

Fairford Flyer

No 54

July 2023

FAIRFORD HISTORY



SOCIETY

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)

The next three meetings are arranged as follows:-

September 21 Edwin Cuss - Along the River Coln through Fairford. Edwin has done this talk before but it was over ten years ago and many members will not have seen the images previously.

October 19 – Nick Humphries on the Concorde Project

November 16 – Samantha Harper on a medieval history subject (details in the September issue)

There is no meeting in December.

FHS News: Membership reached 156 in the 2022-23 year, about a third attend meetings. There will be no Flyer in August. Thanks to all the contributors during the year and to Eric Jones for this month.

Fairford Festival

Edwin Cuss's photographic display was as popular as ever, this year he had a new format, fewer but large pictures which were easier to view. The FHS display was about links with North America, including the USAF at RAF Fairford and the Abraham Cowley display made for the Canadian First Nation visit. Coincidentally, we were visited by an American who was the great grandson of William Stagg, the priest who followed Abraham Cowley at the Fairford Manitoba Mission. He had come to see Abraham Cowley's birthplace and was delighted to find that we knew something of him.

Tomb Trail 2

The dates for the next Tomb Trail have not yet been decided, but if you would like to join the tour please let us know, price £3. If you are interested please let us know at enquiry@fairfordhistory.org.uk

FHS AGM and meeting

At the AGM the Committee were elected as follows: - Chairman: Chris Hobson, Vice Chair: Syd Flatman, Secretary: Alison Hobson, Treasurer: Gill Compton, Margaret Bishop as FCC representative, Edwin Cuss, Jennie Sanford as FTC representative, Joanna Petty, and Dave Matthews. The treasurer reported a good set of accounts and there is no need to raise the membership fee for the next year, but it may be considered the year after as speaker costs are rising. Membership fees are due in September.

Thanks to the Committee who all ably spoke about items contained in the FHS Archive as follows:-

- items from the Keble archive, John Keble's handkerchief, his signature on some of his letters, a poignant letter to John Keble from Susan Cornwall after the death of her 4 children 'her latest affliction', and the leather letter bag used by either John or Thomas Keble
- a photograph of E.B. Chew's shop in the Hight Street where the butchers and estate agents are now, taken by local Fairford photographer, James William Gardner about 1897, He had a shop in Bridge Street, Fairford from 1894-1908. The photograph is of extraordinary clarity. It shows a Christmas display, you can see the Christmas wares displayed in the windows.
- A brick from with 'Fairford Wane' on it from Fairford's local



brickworks from c 1850- 1920. It was at Waiten Hill on a site north of Cirencester Road. Many Fairford buildings were built of this including the Hospital, and houses at West End.

- The history of Fairford hospital. The foundation stone was laid in 1897 and funds from the Fairford Carnival supported the hospital. Local residents also paid a subscription. Jennie Sanford was on the last shift at the Hospital when it closed for beds in 2006.
- Items from Fairford, Manitoba brought back by June Lewis and also a headdress sent by a former Chief of the Fairford Reserve and items presented to FTC on the Canadian's visits to Fairford this year.
- A copy of a Johannes Blaeu's (1596 -1673) map of Gloucestershire. Dave is an expert on maps and gave us a lot of detail about this Dutch cartographer and a picture of the man himself.
- A dilapidated copy of the very large and heavy copy of the 1871 Fairford windows book by the Reverend Joyce. The pages are loose and could be held up for easy showing. Joanna explained how Rev Joyce made the tracings and then photographed and reduced them for the book. FHS also has two good copies.
- A Second World War recipe book, showing recipes for mass catering at that time with prices and costs per head. It had been given to June Lewis either during her research of the 'Cotswolds at War' book or maybe for her VE-Day Exhibition in 1995. One of our members did some investigation after the meeting on the owner of the book Pamela Hamilton-Smythe. Pamela's mother, Mrs Holt-Needham, was living in Meysey Hampton in 1939. There was a 'British Restaurant' in Cirencester or maybe it was for 'The Settlement' in Walnut Tree Field, although the quantities seem quite large for that.
- A Bristol glaze stone ware jug about 18 inches high, marked 'White Hart Fairford' and 'Powell Potters', probably made mid-19th century. In 1906 Powell's company merged with Price, Son and Company. Unfortunately, the Price, Powell Company's premises were destroyed during the Bristol Blitz and most of the company records were lost. The jug was a donation from a lady from Chippenham. When we collected it we found their house was called 'Fairford' as they had fond memories of the Airshow.

Is Fairford in the Cotswolds? by Eric Jones

The Cotswold brand is so sought after that answering the question with a straight-out 'no' might risk knocking thousands of pounds off the price of our houses. A more plausible tale is needed.

Almost every general book on Gloucestershire asserts that, like Caesar's Gaul, the county is divided into three parts: the Cotswolds, the Vale of Severn and the Forest of Dean. On this reckoning Fairford must fall in the Cotswolds. It certainly looks Cotswold enough - but nevertheless this may be a façade, and Fairford a Potemkin village whose surface appearance tends to mislead. The older houses, especially in the High Street, are imposing enough to have had stone brought in by horse or ox-cart from neighbouring quarries without themselves being founded on solid stone. They are at best just along the lower slope of the Cotswolds proper.

One authority told a more sophisticated story. He was John Bravender, surveyor, land agent, geologist, archaeologist and much else in mid-nineteenth century Cirencester - a real Victorian polymath. He became Professor of Engineering and Land Surveying at the Royal Agricultural College and is quite the most interesting character I have come across in over twenty years reading about Gloucestershire. In his Prize Essay on the farming of the county, published in the Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England in 1850, he divided the county not into three but into five districts. One district he called the vale south-east of the Cotswolds - the Vale of Thames or Isis. This, he conceded, was only a small part of the county and anyhow it was shared with Wiltshire.

But it was a rich part, the area to which Welsh drovers brought their black cattle to feed before journeying on to the London meat market. The grass from the Thames meadows also fed dairy cattle; the whey from whose milk went to fatten pigs (4,000 per annum were slaughtered at Faringdon in the late eighteenth century). Kempsford is fully in this meadowland district and Fairford farmers sent cattle there, as well as to Cricklade, for extra grass. I suggest therefore that a key point about Fairford is that it is situated at the boundary between the Cotswolds and the Vale of Thames. The town's market benefited from being at the junction of the grassland district and the wolds, from which wool, mutton and live sheep were supplied, besides from any value provided by travellers along what is now the A417.

Bravender knew our district very well. The National Rivers Authority's Final Report of 1992 states that 'the earliest relevant reference to the Coln Catchment is from John Bravender in 1864'. Examined by the Royal Commission on Water Supply in 1868 he declared, 'I know almost every inch of the ground between Gloucester and Oxford, having for some purpose or other been called into almost every field in the upper vale of the Thames.' We gain a rare little insight into the state of the countryside when he tells us that a rash of new and better buildings for livestock had been put up at Fairford in the 1830s and 1840s.

John Bravender was surely correct in drawing attention to the Thames vale. Is Fairford in the Cotswolds? Not entirely. It is more interesting than that. The town lies fruitfully where the Cotswolds meet the vale. Any prosperity it had in past times came from what the eighteenth century would have called a frontier location.

Officially Fairford is in the Upper Thames Clay Vales National Character Area. See

<https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5865554770395136?category=587130>

The title of the 1986 FTC guidebook is 'Fairford - Southern Gateway to the Cotswolds' perhaps that is a compromise.

John Moore obviously thought Fairford was in the Cotswolds.

Here follows an extract from his book, 'The Cotswolds' published in 1937.

'.. I came to Fairford and made my way - once again for memory's sake - into the bar of the Bull Hotel. Like the Swan at Bibury, the Bull is a fishing-inn. Anglers and ghosts of anglers haunt its bar. The walls are decorated with drawings and photographs of the men who caught trout at Fairford long ago....I glanced for some reason up at the mantelpiece... something was missing which had always been there but no longer. The hat! The glorious old fishing hat had disappeared. Now this hat, green and mouldy and beautiful had hung over the mantelpiece at the Bull ever since I could remember... It had graced the patriarchal head of the greatest angler who ever came to Fairford and apart from the virtue which it had thus acquired it was without doubt the most remarkable hat in the world. It fairly bristled with hooks and bits of gut and flies of strange patterns which would frighten our modern sophisticated fishes to death.

"Where," I demanded, "is the Hat?" The boy who served the beer said rather nervously "Er - they took it down." "Took it down!" "Well, sir it was so moth eaten and so dirty and some people said it smelt and might breed germs". "Breed germs!" There was a short embarrassing silence. Everybody, I think felt it was wrong to take that hat away; it was a breach of tradition, and at Fairford tradition is very strong. So I seize this opportunity of making a last plea. Mr Walters, may we please have the hat back again, with the old faded yellow photographs and the ghosts of the anglers who look down from the walls?

At closing time I went from the pub to the church in order to look again upon the legions of hell represented in the astonishing west window. There used to be an old verger at Fairford who for a small fee would conduct parties of visitors round the church and explain to them the history of the famous glass. At last they would come to the great west window, and as they stood before it, looking with awe at the piteous, distorted faces of the Damned, whom the Devils maim and torture as they shepherd them to hell, the verger would glance round his audience and fix a sombre eye upon the ladies.

"You will notice," he would say, "that they're most of 'em women..." And he was right. T Aeps, the Flemish artist, who (it is conjectured) made this glass, had a pretty fancy that hell would be peopled chiefly by naked women. It may be that he had unfortunate memories of a visit to a brothel in his youth; he may be that he simply enjoyed painting naked women. Anyhow, he saw to it that the sadistic little devils in his picture of the Last Judgement should lack no such ready fuel for their fires. And if you look carefully at the bottom right-hand corner you may notice what fun the devils are having with them, as they prod them, prick them, pitchfork them, pinch them or carry them shoulder-high towards the yawning chasm.



As a change from 'Newspaper Cuttings' and following on from the theme of the 'Cotswolds', there follows extracts from chapters of June Lewis's book 'Cotswold Characteristics' published first in 1971, fifty years ago now.

Cotswold Stone

The Cotswaller understands his environment, he is conscious of the stone under his very feet and when the quarries are opened he is able to use the material from which the hills themselves are formed. The buildings are solid but never heavy in design. The secret lies in the newly quarried stone as it is delivered from the womb of the earth.

The Cotswold stone slates used to be measured by 'slat rules', the symbols notched into the wooden ruler meaning nothing to anyone other than another 'slatter' for no numbers were given. Each part of the country has its own particular type of slates or tiles. Only a handful of Cotswold 'slatters' now remember the ones once used for their own slates. Examples of names in increasing sizes are: cocks, thirds, short cuttings, long cuttings, movedays, short, middle and long backs, short and long bachelors, short and long nines, short and long wivetts, short and long elevens, twelves and up to sixteens.

Cotswold Burial Places

Betty's Grave: motorists may pause a while outside Poulton to glance at the signpost. Their glance will probably take in the faded plastic flowers in the jam jar at the side of the road. If they look closer they may discover a simple mound, There is no stone to tell whose grave it is - but it was important enough to give to the spot 'Betty's Grave'. But who was Betty? Conflicting reports are that 1) she committed suicide 2) she took up a wager to cut a field of hay in a day and died of exhaustion at that spot, but believing it to belong to the eighteenth century with its great witch-scouring mania, it is locally reputed to be the grave of a witch who lies with a stake driven through her heart.

Ghosts

Fairford has its Saxon knight, who roams the eerie darkness of Pitham Bottom a little way from where the Saxon graves were discovered.

Hatherop Castle has its 'lady in blue' who paced the Yew Walk. She is reputed to have been Lady Derwentwater looking for her husband, a leader in the Jacobite rebellion, who left Hatherop on his fatal journey in 1715. She has not been seen since the Castle became a girls' private school.

Further up the Thames lies Kempford, not strictly Cotswold, except by virtue of its character and building. So although it has one foot firmly placed in the Thames Valley, the other can rightly claim a foothold in the Cotswolds. And its vicarage has been reported as 'the most haunted house in Britain'.

Cotswold Dialect

Phrases: -The Cotswaller doesn't waste time on small talk, he doesn't go 'all round Dymock to get to Crewe'. Twaz as deep as a church (of a great height); on the glad and sorry (hire purchase); as happy as a cat in a tripe shop; as thin as a rasher of wind; as slow a-coming as Cotswold barley; mumbles like a Dumbledore (an insect that buzzes) in a pitcher.

Words: Avels and ails (barley beards); scawt (to hurry); duberous (doubtful); daddocky (rotten wood); jibbels (spring onions); mugglement (confusion); gallybagger (scarecrow); podjicate (to make a mess of a job)

Cotswold Sheep and farming

Evidence of the importance of sheep in the Cotswolds is traced even in the names of towns and villages, hamlets and fields: Sheepscombe, Sheepbridge, Sheephouse, street names and pubs. The Cotswolds, and its neighbouring Thames Valley used to celebrate four feasts a year: sowing, shearing, haymaking and harvest.

A variety of folk songs [on the topic of sheep and farming] were the order of the day in the evening in the pub.

'As I went to the Rom zales t'other market day
I seed the finest ram thur, that was ever fed on hay.
The wool upon 'er back thur, reached ver' nigh to the sky
A crow ad builded a nest in't, cos I yerd the young 'uns cry.

And after a few rousing choruses of this folk song, a toast to the landlord

Her's success to the plough, the fleece and the flail,
May the landlord ever flourish and the tenants never fail.