

# Fairford Flyer

## No 60

February 2024

FAIRFORD HISTORY



SOCIETY

### FHS Meetings 2024

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.** Visitors are always welcome at £3.  
FHS now has 138 members.

### 2023/2024 Programme

February 15 at **10.30am** morning meeting – Along the road through Fairford a presentation by Edwin Cuss, coffee served from 10am.

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

April 18 – Chris Hobson on The Retreat Asylum: the patients' story

May 16 – to be arranged

June 20 - AGM Social 20th anniversary

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### A good time was had by all – the afternoon tea meeting 18 January

January is not an inviting time to venture out to evening talks. This year, Fairford History Society tried the experiment of holding an open exhibition in the Community Centre on Thursday afternoon, 18<sup>th</sup> January. Despite the bitter weather, it was extremely successful, with about 60 people attending and many staying the whole time from 2 p.m to 4 p.m. In the Farmor room on the ground floor there was a display of documents and photographs covering almost any aspect of Fairford's history you care to mention, even the big drum of the Silver Band. People were held here by a generous provision of tea and cake, waiting their turn to go up in batches to the History Room at the top of the building.



The History Room is really the Society's archive. Alison Hobson presided over another display there, largely documents that mention many of the town's former inhabitants. "As far as Fairford is concerned, Alison is like the Master of Balliol: what she doesn't know isn't knowledge". She opens the History Room on Monday afternoons. For anyone wary of flights of stairs, the top floor can be reached by a spacious lift.

Probably the chief gain from the occasion was the chance for members to mingle and chat, helped no doubt by the tea and cake. All sorts of information was exchanged, much of it relating to forebears who had lived in Fairford. We met one couple who had come all the way from London, trying to trace the wife's local ancestors. All in all, the committee is to be congratulated on a comprehensive display and enjoyable social occasion which we hope will be repeated next year.

Eric and Sylvia Jones

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## A HISTORY OF CROFT HOUSE Part 2 by Chris Hobson

After the death of Albert Iles in 1863 his wife Ellen was left to raise five children under the age of 10. Two years later, in June 1865, Croft House was advertised to let fully furnished with six best bedrooms and with furniture that was "new and very chaste". However, the house did not attract a new tenant so Ellen Iles remained in Croft House and, probably with the support of her husband's family, chose an unusual career for a woman, as the proprietor of a small asylum for ladies. She contracted the firm of Bravender and Son of Cirencester to build another storey with bow windows on the ground floor wings on either side of the house to increase the number of bedrooms available. This raised the wings up to the same roof level as the original late-18<sup>th</sup> Century house and thereby enhanced the building's appearance. A licence to open up her house as an asylum for up to four patients was granted on 16 October 1866 although the first patient, Ann Hedges of Newnham Murren in Oxfordshire, had arrived over a year earlier in August 1865, probably as a 'guest' or boarder. Ellen started advertising in the local and national press and one such advertisement in the Morning Post in April 1867 starts "There is a vacancy in a first class Retreat for a lady suffering from a mild form of mental derangement, where three others only are received".

From the first visits by the Government Commissioners in Lunacy and the locally-appointed Board of Visitors the Croft House asylum received very favourable reports. The 1868 Commissioners' report stated that the house "affords admirable accommodation for patients of a quiet class" and that it was "especially adapted for patients of the class above referred to". All the patients in Croft House were private, i.e. fee-paying, residents. The 1872 report stated that the "inmates are treated, in so far as it is possible as members of the family" and "that the garden of the adjoining cottage, which is the property of Mrs. Iles, is cultivated by one of the patients, and is a source of great interest and amusement to her." The licence was amended to increase the number of patients permitted from four to five in 1872, although from this date the average was usually only three patients in residence with one or two living-in nurses assisting.

By January 1892 there was only a single patient resident in Croft House and later in the year Ellen Iles and her daughter (also called Ellen Matilda) closed the asylum. Ellen may have become unwell and unable to continue to look after her patients as she died at her home on 15 July 1893. However, this was not the end of the Iles family's connection with Croft House because Ellen's youngest daughter Agnes Eliza ('Lizzie') had married a local doctor Charles Harold Bloxsome in 1884 and after her mother died in 1893 they moved from the High Street to become the next tenants of Croft House with the younger Ellen Matilda Iles living with them.

Doctor Bloxsome was born in Yorkshire in 1857 and had practised as a physician and surgeon in Lancashire until he moved to Fairford in 1883. Croft House served as the family home and the surgery with 'Lizzie' acting as receptionist, pharmacist and accountant for the practice. Doctor Bloxsome was the first person in Fairford to own a car, a steam-driven American Locomobile which he bought in 1903 and which he probably kept garaged in the old stable block. It seems that the Bloxsome's rented out part of their property, probably the cottage that had been built onto the house and it is possible that Ellen Matilda Iles had done likewise in the 1880s/90s. John L. Williams and his wife Mary, recently arrived from South Africa, were the Bloxsome's tenants in 1897 to at least 1901. 'Lizzie' Bloxsome died on 21 Oct 1911 aged 49 years and was very well respected, especially by many of the poorer families in Fairford who paid for three seats to be erected in Fairford in her memory. In July 1913 Charles Bloxsome remarried to Miss Eveline Rendell in London and continued his practice in Fairford. Doctor Bloxsome died in Croft House on 17 February 1928 having spent over 30 years in Croft House and over 40 years treating the local population of the Fairford area in his house and in the Cottage Hospital. Doctor Bloxsome's son Harold took over his father's medical practice and Croft House remained in the hands of the Bloxsome family until 1954 when both Harold and his wife Helen died within just a few weeks of each other.

In 1952 Croft House was added to the National Heritage List for England as a Grade II listed building affording the building a degree of protection. The stable/coach house and the gazebo both became Grade II listed in 1986. Although not mentioned in the 1842 advertisement which listed the property for sale, the



gazebo in the north-west corner of the large garden (now overlooking Walnut Tree Field) may have been built soon after the house was constructed. The official listing entry records that inside the gazebo is a winding timber staircase and that each of the two floors have a small iron fireplace.

Tucked away at the western end of The Croft, Croft House is one of Fairford's hidden gems which became one of the town's most prominent and prized buildings when it was constructed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century and remains so today. It has one of the most extensive grounds of any of the houses in the centre of the town and has had one of the most interesting histories of Fairford's Georgian buildings.

#### References:

- Colvin, H. A biographical dictionary of British architects 1600-1840. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition Yale University Press, 1995  
Gloucester Journal, 11 Jun 1842  
Herbert, N M (Ed.) The Victoria history of the counties of England: A history of the county of Gloucester. Volume 7, p.72. Oxford University Press, 1981  
Morning Post 3 April 1867  
Verey, D and Brooks, A. The buildings of England: Gloucestershire 1: the Cotswolds. Yale University Press, 2002  
Twenty-second report of the Commissioners in Lunacy to the Lord Chancellor 1868  
Twenty-sixth report of the Commissioners in Lunacy to the Lord Chancellor 1872  
Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard, 7 November 1842  
Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard, 9 May 1857  
Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard, 17 June 1865

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### Newspaper Cuttings

North Wilts Herald 8 May 1885

A PUBLIC HALL - The great need of a public hall for our town has long been felt and the difficulty of securing a building has been chiefly owing to the terms on which suitable premises have been held. The question was considered by some of the members of the Liberal Association as being one of pressing need, and action was taken at once. By the generosity of our townsmen, Capt T Milbourne and Mr C Kingsley suitable premises have been secured at Milton End, abutting the Cirencester Road. The building will be known as Milton Hall, and after the necessary alterations, it will afford sitting accommodation for about 300 persons. It will be a place at the service of the Fairford Liberal Association, and may also be engaged for any meeting for the free debate of questions connected with the welfare of the town....

Note: I have included this cutting as a picture of this Hall will possibly be in Edwin Cuss 's presentation at the next meeting as the Salvation Army Hall, later the Troglodyte Club etc. and now flats, next to the Marlborough Arms. After Capt T Milbourne retired as a missionary sea captain he married Sarah Thomas (of diary fame) and became a farmer, a renowned Baptist Church speaker and a founder member of the Liberal Party Association in Fairford. Mr C Kingsley was Sarah's half-brother.

North Wilts Herald 25 April 1884

### **GLOUCESTERSHIRE BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION**

We are glad to find that a Bee-keeping Association has been formed for the County of Gloucester, with the Right Hon. Lord Sudeley as president and Mr Wm Zachary of Cirencester, as hon. secretary, in connection with the British Beekeepers' Association, which has been established for ten years, and of which the Baroness Burdett-Coutts is president. The object of the proposed Association, is set forth in circulars which are being largely dispersed to encourage and advance bee keeping in Gloucestershire, especially amongst the agricultural and other labouring classes, and to afford information as to the most profitable manner of managing bees and disposing of the produce. Mr Cook of Fairford, is a member of the provisional committee, which has been formed and would doubtless be glad to furnish any further information to those in this neighbourhood who may wish for it.

Wilts and Gos Standard 10 May 1884

### **GLOUCESTERSHIRE BEEKEEPER' ASSOCIATION**

In connection with the above association Mr C Brown of Bewdley, an expert of the British Beekeepers' Association, gave a lecture on the 1<sup>st</sup> inst. in the Infant Schoolroom, kindly lent for the occasion by the Rev A Loxley, on the most profitable and scientific method of keeping bees. Owing to the weather, which was very wet, the attendance was limited to the purely local beekeepers, which was a misfortune, as the very able and lucid manner in which the subject in all its details was treated by the lecturer could not have failed to interest and also instruct all who are turning their attention to the matter.

Gloucester Journal 5 July 1884 Advertisement

### **HEALTH EXHIBITION**

One novelty is a collection of 'colouring' and other dyes used by the Chinese in adulterating teas. Visitors after inspection will prefer the natural leaf to that which is painted or dyed. The reason why Horniman's Tea is in daily increasing demand is because it is pure, strong and delicious. List of Agents in this locality:- Gloucester... Newent... Tewkesbury... Cinderford... Newnham... Cheltenham... Fairford by E Giles, Boot and Show Warehouse... Chipping Sodbury... and Stroud.

Wilts and Gos Standard 18 October 1884

### **A BOY BITTEN BY A PIG**

On Saturday last a lad named Griffen, in the employ of Mr Alexander Iles, was driving some pigs by the park gates, and amongst them a sow and a litter of young. One of the latter got fixed in a gate-way, and the lad on going to extricate it was attacked by the old sow, guided doubtless by maternal instinct, and failing to discriminate correctly on the nature of the case. Mr Miles, seeing the lad's peril, went to his rescue and soon extricated him from his danger, as the beast had become savage. The lad was conveyed to the Cottage Hospital, and his wounds which fortunately owing to the promptitude of his rescue, were not serious, were carefully attended to, and in a few days he was again employed at his old vocation.

Wilts and Gos Standard 26 December 1884 Advertisement

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