

Fairford Flyer

No 56

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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)

Membership fees were due in September and remain at £5. Thank you to all who have paid already. Visitors are always welcome at £3.

2023/2024 Programme

October 19 - Nick Humphris - 'The early development of Concorde at Filton'.

November 16 - Samantha Harper on 'How to read a Medieval Church: Church and community in Medieval England.

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 David Aldred on Hailes Abbey and the Mystery of the Holy Blood

April 18 - Chris Hobson on the patients of the Retreat Asylum

May 16 - to be arranged

June 20 - AGM Social 20th anniversary

A guided walk through Fairford Park with Syd Flatman - 7th September 2023 by Sarah Basley with photographs by Jennie Sanford

What a glorious early autumn day, perfect (if a little hot) for a walk through Fairford Park starting at the Lodge which possibly pre-dates the 1660 construction of Fairford Park house. [Historic England Listed Buildings No 1151966 says the Lodge is early C19]. This house originally stood in several acres of gardens and parkland, remnants of which remain today - and it was these we were here to see.



Firstly a walk through the long grass to the Palladian Bridge, once a road bridge; you can see the entrance to this road at Pitham Copse (Quenington Road), a wooden gate between 2 pillars. This is the same bridge that you can just see from Mill Bridge but from here the view up towards the Broad Water is impressive. Apparently the widened river silts up at this point and needs to be dredged every 60 years, with a note made of the year of the work carved into one of the bridge pillars. Last completed in the 1990s, a staggering 60,000 tons of silt was removed and spread on the nearby meadows.

Back through the parkland, past what must be a proper 'ancient' sweet chestnut, all that remains of an old sweet chestnut orchard here, and on to a lovely red-brick walk forming part of the boundary of 2 acres of walled garden. The brick here was made locally at Waiten Hill Brickworks (as were other red brick buildings in the town). A look back across the parkland to the shadow of an avenue of trees (stand by the Fire Assembly point) and then on to the stable block, once attached to the main house. Look up inside the entrance arch and there are the lintels of old windows, and beyond, in the stable yard, the bricked-up shapes of carriage houses.

And so on to the deer park with vistas across to the Obelisk and views to a field once home to an American hospital and the Polish camp. Where we were walking were once the Pleasure Grounds but little remains of the walks and gardens, grottos and canals. The Doric Temple is now a feature at Barnsley House Hotel and the orangery has been transported to Yorkshire, to Sledmere House. Both were in a poor state of repair so whilst it is a shame that so much has gone, at least they are now restored and in good hands.



Through the woods and down to the Broad Water again for a visit to the boathouse, this was built later than the house and gardens, probably from stone taken from the bank above and beside it. It has been restored and there is now a modest but charming and peaceful room overlooking the Broad Water, boats stored underneath, accessed from outside. From here we walked along the waterside to the Cascades, another remnant of the Pleasure Gardens, created to form the Broad Water. The old pumping house was also worth noting – read Syd’s piece ‘A Nice Little Earner’, Fairford Flyer August 2020, ‘Fairford Waterworks’ for more detail.

Back up the hill to a wonderful, refreshing tea and cake provided by the Ernest Cook Trust, to whom we give our thanks for this rare view of Fairford Park (and then home to a cold shower!).

If you want more information on the house and park then read FHS Occasional Paper 14, ‘Fairford Park 1661-1955 – a lost treasure’ by Chris Hobson. Also the Victoria History is always worth a look online at <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/glos/vol7/pp69-86>.

FHS September 21 meeting

Unfortunately Edwin Cuss was unable to present his trip along the River Coln, which can be given at a later date. Chairman Chris stepped into the breach and gave about 50 members a whistle-stop tour of the history of Fairford from prehistory to the present day. This was adapted from a presentation that Chris gave to Lechlade History society some years ago (without the comparisons between the two towns).

Re Escheators’ Inquisitions’ from the last issue – and Thomas [le] Despenser’s goods and chattels in Fairford. Farming Facts from Farmer Chris Peachey: How relative values have changed! A fleece today is worth about the same as the cost of the shearing. Despenser’s “wool skin”, presumably a fleece, at 3.5 pence, a “sheep skin” at 20 pence, a sheep at 4 or 8 pence presumably depending on age and sex? A lamb today £80 to £120 and an old ewe up to £100; if you can get £1 for a fleece, that’s good. Oats at 16/- a quarter but wheat at only 4/- oats being horse food (fuel for transport).

Memories of Maurice Jones, Town Crier by Syd Flatman

I knew Maurice for most of my life. Although a few years older than I, our paths crossed on several occasions. I remember my friends and I would tease the choir boys of St. Mary’s. They wore blue enamelled badges on their plumb coloured cassocks with the initials RSCM, which stood for The Royal School of Church Music. The junior choir boys, many of whose voices had not yet broken so were high pitched, we said the initials instead stood for The Royal School of Cats Meowing. Maurice, being one of the senior choir boys, would take offence and pulling up his robe would chase us through the grave stones. If caught, the punishment was to be pushed into the thorn bush by the Church porch.

Maurice lived at No. 4 The Virgills in Horcott Lane with his younger brother Anthony (or Titch, as he was known). Anthony would always refer to Maurice as “Our Fatty”. I don’t remember Maurice swearing very often, that honour went to Anthony who had the ability to cram more swear words into one sentence than anyone I ever came across and he didn’t care who was in earshot.

Always community minded, Maurice answered the call when the County Youth Service was asking for volunteers to turn the old abandoned Farmor’s School into a Youth Club. Armed with sandpaper and paint

brushes he played his part in sprucing up the building. The Club was donated some old sofas and a television set. We would all have to hush when Coronation Street was on, a programme Maurice enjoyed, starring Ena Sharples in her hair net. The Club was up and running by September 1963. The musically-minded members decided to form a band, calling themselves The Comancheros. Maurice joined as the bass player. His instrument given to him was a two string electric double bass, six feet in height. This was designed to be played in the vertical position but not him, he attached a cord to both ends and had it slung around his neck like a giant guitar. Maurice never had much of a feel for the beat. This caused the Lead Singer, John "Archie" Griffin, much frustration. When practicing the Beatles number "I want to hold your hand", Archie could stand it no more. Wrenching the wires from Maurice's bass Archie leapt from the stage never to return.

In the early 1980's Maurice and I became Bell Ringers at St. Mary's. He would often ring the treble bell which leads off as you start to ring. The correct saying known throughout the ringing world is "Trebles going, she's gone" but not Maurice. He would say "Trebles going, hers gone". After about a year, Bill Godwin, the Tower Captain thought us skilled enough to ring a full Peel. It had been ten years since Fairford ringers had completed one. This involves 5,040 changes and takes three hours when rung on eight bells. We were one and a half hours into the Peel when Maurice lost concentration, resulting in total confusion for the whole band. We never attempted another one! I remember the time he and I were tasked with changing a bell rope. Following Maurice up the spiral staircase, suddenly there was a loud bang, followed by a cloud of yellow dust, one of the wood worm infested steps totally disintegrated under his eighteen stone weight.

There was a serious side to him. For many, many years he served on the Town Council and was a First Aider with the St John's Ambulance, being on hand at fetes and festivals etc. Then, when the Town Council thought it a good idea to appoint a Town Crier, with his sunny personality and outlook on life and with his large frame and booming voice it could be no other. In full regalia, Toby jug like in appearance, he was everyone's idea of a Town Crier of old. He was employed all over the district to advertise public events. So well known was he, it elevated him to almost celebrity like status.

Maurice Andrew Henry Jones died on 30 August 2023 age 82. From its start of 2004 he was always very supportive to the FHS. He recorded 'The late old clerk's description of the painted glass windows of Fairford Church in his own Gloucestershire dialect and contributed to one of the early FHS AGM Fairford Memories meeting with other Fairfordians. In the FHS Archive we have one of his early town crier's hats and two handbells donated by Maurice.



Royal Courts near Fairford by Eric Jones

Browsing a list of Oxfordshire place-names I came across Langley. Although I have lived in that county, I did not recall it. On looking it up an intriguing history appeared and so I co-opted Syd Flatman (always ready for a jolly) to help check it out. Despite Langley being only twelve miles from Fairford as the crow flies (a little more by road) neither of us knew what to expect. County boundaries still divide the country into tight compartments.

We found an isolated farm a few miles north-east of Burford, in what had once been the middle of Wychwood Forest. I should have remembered going there years ago to see the land that had been cleared for farming in the 1850s. An old man leaning on his gate in the nearest village had told me that the deforestation was carried out by 'King John and his slaves.' The buildings at Langley Farm still carry Victoria's crest to mark when most change really happened.

As harvest is not a convenient time to call on farmers, Syd and I contented ourselves with looking around outside. There are lots of medieval earthworks, some of which the Ordnance Survey maps as 'pillow-

mounds', the standard term for rabbit warrens. The farmhouse itself has a visible Tudor wing which inside reportedly contains the initials of Henry VII and his wife, and a Tudor Rose.

Henry VII had a hunting lodge built here on the site of a medieval village. Royalty often hunted in Wychwood, staying at Woodstock but also at Langley. Moreover the court met at Langley as late as 1614. Remember, this is only a dozen miles from Fairford, where the West Window may contain a hidden portrait of Henry VII. He, and Henry VIII, are known to have favoured 'our' Tames. The last of the Tames from Stowell was however Elizabeth who about 1520 married an Edmund Horne. As a result he received land worth £80 per annum.

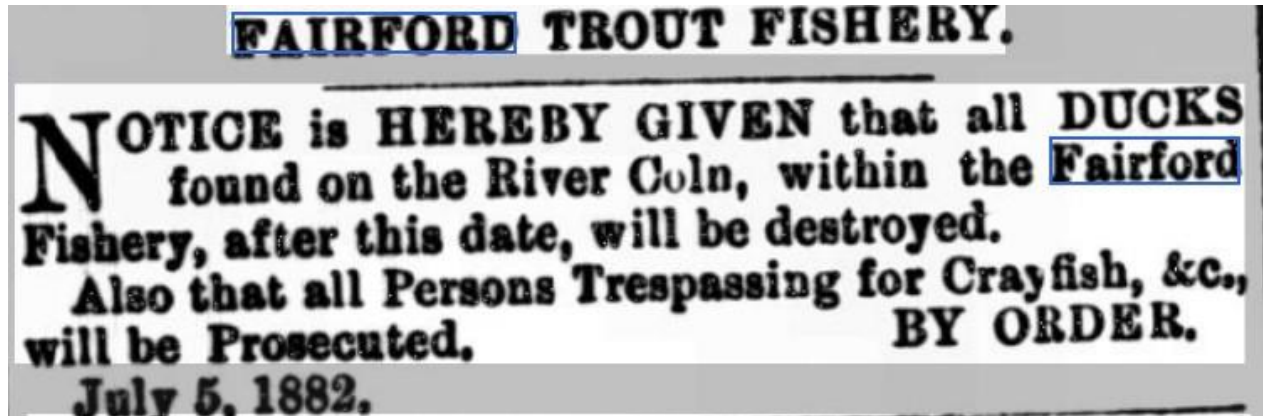
Edmund was the son of John Horne of Sarsden, not far from Langley. Chris Hobson's *The Tames of Fairford* cites Leland's *Itinerary* on this. Leland says that Edmund was dwelling 'by' Langley at the time of his marriage. My edited edition of Leland does not mention the fact (which shows one should always go right to the horse's mouth). My edition does however have Leland noting of Sarsden that 'recently' (this was written about 1542) 'a man named Horne has built the fine house there of squared stone.' Ambitious men bought manors in the vicinity of Langley in order to be close to the court when it met there. The Hornes were going up in the world. One daughter married a secretary of state to Queen Mary. Via the Tames, with whom they were intermarried, the Hornes actually came to manage Fairford manor. In 1545 Edmund Horne succeeded Sir Edmund Tame the younger as steward.

With thanks to Sarah Basley, Jennie Sanford, Chris Peachey, Eric Jones and Syd Flatman for this month's contributions.

Newspaper Cuttings

Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard 8 July 1882

Mallards beware!



North Wilts Herald 8 December 1882

FIRE: On Thursday evening last, about four o'clock a heap of straw in a coach house in the occupation of Mr Hope of the George Inn, by some means became ignited, and speedily set the roof timbers and rafters on fire. Being in the day time the fire was fortunately speedily discovered and the Fire Brigade brought into requisition. A deluge of water being poured upon the fire the flames were quickly subdued and all danger over. Had it happened in the night, the probability is that the flames would speedily run along the roof of the adjoining buildings to the White Hart Inn, and have placed that ancient hostelry in danger. It is conjectured that the fire was caused through some person smoking in that place.