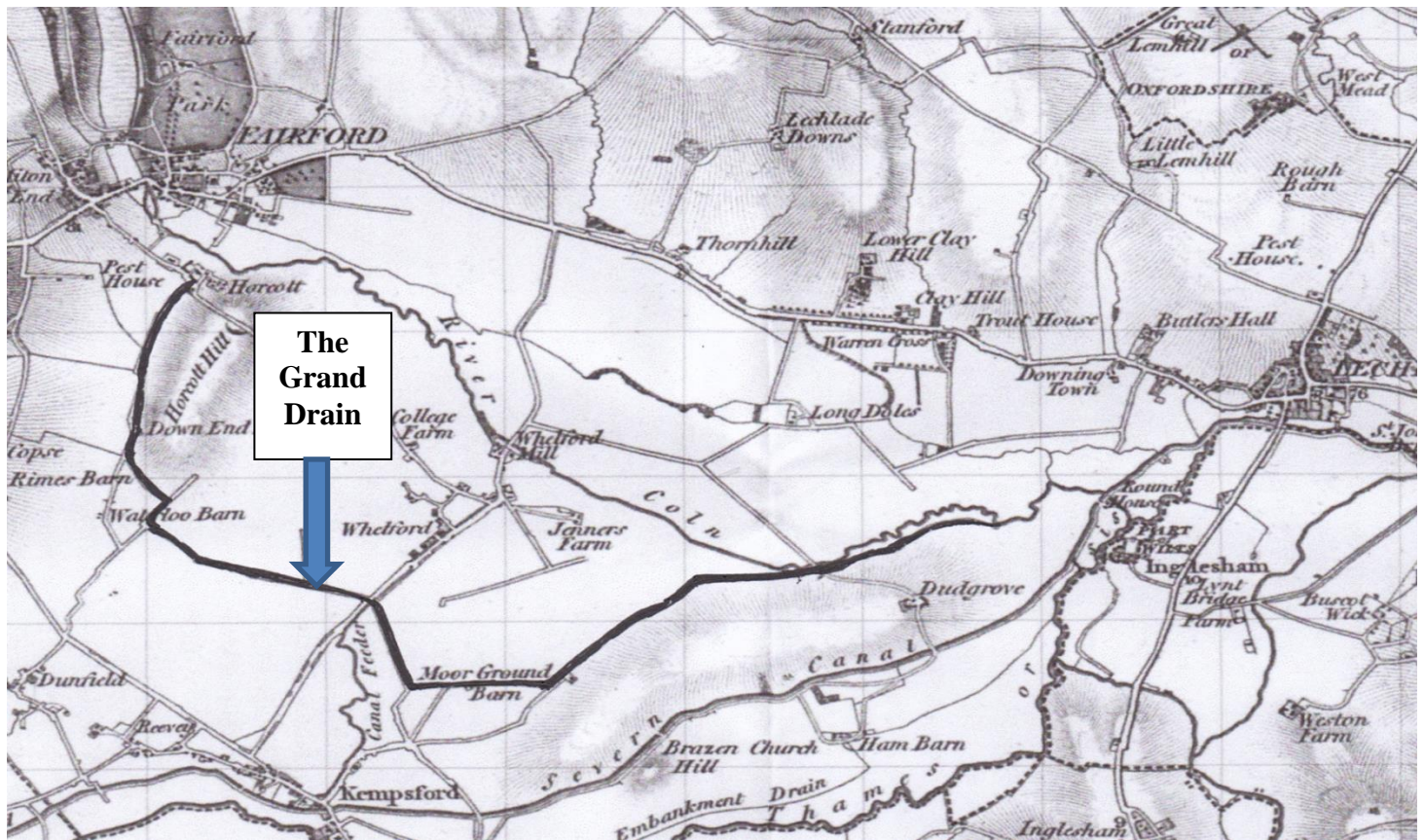
Summer 2018 was unusually dry. Syd Flatman and I took the opportunity to clamber in and out of the many ditches which run approximately south through the parish of Fairford and to trace field boundaries surviving from the mid-eighteenth century enclosure. Above all we examined the Grand Drain which collects streams at Horcott and flows in a channel along Totterdown Lane. Today it runs below ground across the airfield, re-emerges - still flowing - parallel with Washpool Lane in Kempsford, turns east and eventually joins the Coln. At the last point there was once complex equipment. The scheme was developed in the late 1790s by Edward Webb, surveyor from Stow-on-the-Wold. About the same date Webb's famous pupil, William 'Strata' Smith, the Father of English Geology, engineered similar arrangements at Down Ampney. Two other major schemes took place nearer to Oxford but not until the 1850s and 1860s. Fairford's Grand Drain was the first or second on the whole Upper Thames region. It is not known who funded the excavation but it would have needed an extensive work force of men with picks and shovels. At one point the drain goes under the feeder canal of the Thames and Severn Canal. It is described in Thomas Rudge's 'General view of the agriculture of the County of Gloucester' published in 1813.

"The grand drain is twelve foot wide at the bottom of the lower extremity and diminishes in its progress upwards: at some place it is nine foot below the surface.

The embankment of the embanked drain is four foot high on the lowest land and diminishes to a point at the upper part. The lower meadows are embanked, to keep off smaller floods. The Draining Wheel drains the water off three meadows, three feet below their surface by 'trunks' through the embankments, and takes off all the upper waters; this wheel is drawn by waters from the upper drain.

One thousand acres are drained, and three hundred by the embanked drain'.

There were schemes like this all over the Upper Thames Valley in order to increase the agricultural viability of the land, and many new farms were built as a result. From local farm records it can be seen that many 'man hours' were taken up with drainage work.



1821 OS map

More on drains...

In 1839 the 1st Earl of Ducie under the auspices of the Gloucestershire Agricultural Association offered a prize of £20 to the renting farmer for the best-drained farm. The candidates were:- Mr J Cadle of Longcroft, Mr H Parker of Fairford, Mr J Long of Whaddon, and Mr F Woodward of Little Comberton. This was awarded at the AGM of the Gloucestershire Agricultural Association in December 1842 to Mr Henry Parker of Fairford. From the 1841 Tithe map Mr Parker seems to have farmed the fields above the River Coln to the east of Fairford.

From the Gloucester Journal 3 December 1842

"...Mr P having gained sufficient outfall for the water, has been enabled to cut through a retentive pan into a white porous gravel and has drained a large track of land, which was before a useless swamp, and has effectively let off black stagnant water, which his neighbours told him had been there since the time of their forefathers. The effect is surprising, and must be permanent and Mr Niblett and Mr Stallard [judges] have no hesitation in recommending Mr Parker of Fairford Earl Ducie's premium of £20 as a token to reward his industry and superior skill."

Earlier in the article it says that Mr Parker spent at least £100 on covered stone drains and deepening ditches. The 1st Earl of Ducie had died in June 1840 so he didn't live see his award presented. The Earl's youngest daughter Katherine was married to John Raymond Barker of Fairford Park on 14 December 1841.

Thomas Harvey – Fairford Stonemason

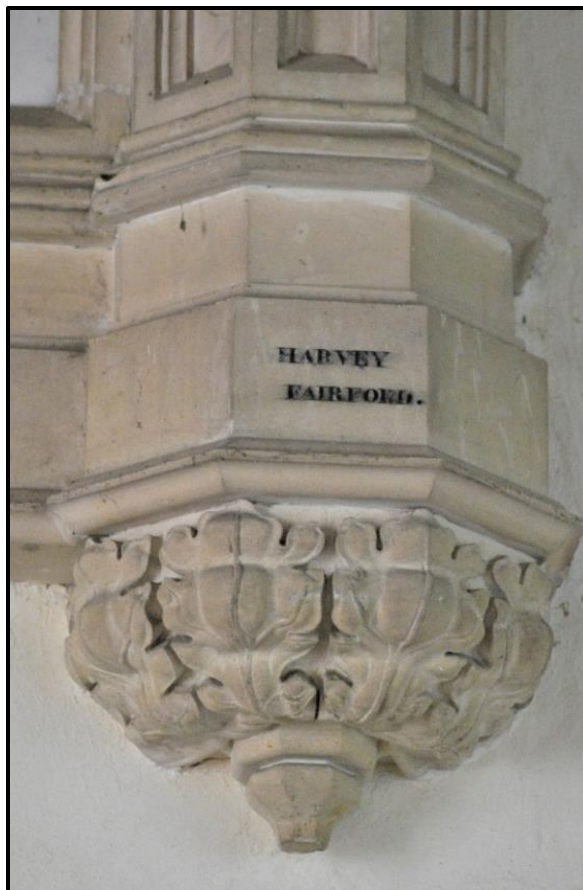
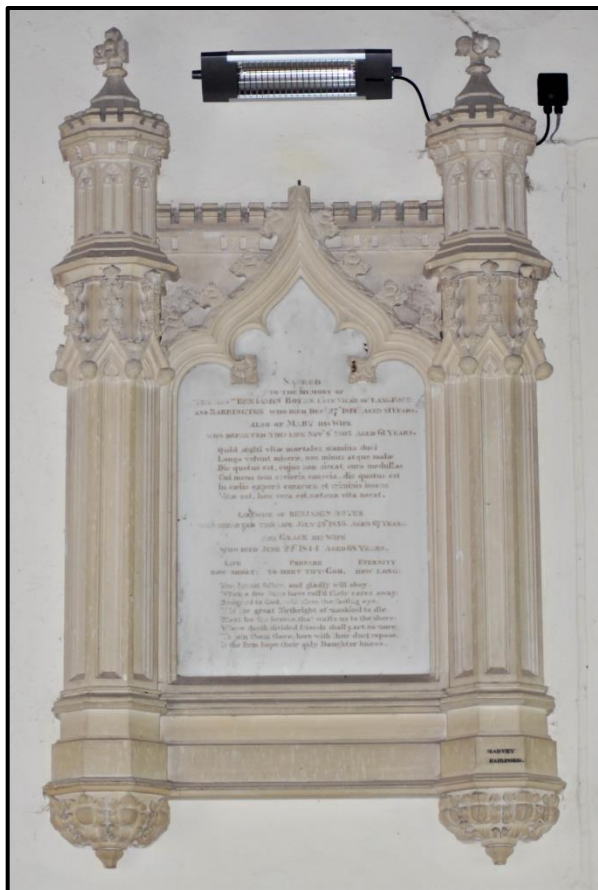
The small Norman church of St Andrew's at Eastleach Turville is full of historic interest. The 12th century south doorway of c.1170 has elaborate, high-quality zig-zag carving, similar to that found at Quenington, and is sheltered under a late-13th century porch. A blocked arch of c.1200 on the outside of the north chancel wall has a grotesque stone head on top of a short column. The tower dates to around 1300 and the north wall of the nave has two large blocked arches of a former aisle indicating that the church was once larger than it is today. In about 1825 the east and west walls of the north transept were rebuilt by Peter Cox of Fairford who retained the original lancet windows.



Inside the church is another item of interest with a direct connection to Fairford. On the west wall of the nave are three memorials which commemorate members of the Boyes family and one of these is signed by the mason simply as "HARVEY FAIRFORD". There is a very brief entry in Roscoe's encyclopaedic 'Biographical dictionary of sculptors in Britain 1660-1851' which reads "*HARVEY, of Fairford fl. 1844. His only identified work is a large unidentified Gothic tablet in Gloucestershire*". This is almost certainly Thomas Harvey (1776-1850) who is recorded in the 1841 census as a stone mason living in Calcot Street, the former name of Park Street, and is also listed as a stonemason of Fairford in Pigot's trade directories of 1842 and 1844.

The memorial is quite a large wall tablet of an unusual Neo-Gothic design with an inscription in both English and Latin which is heavily framed by decorated columns surmounted by turrets complete with battlements. The memorial dominates the west wall of the nave but is not particularly pleasing and seems rather out of place in a small, early church such as St Andrew's. Four members of the Boyes family are named on the memorial: Reverend Benjamin Boyes who died in 1814; his wife Mary who died in 1803; their youngest son Benjamin who died in 1836 (which is incorrect as he died on 28 July 1835), and his wife Grace who died on 22 June 1844. Although the Boyes family had lived in Eastleach Turville since at least the 1680s the Reverend Benjamin was actually vicar of Langford from 1760 to 1769 then of Little Barrington until his death. He was succeeded at Little Barrington by Reverend Frederic Raymond Barker of Fairford. Benjamin was buried in the churchyard alongside his wife on New Year's Eve 1814 and both are commemorated on a badly damaged stone which is now fixed to the exterior south wall of the chancel.

The two smaller memorials in the nave are plainer tablets commemorating other members of the Boyes family. One was made in 1788 and records the death of Benjamin's parents and one of his daughters who died in her infancy. The other tablet mentions Mary Boyes, Benjamin's granddaughter who married John Fowler and who died in 1894 but there is no mention of the stonemason who made either of these memorials. They were certainly not made by Thomas Harvey.



The 26 lines of the inscription on the memorial are all of the same style and font and there does not appear to have been any alterations or additions made so it would appear that the tablet was made in or perhaps soon after 1844 following the death of Grace Boyes. The Reverend Benjamin's eldest son Richard Edmund, who was the executor of his father's will, died and was buried at Eastleach Turville in 1848 so it is possible that it was he who arranged for the memorial to be made for his parents and brother.

However, there is a twist to this story. The stonemason Thomas Harvey was committed to Gloucester Gaol on 10 January 1842 by Joseph Watts of Fairford as a debtor. The London Gazette of 13 October 1843 records Thomas's appearance in the Court for Relief of Insolvent Debtors and calls him a "retailer of beer and stone mason, then farmer and stone mason, and late journeyman stone mason". Thomas appeared at the Gloucester court house on 4 November 1844 and was conditionally discharged. It is possible that one of his sons Giles or John who were both builders and stonemasons had a hand in making the memorial for the Boyes family or assisted Thomas after his release from the county gaol. Unfortunately John Harvey himself became an insolvent debtor in 1848. By 1851 he was back in Fairford and in 1855 he was advertising to take on an apprentice. However, in 1867 he (or perhaps his son also named John) was in Gloucester Gaol again when he became bankrupt yet by 1871 he was back home in Club Ground as a stonemason and builder. Thomas Harvey was buried in the churchyard at Fairford on 30 January 1850; there is no surviving headstone. Whichever of the Harvey stonemasons of Fairford made the memorial for the Boyes family it would appear to be their only known attempt as monumental masons - unless anyone else knows otherwise?

RAF Fairford

Recently Darren Bruton, who runs a website <https://www.raf-fairford.co.uk> visited the Archive Room. At the moment he is concentrating on post-war information, especially the 1950s and 60s but he is looking for any copies of 'Falcon Facts' and the 1980 USAF Open Day programme when the Air Tattoo was at Greenham Common but they held an Open Day at RAF Fairford on July 5. Please contact darren@raf-fairford.co.uk if you have any further information.