

Fairford Flyer
No 49
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FAIRFORD HISTORY



SOCIETY

As the Fairford Flyer is now well established as a monthly issue, we will revert to the pre-Covid title of 'Fairford Flyer' but it will remain a monthly feature.

FHS Meetings 2023

All meetings are at 7.30 pm in the Farmor Room, Fairford Community Centre except for the February meeting which is at 10 am during half term. **We would really appreciate it if members helped with putting the chairs away at the end of a meeting.**

- February 23: a 4th Thursday of the month during half term at 10 am, a daytime meeting on Sport by Edwin Cuss. There will be a break for refreshments
- March 16: Kathy Haslam on Kelmscott Manor
- April 20: Royal Progression 1535 by Alan Pilbeam
- May 18 Bill King on a topic yet to be decided
- June 15 AGM to be arranged

Big Ben - January meeting

At the January meeting Keith Scobie-Youngs gave a very informative and entertaining presentation on his company's part in the renovation of Big Ben which was very much enjoyed by the large audience. The clock of Big Ben was made by the firm founded by Edward John Dent of London and installed in the tower in the Houses of Parliament in 1859. It is the largest clock mechanism in Britain and when it was built it provided the model for most subsequent large tower clocks. The clock is a masterpiece of Victorian engineering but by the 21st century it and the fabric of the tower itself were in need of a major refurbishment.

In August 2017 a five-year complete renovation of the Elizabeth Tower was commenced which involved the removal, repair and renovation of the clock mechanism. The removal of the clock was a very difficult and intricate operation which required great skill and ingenuity. This was accomplished by Keith Scobie-Youngs' firm the Cumbria Clock Company based near Penrith in the Lake District. The project required the removal, inspection, cleaning and, if necessary, the repair of every component of the massive clock mechanism. Almost every piece of the clock had to be dismantled and taken on the 300-mile journey to Penrith where it was worked on. This was a major undertaking which had to be accomplished to the highest possible standard to ensure that this iconic clock would continue to tell the time and ring out its chimes for many years to come. In fact the renovation improved the workings and accuracy of the clock and the refurbishment of the face of the dial and the stone and glass work of the tower itself have greatly enhanced the appearance of the Elizabeth Tower.



Photo: Nick Humphries

AUNT AGATHA by Chris Hobson

If you are an avid reader of P G Wodehouse's tales of Bertie Wooster and his faithful manservant Jeeves or have watched the 1990s television series 'Jeeves and Wooster' starring Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie you will almost certainly remember Bertie's formidable Aunt Agatha. Wodehouse's parents spent some considerable time abroad so he was often looked after by two of his mother's sisters; his Aunt Louisa and Aunt Mary. In his novels he based the character of Aunt Dahlia, a genial, kindly figure, on his Aunt Louisa while the fearsome and overbearing Aunt Agatha was inspired by his Aunt Mary. Wodehouse himself confirmed this in 1955 when he wrote "Aunt Agatha is definitely my Aunt Mary, who was the scourge of my childhood." So, why should this be of any possible interest to Fairford's history? Read on and find out.

P G's parents spent many years in Hong Kong where his father worked as a magistrate leaving their sons behind to attend private schools in England and to be looked after by P G's maternal aunts. One of these aunts was Mary Deane who was born in Finsbury, London in 1845, one of the 13 children of the Reverend John Bathurst Deane and his second wife Louisa. Mary's younger sister Eleanor married Henry Ernest Wodehouse in 1877 and their son Pelham Grenville ('P G') Wodehouse was born four years later. . When the Reverend Deane died in 1887 his widow and their four unmarried daughters moved to Bath. However, by 1891 Eleanor's sister Louisa along with her daughters had moved to Cheney Court, an early-17th century mansion house in Ditteridge near Box in Wiltshire. When Louisa died in 1892 her daughters Mary and Louisa remained at Cheney Court where they are listed in the 1901 census as joint heads of the household with two servants.

During their time in Somerset the Deane's became very active members of the fashionable social scene in Bath and the local newspapers (The Clifton Society and the Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette) often mention them attending balls and other functions. Mary and her sisters were very well connected with 'high society' and Mary was a particular friend of Frederick Dutton, Lord Sherborne, the vicar of Bibury, who often visited her at Bath and Cheney Court. However, Mary was more than a well-to-do socialite; she was also an accomplished author, poet and amateur artist. During the 1880s and 1890s she had 14 books published and although Mary never married most of the books were romantic novels; perhaps not great literature, but more in the genre of Mills and Boon. Her most popular work was 'Mr. Zinzan of Bath' first published in 1891 and still available today as a classic reprint. She was still writing in the 1930s but by then her style of writing was out of fashion and nothing of hers appears to have been published after 1921.

It was at Cheney Court where the young P G Wodehouse spent many of his school holidays under the watchful eyes of his maiden aunts Mary and Louisa. While P G seems to have had a soft spot for Aunt Louisa his Aunt Mary's domineering, critical and harassing behaviour was less welcome. In Mary's defence she probably thought she was treating P G in this way for his own good and the character of his fictional Aunt



Agatha is an exaggeration of his Aunt Mary. According to one of Mary's friends who met her in the 1920s she did not have a very high opinion of the 'class of literature' later produced by her nephew despite the fact that he became one of the most popular English novelists of the 20th century. Mary Deane was apparently a quintessential Victorian gentlewoman who had difficulty in accepting the social changes brought about by the ending of the Victorian era.

So, having read this far you are probably still wondering what all this has to do with Fairford. The answer is that in her old age Mary Deane's health deteriorated and she could no longer live alone, her sister Louisa having died in 1906. At some point in the 1930s she became a patient in The Retreat in Fairford. This does not necessarily mean that she was suffering from mental health issues because by this time The Retreat was taking in private boarders and was in part acting almost as a hospice or care home as well as fulfilling its original function as an asylum. Unfortunately nothing more is

known about her time in Fairford except that she died in The Retreat on 13 April 1940 at the age of 95. She was buried five days later in Row 4 of the Garden section of St Mary's graveyard the grave being marked by a small headstone. So the lady who inspired the fictional Aunt Agatha does have a connection with Fairford and so, in a more distant way, does P G Wodehouse.

The photograph was taken in about 2011 but is now almost totally illegible.

The horse economy in Fairford by Eric Jones

Horses have been called the internal combustion engines of the past. They were everywhere and as a result few people bothered to keep many records. We can therefore recover no more than snippets about the horse economy of old Fairford. Imagine the motor-car disappearing with only a few enthusiasts celebrating its former glory.

Fairfordians will have been well aware of the horse-drawn traffic along what is now the A417. No doubt the type of folk who today admire brands of cars and trucks would have commented on good turn-outs and well-groomed horses but other people would have been as indifferent (or irritated) as the rest of us are today by the vehicles pounding through our narrow streets. The traffic was serviced by blacksmiths' forges, such as Gearings in London Street, and supported ancillary trades like saddlers and wheelwrights (a rather rare tyre iron for fitting rims around waggon wheels survives in one yard off the main road). A few former carriage entrances may still be spotted, which is no surprise given that the town was a halt on the Gloucester and Cirencester to London road. But the coaching trade lasted only a couple of generations, whatever Christmas cards may imply. Travellers with their own conveyances would have been the main users of the inns. For them, the Bull offered stabling for thirty horses.

Hints of the one-time importance of the horse appear more definitely in the surrounding district than in Fairford itself. Taking mares to be served by selected stallions was the most efficient mode of breeding: the Trout at St John's Bridge had a big gable-end notice, 'Bowly's Entire.' Bowly's were Swindon brewers and used their premises to sell the services of 'entire', i.e. uncut, not castrated, stallions. Only a little further away, the Coleshill estate built a dedicated foaling shed in 1850. It was arranged like a panopticon (compare the design of the reformer, Sir Georg Onesiphorus Paul, for Northleach gaol) where the stud groom could observe unseen all the compartments at once. He watched the progress of several pregnant mares simultaneously. The building still stands. Just across the A417 from Buscot Park, Alexander Henderson had less elaborate but still dedicated stables where he bred an exceptional number of prize-winning shire horses in the 1890s. Well away on the other side of Fairford, at Malmesbury, Henry VIII had located his chief stud.

1850.

TO COVER THIS SEASON,
A T ONE SOVEREIGN EACH MARE, and One Shilling
the Groom, at RHYD-Y-SCYFARNOG FARM, near Llan-
tarnam Village, that beautiful and celebrated Cart Stallion,
THE OXFORDSHIRE CHAMPION.

The OXFORDSHIRE CHAMPION is now rising thirteen years
old, purchased by Mr. George Pye, for the purpose of im-
proving that valuable race of animals in Herefordshire. He
was got by Mr. Nalder's celebrated Horse Champion, the pride
of Oxfordshire, which obtained more Prizes than any Horse in
England; at Oxford, Banbury, Bicester, Swindon, Fairford,
Abingdon, and many other places too numerous to insert. A
better temper or finer form in a Cart Horse is not to be found
in this or adjoining counties. He stands full 16 hands 2 inches
high, is a beautiful black, with immense power, superior make
and shape, and has proved himself a sure foal-getter. His two-
year-old Colts have been eagerly purchased at £25 each, and
cannot be equalled in the country.

He won the Cup at Hereford, in 1840, when he was four
years old, there having been twelve horses exhibited against
him.

Mares coming from a distance may be kept for One Night
Gratis.

Fox-hunting made up a conspicuous part of the leisure use of horses. Napper Dutton and his son from Sherborne ran hunting stables at Fairford from the 1760s to 1780 and Henry Moreton, MFH of the Vale of White Horse hunt, also had stables here in 1834. But this was the frivolity of rich men whose affairs tend to be recorded. The horse-drawn farming system that ultimately paid for their pastime generated few direct observations and left few 'archaeological' traces, other than former stables now used for storage on some of the farms. Only one exception stands out: a few miles away at Down Ampney is a derelict farm containing a rare, circular horse mill. Its working gear (presumably used for threshing) has been stripped out. Otherwise the once-ubiquitous horse economy has been and gone. We commit more to print today and take infinitely more photographs. Perhaps that will prevent the age of the automobile vanishing in turn, like the horse economy, into the mists of history.

Newspaper Cuttings

Liverpool Mercury - Friday 10 August 1827

Accident on Tuesday, the 24th ult. to Daniel Raymond Barker Esq of Fairford Park, Gloucestershire. He was riding accompanied by his daughter, Mrs Brocas of Wakefield Park and his elder son, Mr J R Barker, and his two nephews, Messrs Bozenquet, of London, when his horse (a newly-trained one) took fright at a cart, and plunged into a ditch. Mr Barker was thrown, and in endeavouring to recover himself, pulled the animal upon him, by the pressure of which his spine received a mortal injury, and he expired on the following day.

[1827 was a bad year for the Barkers/Raymond Barkers: John Raymond Barker, the heir to Esther Lambe died in January, Elizabeth Barker, Esther Lambe's sister died in March and Daniel's accident was in July.]

Oxford Journal 21 June 1851

ACCIDENT: On Wednesday last Miss Rice, daughter of the Vicar of Fairford, was driving into Burford in a pony carriage, and when near the top of the street the pony took fright, and dashed down the hill at a terrific pace; on attempting to take the turn into Witney-street, Miss Rice and the servant were thrown out, and the horse went through the shop window of Mr Westrope, draper, knocking the window frame &c. completely out, and doing considerable damage to the stock. The animal, with the shafts attached, went some distance in to the shop, till its career was stopped by a heavy desk. We are happy to add that Miss Rice was but very slightly hurt; the servant received little or no injury; but the pony was very badly cut and injured.

Cirencester Times and Cotswold Advertiser 13 July 1863

FATAL ACCIDENT TO DR ILES: We have seldom had to record a more melancholy accident than that which occurred yesterday morning to Dr Albert Iles of Fairford, who left his residence in his usual health about eight o'clock, and had arrived near to this town when the horse suddenly became unmanageable. The pin of one of the shafts gave way, and the shaft fell against the horses legs, causing it to run away at a fearful pace, and it is supposed that on turning the corner at the junction of the two roads near the Cirencester turnpike, the doctor, seeing the gate closed, jumped out, and fell with great force, receiving serious injuries on the head and back. The horse ran at the bridle gate, which was open, knocking it down and slightly injuring a woman and a little girl who had got into the turnstile for safety, while the animal escaped almost uninjured. Mr Ruck, surgeon, was immediately sent for, and attended, and Dr Iles was conveyed to his house in Dyer-street. At first a slight hope was entertained that the accident would not prove fatal, and every aid that medical skill could render was applied, but unfortunately without success for about noon unfavourable symptoms set in, and he gradually sank till between seven and eight o'clock in the evening when he expired. It is satisfactory to state that Mrs Iles, and the deceased's two brothers, Mr D Iles and Mr A Iles, arrived about mid-day, and remained with him till the last. Most of our readers are aware Dr Iles was for many years a resident in Cirencester, and gained universal respect and esteem by his kindness and assiduous attention to all classes of his patients. His death has caused a feeling of gloom throughout the town.

(Not only in Cirencester but it must have been a great shock to Fairford residents. He had or was going to set up a surgery with Dr Cornwall in Croft House.)

Cirencester Times and Cotswold Advertiser 7 June 1869

A NARROW ESCAPE: On Wednesday week, three gentlemen accompanied by a boy were proceeding on a fishing excursion in a four-wheel dog cart belonging to Mr Gibbs of the Bull Inn, at Lechlade, the trap parted in the middle, leaving the gentleman and boy sitting on the backseat on their backs in the road, while the horse went on with the front pair of wheels. Those sitting in front were thrown out, but fortunately no one was injured. The horse after going a little further stopped of its own accord.

North Wilts Herald 31 January 1874

A SMASH: In the lack of any more exciting occurrence, on Monday afternoon considerable interest was aroused by the smashing of a large pane of glass in the shop window of Messrs Hyde and Co., drapers in Cirencester. Mrs David Archer, of Fairford was endeavouring to turn her pony and carriage opposite that establishment, when the animal backed the vehicle over the pavement and through the shop window with a loud noise. It then pulled up.