

# Fairford Flyer

## No 64

June 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 fee is £5.** Visitors are always welcome at £3.

The FHS now has peaked at 162 members, the highest we have ever had, and at the last 2 meetings we have had 69 and 72 attendees also a record. We welcome all new members who joined this month.

**June 20: 7.30pm** - AGM Social FHS 20th anniversary. There will be a short AGM followed by a refreshment break then 'short' speeches by Edwin Cuss and John Read followed by a PowerPoint presentation showing pictures of the FHS'S various activities over the years. This will bring back some fond memories, especially of people who are no longer with us.

Next season's meetings will appear in the September Fairford Flyer, but as a taster we are starting with 'The Romans at Cirencester' on September 19.

There will be a July Fairford Flyer but we are taking a break in August.

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### Dates for your Diary

**June 8-9** Fairford Festival - Edwin Cuss's photographs and FHS Display in the Heritage Room at Fairford Community Centre 10-4pm.

... and for your information

**July 19-21** Royal International Air Tattoo

**August 9-11** FairFest

**August 17-18** Fairford Steam Classic and Retro Show

**September 28** Town Crier Competition

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### May meeting

Chris Peachey gave us a very interesting and well-illustrated talk about Fairford walls, particularly stone walls. He demonstrated that by studying stone walls one can learn a lot about building practices. Many of Fairford's older houses are built of Cotswold stone and some houses and farm buildings show the 'shadow' of a former building which has been removed. The pattern of stone construction in a wall can also show where repairs and modifications have been made. For example, some buildings can be seen to have old doorways and windows blocked up while some field walls can be seen to have been (not always expertly) repaired following damage or decay. Chris showed examples of stonework from many ages ranging from the 13<sup>th</sup> century gateway to the Knights Hospitaller's preceptory at Quenington, (see left) to the much more recent use of tin sheets for walls and roofing. Other interesting images included one which showed holes made by masonry bees in mortar and small gaps in the stonework at the base of field walls to allow water to drain away.



This was a fascinating talk on a subject that is not often featured in our programme of talks but hopefully many members of the audience will now spare some time to look at stone walls with more insight and interest.

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## Valentine Strong and the Fairford connection

In 2006 I wrote the four-page FHS Occasional Paper No.3 titled 'Valentine Strong - Cotswold Stonemason' which is available to view/download on the FHS Website. This paper records the career of Valentine Strong and the building projects that are attributed to him and his two sons Thomas and Edward. Valentine's last contract was the building of Fairford Park House for Andrew Barker in 1661/62. Valentine died before completing the house and is buried in a Grade II\* listed chest tomb in St Mary's church yard. Since producing



the Occasional Paper I have continued to research the Strong family and other Cotswold stonemasons and have found another connection between Valentine Strong and Fairford.

The Strongs were a very prolific family, many of whom were stonemasons starting with Valentine's father Timothy who died in Taynton in 1644. Valentine and his wife Ann had at least 10 children; their sons Thomas and Edward became well-known due to their work in the rebuilding of St Paul's Cathedral and other London churches after the Great Fire of London in 1666. At least three of their four brothers were also stonemasons but after

Valentine's death most of the Strong family moved away from Taynton and Little Barrington where they had lived since the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Two of Valentine's sons, John and Timothy, moved to Stanford-in-the-Vale near Faringdon in what was then Berkshire and it is John, Valentine's youngest son, who is known to have carried on the stonemason trade.

John Strong was born in 1653 and he married Marie Carter who had nine children, one of whom was also called John born in Stanford-in-the-Vale in 1684 and who married Mary Gunter who produced four children, including Thomas who was born in 1715 and died in 1797. Thomas and his wife Elizabeth Whitfield had just three children, one of whom was Robert born in 1757. So far all these Strongs were stonemasons who lived in Stanford-in-the-Vale. They made gravestones for the village church yard, worked on the churches at Longcot and Uffington and are thought to have built houses in the area.

Robert and his wife Mary Lucas renewed the Strong tradition of having large families by producing 10 children. Now here comes the Fairford connection: Robert died in 1815 and his will commences with the words '*I Robert Strong in the Parish of Fairford in the County of Gloucester Mason*'. Robert is listed as a stonemason of Fairford in the British Universal Directory of 1791. In fact there was an even earlier connection with Fairford because Robert and Mary's son, also called Robert, was baptised in Fairford's St Mary's church on 1 May 1789. It is not known when or why this branch of the Strong family moved from Stanford-in-the-Vale to Fairford but whatever the reason Robert Strong junior was the great, great, great grandson of Valentine Strong, master mason. One wonders if the Fairford Strongs made the connection between their family and the grave of Valentine Strong in St Mary's church yard.

Robert junior married Mary Hookham in St Mary's on 21 October 1809 but by 1811 they had moved to Bourton-on-the-Water where Robert worked not as a stonemason but as a slater and plasterer. However, one of their children did return to Fairford when Ann Hookham Strong married John Harvey, a stonemason and builder of Fairford in 1832 and died here in 1845. Their son John Harvey was still living in Fairford in 1861 and, lo and behold, he was also a stonemason!

Chris Hobson

## Newspaper Cuttings

### FAIRFORD AMATEUR ATHLETIC SPORTS

This event seems to have started in 1878 always on Whit Monday (the late Spring Bank Holiday) although an account could not be found for 1878 (it was reported that 1887 was its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary) and continued until 1895 by which time the Raymond Barkers had left Fairford Park and the House was let. The cycle carnival started about this time, so Fairfordians were not without an event.

#### **Wilts and Glos Standard 7 June 1879**

*As announced these sports came off in Fairford Park kindly lent for the occasion, on the afternoon of Whit Monday, and proved, notwithstanding the very unpropitious state of the weather, a decided success. Over 3,000 persons were admitted, and it must have been not a little flattering to those who had the getting up of the affair to observe that despite the increased downpour of rain the interest of this large concourse of visitors remained unabated, and that scarcely any left the field until the conclusion of the sports. The site chosen for the sports was a most suitable one, and had the day been fine the friendly shelter of a noble range of trees, under which was drawn up a goodly array of wagons to form a "grand stand", and which fringed one side of the "course," would have been most enjoyable, as affording every opportunity of a quiet lounge in full view of the winning post, and a grand part of the course. As it was the same trees proved a most acceptable break to the drenching rain and afforded a considerable shelter to the fair occupants of the above-named waggons and other vehicles, who resolutely held their posts, and bore gratifying testimony to the competitors in the various events that their efforts in driving for the mastery were keenly appreciated. The financial results were most gratifying and may be said to have exceeded the most sanguine expectations of the committee. The entries for the various events were numerous, and all were keenly contested.*

*Great credit is certainly due to the committee for their very efficient arrangements; but special mention must be certainly made of the efficient manner in which Rev A.S. Loxley performed the duties of judge, and also of Mr Chard as starter. The band of the Royal North Gloucester Militia of course formed a very great acquisition and would certainly have proved very much more so had the day been fine. We have every reason to believe that a good balance will be carried to the fund for the next year's sports.*

There followed a list of events and prizes winners: including flat races for all ages, and different lengths, some races were for 'Fairford only' others were 'open'; high jump, long jump, putting the weight, hurdle race, tug of war, carrying stones, 50 stones a yard apart, throwing the cricket ball, donkey races, ponies under 13 hands, Donkey Race, last donkey to win.

Over the years a variety of races were introduced including an 'obstacle race' ...

#### **Wilts and Glos Standard 3 June 1882**

##### **OBSTACLE RACE**

*This was the most amusing race of all, the competitors having to crawl through a tub, then over hurdles placed at a most awkward distance underneath a pole only about ten inches from the ground – underneath hurdles placed length wise in the shape of an inverted V, then over a waggon on which were loose hurdles, back underneath the waggon and over the same course to the starting post. As may be anticipated, roars of laughter were elicited by the performances of the competitors and their extraordinary efforts to overcome the obstacles. Mr Shillingford nearly failed as, when endeavouring to emerge from his tub on the return journey he consequently found himself on his back. He, however righted himself just in time to obtain first honours, six started. Prizes 1st 20s; 2nd 10s; 3rd 5s.*

...and a 'steeplechase' through the Park

#### **Wilts and Glos Standard 19 June 1886**

*STEEPLECHASE about one mile, over two watercourses and Broadwater in the park. Thus was the event in which doubtless the most interest was centred, and it was watched throughout with the keenest zest, as it involved swimming across the Broadwater, here some 50 yds wide and deep enough to excite considerable anxiety in the breasts of many spectators. However, boats and ropes were ready in case of emergency, but fortunately they were not required. The course was well planned, and was in sight of all present, starting from the part known as Thirty Acres, across the interesting*

meadow in which two nasty watercourses had to be dealt with, over a bank of rough ground, through the aforesaid river, up the steep bank and so home. It was open to all comers and the prizes were 1st £5, 2nd £2. The starters were Albert Evans, Cirencester, John Sparks, Lechlade and Charles May and Charles Mason, Fairford. It was feared that May had already done too much, and that his chances were limited, whereas the others were comparatively fresh. All started well, and ran easily down the gentle slope to the first watercourse, where they got their first immersion, Sparks leading and clearing it most easily. So, through watercourse No 2 where Mason fell, and lost way considerably. The other three took the river almost simultaneously, Sparks slightly leading. All swam in fairly good style, Mason evidently making the best way. Evans was first to leave the water, but for the moment was fairly done, and could not tackle the steep bank in front of him. This gave May just the chance he was wanting, and pulling himself well up together he rushed up the bank and ran in home some yards in advance of Evans, who had quickly recovered, but too late to hope for first place. He however made a good struggle for second, and beat Morse easily, Sparks being out of it entirely.

The prizes were monetary and range from 1s 6d in the first year rising to considerably more in the later years. Some, however, were not pleased.

### Wilts and Glos Standard 19 May 1883

To the Editor

Sir - In justice to myself as an amateur, I wish to make it known through your columns, that I entered my name as an competitor in the Fairford Sports wholly under the impression that they were Amateur Athletic Sports, and it was not until after the sports were over that I learn to my astonishment that the various sums advertised as prizes were actually going to be paid in money, and in articles of equivalent value.

I need hardly say that had I known of this, I should certainly not have competed. I left before the prizes were given away, but I have written to the Secretary, refusing to receive my prize money, as this would strictly speaking constitute me as a professional. That a hard and fast line ought to have been and is drawn between these two classes does not seem to have struck the Fairford Amateur Athletic Sports Committee.

I am, yours truly Arthur B Baldwin, D U B C [Dublin University Boat Club]

The Vicarage Berwick-on-Tweed

However, despite the variable weather (reports often seemed to say it rained) - the event always went well.

### Witney Express and Oxfordshire and Midland Counties Herald 1 June 1882

ATHLETIC SPORTS: The Fairford Athletic Club held their annual sports on Monday last, Fairford Park being kindly lent for the occasion by J.R. Raymond Barker, Esq and Mr Alexander Iles. The day being beautifully fine a large number of visitors from the surrounding towns assembled to witness the various events, 21 in number and which were well contested. The town was tastefully decorated with flags and banners; over the Park gates was an arch bearing the inscription "Welcome to the Sports." When the Sports were over dancing to the strains of the Royal North Gloucester Militia band commenced and was kept up till eight o'clock when the Park was closed.

<p><b>FAIRFORD</b>  <b>AMATEUR ATHLETIC SPORTS</b>          WILL TAKE PLACE ON  <b>WHITMONDAY, MAY 17th, 1880,</b>          IN  <b>FAIRFORD PARK,</b>          By kind permission of J. R. R. Barker, Esq., and Mr.          Alexander Iles.          Under the patronage of most of the Gentry in the Town          and Neighbourhood.</p>
<p>By kind permission of Captain and Adjutant Bigg-Wither,          THE BAND OF THE R.N.G. MILITIA WILL PERFORM.</p>
<p>SPORTS TO COMMENCE AT HALF-PAST ONE O'CLOCK.          Over £30 in Prizes to be given away.          Admission to the park : - Adults, 2d.; children, under 14 years,          1d.; two-wheel conveyances, 1s.; four-wheel conveyances, 2s.;          each occupant, 3d.          Tickets to be obtained from each of the stewards one          week previous to the Sports.</p>
<p><b>RAILWAY ARRANGEMENTS.</b>          The G.W.R. Company agree to issue return tickets, 1st, 2nd,          and 3rd class, at single fare and a quarter, from Oxford,          Yarnton, Eynsham, Southleigh, and Witney, by trains leaving          Oxford at 8.50 a.m. and 12.5 p.m.          All passengers to return from Fairford by 6.35 ordinary          train, or by special train at 7.30 p.m.</p>