

# Fairford Flyer

## No 55

September 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 January and February, 2024)

**September walk:** the planned walk to the grounds of the former Fairford Park to led by Syd Flatman, will take place on 7<sup>th</sup> September. **Meet at the car park at the top of the High Street at 10am.** There are still a few places left, please contact [enquiry@fairfordhistory.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@fairfordhistory.org.uk). Small donations to FHS welcome.

**World on Your Doorstep 22 September** On that Friday morning Year 7 of Farmor's School will be descending on Fairford for an historical tour of Fairford, which includes the Ernest Cook Trust, Fairford Mill, the site of the Polish camp and the Church, etc. For several years FHS has put on a display for them in the Heritage Room.

**Membership fees are due in September and remains at £5.** Visitors are always welcome at £3. A membership renewal form is a separate attachment (or you can pay at the meeting or by bank transfer, Lloyds Bank, sort code 30-92-06 A/C Fairford History Society No 02170130). You can also leave the subscription at the Community Centre in the FHS post slot by the FTC office door. Thank you to all who have paid by standing order.

### 2023/2024 Programme

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

October 19 - Nick Humphris - Concorde Project (apologies to Nick for the previous misspelling of his name)

November 16 - Samantha Harper on a medieval history subject

There is no meeting in December.

January 18 2-4pm - afternoon meeting. This year we are trying an afternoon meeting with tea and cake, displays, publications for sale and visits to the Archive Room will be on offer

February 15 10am, Edwin Cuss morning meeting - Along the road through Fairford

March 21 7.30pm Hailes Abbey and the Mystery of the Holy Blood by David Aldred

April 18 - Chris Hobson some of the stories of patients at the Retreat asylum

May 16 - to be arranged

June 20 - AGM Social 20th anniversary

### Local history talk - Eaton Hastings - Tales of a Riverside Parish

Lectures in St Michaels and All Angels, Eaton Hastings by Roger Vlitos in aid of the Church Fabric Fund

First: Saturday 7 October at 6pm Who owned the village from ancient to modern times?

Second: Saturday 14 October The Pre-Raphaelites and Arts and Crafts legacy.

Both lectures followed by free drinks.

Tickets £15 each or £25 for both. Book through Eventbrite <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/tales-of-a-riverside-parish-tickets-669268037717> or pay at the door. Please note there are no lavatories in the church.

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### Fairford Steam Rally

Everyone was very happy to have the Steam Rally back in Fairford again, and it did not disappoint. There was a wonderful display of the different type of vehicles, traction engines, tractors, army vehicles, motor cycles, lorries, small working engines including the dough mixer from Radway's bakery and a Godwins pump. Local

societies were well represented and there were many craft stalls as well as other stalls formerly represented at the Steam rallies.

FHS has not displayed at Fairford Steam Rally before and we were delighted to be asked and to be in the same tent as Doug Newton's Concorde display, which drew people in. An added plus on the Saturday was that we were right beside the arena. On the second day there were no arena displays as it was used for parking. Of course a lot a visitors were not local to Fairford but FHS displays of former steam rallies caused interest, also the railway, Fairford Park and shops. We sold about £50 of publications so it was worth the effort.



FHS display tent and Radway's Dough mixer



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....and talking of Traction engines... WGS 3 June 1882

SAD ACCIDENT WITH A TRACTION ENGINE - On Thursday last a traction engine was drawing three truck-loads of limestone from Eastleach toward Buscot and in descending a hill on the road a part of the machinery broke, and the engine being released from all control, came down the hill at an alarming speed, and ran into a ditch on the side of the road. Engine and trucks were over turned, and one of the men in charge fell under the ponderous machine. A party of gentlemen including Mr Ellett of Cirencester, Mr C Hobbs, Mr Weaver, the Wilts county surveyor, Mr A H Iles, and Mr Yells, happened to be driving near the scene of the accident, and they hastened to the spot, and after some difficulty extricated the injured man from his position. He was driven to Fairford Cottage Hospital in Mr Yell's trap, and latest information is lying in a critical condition both his legs being broken and badly crushed, beside other injuries, while his weak state on Thursday evening from loss of blood rendered an operation then impossible. [He later died; at the inquest it was declared an accidental death]

### Why wasn't Fairford an insignificant village? By Eric Jones

It ought to have been no more than that! Market towns in Gloucestershire are usually farther apart than the mere five miles between Fairford and Lechlade. Since the latter held more of the cards relating to trade in recent centuries, we might expect that its competition would have leached growth away from Fairford. Lechlade(-on-Thames) was the head of navigation and lay on the same London-wards route from Stroud, Cirencester and Gloucester. Theoretically Lechlade could also have captured the livestock traffic travelling down the Welsh Way to Fairford, besides trade down the Salt Way from Droitwich. Once the Thames and Severn Canal was dug, Lechlade was the eastern terminus. It was also on the later Oxford-Fairford railway.

What were Lechlade's special advantages? It prospered from traffic in butter and cheese sent down the river to London, with wharves and warehouses dating from the mid-seventeenth century (probably after an upturn in trade following the Restoration of Charles II in 1660). The line of houses at Donnington on the Fairford side of Lechlade seems that rare thing for the period, a middle-class suburb which may have provided homes for merchants. In late eighteenth-century trade, Loveden of Buscot was quite entrepreneurial but his newly-established Buscot House and Park did not overshadow Lechlade in the way that Fairford Park dominated our town. This may suggest an important point: the manorial situation in Lechlade was diverse, which meant openings for independent businesses.

Where, then, did this leave Fairford? What was its general character? The town had been a place of activity and varied occupations during the Middle Ages; it had its own market. Yet notice how far commerce was influenced in the past by landowner power: Fairford no doubt gained some impetus from the Tames, the Raymond-Barkers and a few others but big landowners perhaps restricted the space for local enterprise. Fairford remained substantially agricultural though not purely so - traffic along what is now the A417 was serviced by blacksmiths, wheelwrights, coaching inns (by 1699) and waggoners (by at least 1754). These were however small enterprises carried on in small properties along the main road and in the tiny market place. Otherwise businesses seem not to have risen much above, so to speak, taking in the town's own washing. Trade is actually reported to have fallen off in the mid-eighteenth century, whereas Lechlade stayed a busy river port.

Reduced activity during the late nineteenth-century agricultural depression (and family troubles for the Raymond-Barkers) similarly seem to have done Fairford no good: the 1923 sale catalogue for part of the Raymond-Barker estate admits problems with drainage and water supply, and astonishingly notes that seven properties had the option of paying their rent in chicken. A barter economy in twentieth-century Fairford! The town was then best known as a little centre for the leisure industry. It was a celebrated fly-fishing venue and famous for the stained glass in the church, with an unexpected side-line in mental hospitals. (This last was pioneered in Victorian times by the Iles family and might be guessed as having been early farm diversification). Agricultural trade still benefited from standing at the junction of the Cotswolds and Thames vale, but its similar location would have helped Lechlade too.

The author of *Highways and Byways in Oxford and the Cotswolds* (1905) remarked that Fairford was 'not the thriving place it was when its splendid church was built' and, while not saying outright that it was decaying, he referred pointedly to the downward spiral affecting other towns in the region. Fairford did profit a little from the leisure trade and eastward traffic along the A417, which it could service before this ever reached our competitor. Until the advent of bus services and plentiful ownership of private cars in the 1960s, there were quite a number of shops providing for residents and the villages around. These activities just about enabled Fairford to hold its own until, with Concorde after the Second World War and regular commuting to Cirencester and Swindon, it was ready for more extensive growth.

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As well as writing articles for FHS Professor Eric Jones has just published a book **A History of Livestock and Wildlife: Animal Wealth and Human Usage**. Published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing of Newcastle-on-Tyne. Price: £64.99. You might recognise the picture on the front cover (see below)



The use of wildlife products, together with advances in livestock feeding, was essential in propelling Western economic growth. Extraordinarily, these early modern and early industrial features are side-lined relative to the role of manufacturing. This book restores the balance, detailing how many species were relocated around the world and how late the use of natural products has persisted. The text describes how animals were driven immense distances to market and harnessed for transportation and to power machines. How the plundering of the animal kingdom and the development of livestock farming jointly created the Smithian Growth that ushered in the Industrial Revolution is also described. Even after industrialisation, animals are employed for innumerable purposes, besides being co-opted as pets...



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### Legal proceedings in medieval Fairford

The latest annual volume of the Gloucestershire Record Series published by the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society deals with one of the many forms of legal documents made between the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The volume is titled '*Escheators' Inquisitions for Gloucestershire and Bristol, c.1260-1485*'. An escheator was a local or regional official who was responsible for maintaining the crown's feudal and prerogative rights; in other words, he made sure the king got his money, land or privileges arising from court cases. Many of these inquisitions were held to appraise the goods and chattels of those who had fallen foul of the law (often civil debts but also criminal action). Other inquisitions were held to make appraisals on church property temporarily held by the crown and, more serious, on the property of noblemen who had been guilty of treason and attainted (i.e. loss of all rights to their property).

There are a few references in the volume with relevance to Fairford. Perhaps the most interesting was an inquisition held at Fairford on 28 January 1400 by Robert Poyns the escheator. This was an inquisition into Thomas Despenser who held goods and chattels in Fairford. Thomas (also known as Thomas le Despenser), was the First Earl of Gloucester and lord of the manor of Fairford who owned much property in Gloucestershire. He was not present at the inquisition due to the fact that he had been beheaded in Bristol 15 days earlier after taking part in a failed attempt to restore the imprisoned Richard II to the throne. The inquisition lists Despenser's goods in Fairford together with their value. This consisted of:

- 18 oxen (10 shillings each)
- 2 horses (13 shillings 4 pence each)
- 1 cart, 3 ploughs, 2 wains and associated equipment (41 shillings 8 pence)
- 300 sheep (4 pence each)
- 200 sheep (8 pence each)
- 140 wool skins (3½ pence each)
- 6 quarters of wheat (4 shillings each)
- 1 parcel of wheat in sheaves estimated at 10 quarters (6 shillings 8 pence each quarter)
- 20 quarters of barley (2 shillings 8 pence each)
- 20 quarters of 'dredge' (i.e. mixed corn) (2 shillings each)
- 40 quarters of oats (16 pence each)
- 1 parcel of hay (13 shillings 4 pence)
- 1 sheepskin (20 pence)

This came to a total of £38 17 shillings and 6 pence, roughly equivalent to about £28,000 in today's money. In 1400 this could have paid for the wages of a skilled tradesman for about six years.

A shorter entry in the '*Escheators' Inquisitions*' volume records another Fairford personality; this one a person at the other end of the social scale. The inquisition was held at Henbury near Bristol on 24 October 1412 when five cases were heard including that of John Clark of Fairford. He had been outlawed in the county court of Wiltshire where Peter Preston of Erlestoke near Devizes accused John of owing him a debt of 20 shillings for two horses. The outcome of this case is not known; hopefully John Clark paid the money and did not remain an outlaw and have to make his way to Sherwood Forest!

Thanks to Eric Jones and Chris Hobson for this month's contributions