

Fairford Flyer

No 50

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FAIRFORD HISTORY



SOCIETY

As the Fairford Flyer is now well established as a monthly issue, we have reverted to the pre-Covid title of 'Fairford Flyer' but it will remain a monthly feature. It was previously published only twice a year.

FHS Meetings 2023

All meetings are at 7.30 pm in the Farmor Room, Fairford Community Centre on the third Thursday of the month, (except for February)

March 16 '...a little place deep down in the country...' The Kelmscott Manor Past, Present and Future Project by Kathy Haslam.

April 20 – Royal Progression 1535 by Alan Pilbeam

May 18 - Bill King - 'The Home Front in World War Two'

June 15 - AGM and Items from the FHS Archive – Committee members' choice

We are at present planning the programme for next season; meetings so if anyone has any ideas or requests please let us know.

Sport in Fairford - February meeting

Edwin Cuss gave members a very enjoyable and interesting presentation on the wide variety of sports in Fairford from 1872 to recent times. His earliest picture (1872) was of a characterful group of fly fishermen in all sorts of interesting attire gathered outside the Bull Hotel ready to set off on their day's fishing expedition. Every year the proprietor of the Bull advertised the start of the fly fishing season on April 1st. Day Tickets could be obtained for 2s 6d in 1879. The usual sports of football, rugby, tennis, cricket and bowls were shown with relatives of some members of the audience being represented. There were two charming pictures of the lady's and men's hockey teams in 1905 and 1910; however did the ladies used to play in their long skirts! The more controversial sports of shooting, fox hunting and otter hunting were shown which were very much part of country life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Otter hounds are now a vulnerable species, only 600 exist worldwide according to the Internet. Indoor sports of badminton, karate, judo, indoor bowling, skittles and darts also played a large role in the social life of Fairford.

An unusual picture of skating on Horcott gravel pits during the cold winter of 1948 was shown. In the background Horcott Road could be seen, long before Lakeside was built.

Thanks to Edwin for his excellent presentation and the background knowledge that goes with it, we look forward to more next year.

One of the pictures that intrigued me was a 1926 picture on the Fairford baseball team. In the newspapers there is an account of that actual event. It was an exhibition match by the Chipping Norton baseball champions to encourage Fairford to set up a team. No more reports of Fairford baseball matches could be found after 1926 so perhaps it didn't happen.

Oxfordshire Weekly News 15 September 1926.

CHAMPION BASEBALL PLAYERS AT FAIRFORD

On Thursday the exhibition game, which had to be postponed from the week previous owing to rain, was given on the cricket pitch in Fairford Park, by kind permission of Mr K Iles and the committee of the Cricket Club. The weather was ideal, the ground perfect, and the attendance good. A charge of 6d was made for admission, to defray the expenses of transport etc. A game of one innings each was played first by the

Champion side [Chipping Norton] against a picked team from the rest of the Club. Miss Betty Iles started this by pitching the first ball. Then a game of 5 innings each, by two teams picked from A, B and C teams, which were evenly matched. This proved very interesting to the spectators, many of whom were witnessing the game for the first time. The tit-bit of the evening followed, when a team of nine Fairford boys were picked against a team of nine from Chipping Norton. This caused no end of fun, and there was applause for the local team, who did remarkably well in their initial trial. Tolley, the cricket groundsman, would soon become an efficient pitcher, for he knew how to put a twice [twist] on the ball. Jacko, a local footballer was a very keen catcher. The whole side did well, and it would soon be possible to get a good club in Fairford. The Chipping Norton Club was hoping that next season Fairford will return the visit, and they will then be able in some measure to show their appreciation for the fine reception accorded them.

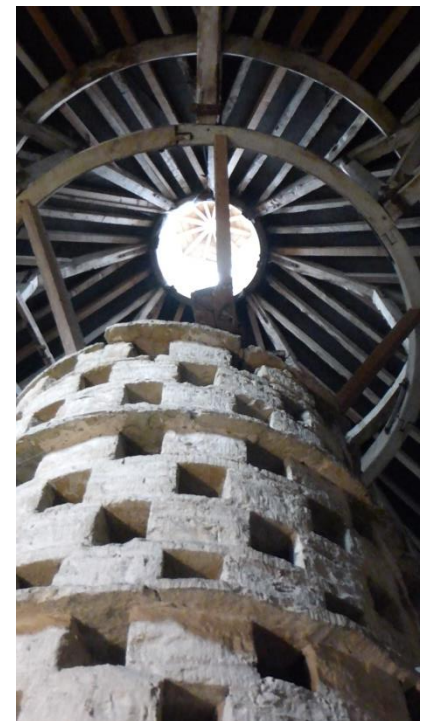


A Note on Fairford's dovecotes by Eric Jones

Dovecotes are small, tallish, free-standing buildings lined with nest-holes for semi-wild doves. Variants are the columbaria which are nest-holes in the outer wall of a barn or house (as at Fairford Mill; there are larger examples in Southrop). Medieval and later dovecotes and columbaria have survived best on the stone belt, many of them associated with manor houses or prominent farms. Wooden dovecotes are rare but there is one not far away at Compton Beauchamp. Several villages in our immediate district contain stone specimens and on some modern houses there are fake nest-holes built as ornamentation. In general, circular dovecotes are thought to be medieval with square-built ones dating from later periods, up to the nineteenth century. The purpose was to 'farm' doves by harvesting a proportion of the young birds, called squabs, and eggs, to supply the owners with fresh protein.

The doves very conveniently flew out to feed on crops in the fields – conveniently that is for the owners of the dovecotes and columbaria, who were gaining from cereals sown by everyone else. Mills and farmyards were good sites because they offered spilled grain and were easier to protect from thieves than if placed out in the fields. Nowadays almost all dovecotes stand unused, although the one at Coln St Aldwyns houses a population of ornamental white doves. The owners of manor houses and other large dwellings presumably find the buildings themselves either picturesque or too expensive to demolish.

Fairford's extant dovecote is the striking circular one just off Park Street, which was originally in the grounds of Park Farm. It has a conical roof with a conspicuous glass 'lantern' on top and not only is the interior absolutely lined with nest-holes but unusually there is a central stone spine also containing holes. This is a remarkable sight, best viewed when the men's shed is open, because the wood-working hobbyists treat it as a store.



The problem with studying this and other dovecotes is that information about their use is missing. Everything is form not function. How long the cotes and columbaria were occupied by doves, with what yield in terms of squabs and eggs, is almost always unknown. The structures are interesting and attractive but that is as far as it goes. Even the dates of construction are rarely documented. Official heritage reports on the Park Street example are ambiguous about the age of the building, which is variously given as medieval or about 1600, with no supporting documentation. From the historian's point of view it is something of a sterile monument.

The title of this note ought in any case to carry a question mark because Fairford may have had a second, perhaps earlier, dovecote. British History Online notes in its Fairford section that the rich Bradenstoke Priory held land in medieval Fairford but mentions no dovecote. Turning to the section on Bradenstoke itself there is however more detail, including that in 1291 the Priory owned a dovecote in Fairford worth 2d (tuppence). Was this the Park Street example? Probably not, because the Priory's Fairford land was at Milton End, though including common rights at East End. It seems likely, therefore, that Fairford once housed (at least) two dovecotes of which only one survives.

Thank you to Eric for this article, the pictures were taken in August 2022 by him



Two years in the Pontifical Zouves by Joseph Powell ZP

In the newspapers of 1871 a book was advertised 'Two years in the Pontifical Zouves: a narrative of travel, residence and experience in the Roman States' by Joseph Powell ZP. In the 1871 census Joseph Powell was living in the Market Place with his mother, Mary and sister Anna and describes himself as an author. He was the son of Mary Ann Powell (née Arkell) and grandson of Thomas Arkell of Kempsford Farm. Joseph was born in 1838 so was in his early thirties when he went out to Italy. He also wrote 'A Handbook to Fairford Church and its Stained Windows' published in the 1870s, which ran to several editions published by Thomas Powell, chemist and stationer. Although it had been disproved by this time he obstinately remained convinced of Albrecht Durer's connection to the design of Fairford's windows and wrote several papers on the subject. It is unclear what Joseph Powell was doing between the late 1870s and the time he died. However, his mother died in 1891 age 85, his sister Anna Exton Powell in August 1899 age 58 and Joseph died in September 1899 age 61, and they are all buried in St Thomas of Canterbury RC Churchyard at Horcott. In the probate record Joseph died intestate and is of Wotton, Gloucester, formerly of Fairford.

The Papal Zouves (Italian: Zuavi Pontifici) were an infantry battalion, dedicated to defending the Papal States and were mainly young men unmarried and Catholic who volunteered to assist Pope Pius IX in his struggle against the Italian unification's Risorgimento. Joseph must have joined the group in 1868-70. The book is quite a detailed work taken from his own diaries with many descriptions of the towns and sights he had seen and campaigns he experienced. It also includes accounts of other people who took part in the uprising before he arrived in Italy and after he left. The book was sponsored by a great many distinguished names of the Catholic Church. It was reprinted in the Classic Reprint Series by Forgotten Books, 2018.

It does not add anything to Fairford's history but it is somewhat surprising that someone from a little Cotswold market town should go out and take part in such an event in Europe.

Newspaper Cuttings

North Wilts Herald 9 August 1873

Fairford Petty Sessions

Thomas Wilkins, an elderly labouring man, of Maiseyhampton, was brought before J R Raymond Barker Esq, a warrant being issued at the instance of James Vincent, of the same place, labourer, for having threatened to kill him. PS Mason had said he had made enquiries and found that Wilkins had hidden some money last winter in a bed of parsnips in his garden, and given the complainant leave to go and dig some up for his use. When he dug up the bed he could not find his money and thought the complainant knew something about it, hence his threats. The magistrate, after hearing the affair attentively, thought the justice of the case, would be met by binding defendant over to keep the peace for six months, and he was bound over accordingly, in one surety of £10 and himself in a like sum. The idea of secreting money in such fashion in these days of savings banks is astonishing said J R Raymond Barker.

and from the Swindon Advertiser and North Wilts Chronicle 11 August 1873

BURYING MONEY AND THE RESULT - On Saturday last, before J R Raymond Barker Esq T Wilkins, labourer, of Maisey Hampton, arrested under a warrant, was charged with assaulting and threatening to kill James Vincent of Maisey Hampton, on Tuesday, the 29th ult. Complainant stated that defendant came to him in the street and shook a stick over him, threatening to beat him, and that if he caught him down the lane where he (defendant) lived he would do for him. Defendant denied making use of such threats. Bound over in his own bond of £10, and one surety of £10, to keep the peace for six months. It appears the original cause of the offence was as follows: - Last February the defendant had a sum of money, about £40, and not deeming it safe to keep it by him in the house, put it in an old mustard canister, and buried it in a bed of parsnips in his garden. A short time afterwards he gave complainant permission to dig some parsnips, forgetting about his measure. Shortly after his conscience smote him as he thought of it, and hastened with sad forebodings as to the fate of his fortune, but only to find his worst fears realised. Ever since that defendant has accused complainant of the theft, though without any apparent foundation, until complainant felt bound to take the present proceedings for his own protection.

North Wilts Herald 28 October 1871

ELECTRIC TELEGRAPH The line of posts and wires between Fairford and Faringdon via Lechlade is now completed, and the Government officials have been very busy during the past week testing the wire, etc. We understand the communication is quite perfect, and that the electrical instruments are now placed in the post office so that in a few days the public will receive the gratifying intelligence that Fairford is an electric station, and messages can be sent all over the world if necessary.

[Useful information for dating photographs.]

Oxfordshire Weekly News 20 November 1878

An experiment on the telephone took place at Witney Railway Station on Wednesday, the communication being between a gentleman at Fairford Station and Mr Smitheman at Witney Station. It was a thorough success, the conversation being distinctly heard, and in reply a tune whistled at the Witney end, and the gentleman at the other end sang the words.

North Wilts Herald 14 May 1877

A SAVAGE HORSE: On Tuesday afternoon as an entire horse, which had been shown off at Fairford market, was being led through the village of Ashbrook, it became ill-tempered, and showed off at his keeper, knocking the man down and tearing his unmentionables in an unmentionable fashion. Fortunately such a display of savagery had been provided against, and no further mischief or injury resulted.