

Fairford Flyer

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FAIRFORD HISTORY



SOCIETY

We hope you are enjoying these online newsletters. If anyone has anything they would like to contribute or any local history questions please email enquiry@fairfordhistory.org.uk.

Chairman's Report 2019-20

This has been a very unusual time in all our lives and in the life of the Fairford History Society. The AGM would have been held this week. There was no speaker booked; a 'Show and Tell' had been planned instead. As a stopgap the FHS 2019-2020 Accounts are attached to the Email. Of course, we have lost a little income but on the other hand we have not had to pay rent for the room or speaker's fees. At the next meeting hopefully in September the AGM business will be very brief. We shall keep you informed of developments.

The AGM is a gathering when we review the work of society during the previous year and consider how we can continue its work in the future. This year we were forced to cancel meetings, our participation in Fairford Festival and the Tudor event celebrating the 500th anniversary of the visit of Henry VIII to Fairford. We had already prepared and printed a booklet about life in Fairford in Tudor times and a Tudor Trail around the town, both of which will be available in the future. Maybe the guided walk by Syd Flatman can be held in the autumn.

The regular newsletters have filled the void to some extent and helped to keep us interested and entertained, appreciative emails have been received; it was a policy to keep off the subject of 'you know what' and we abandoned the article on the plague in Fairford!

Thanks to all our contributors and to members that have given us content and ideas for subjects.
Geoff Hawkes

Fairford Trees extra - from Jane Pugh, former tree warden

Another planting of interest is a red oak tree in the grounds of Fairford Primary School in memory of headmaster Colin Watkins. It stands near the well grown woodland that runs along one boundary of the school. When the present primary school moved from the centre of Fairford where the Orchard is now in 1988 Colin Watkins encouraged the children in planting a new woodland of mixed native trees which is charmingly named Watkins Woods, this has continued to be an item of play, education and shelter ever since.

Edwin Austin Abbey at Morgan Hall 1891-1911

Edwin Austin Abbey RA (April 1, 1852 - August 1, 1911) was an American illustrator and painter. He is best known for his drawings and paintings of Shakespearean and Victorian subjects, as well as for his painting of Edward VII's coronation. His most famous set of murals, *The Quest and Achievement of the Holy Grail*, adorns the Boston Public Library.

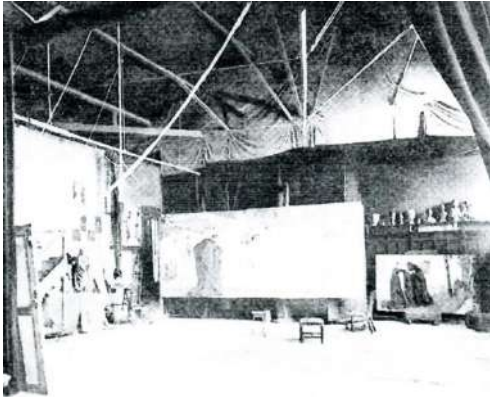
E V Lucas published a biography 'Edwin Austin Abbey; Royal Academician: a record of his life and work' in 1921 commissioned by Abbey's wife Gertrude from whence much of the information of this article was obtained. June Lewis had planned to write a biography of Abbey but sadly died before it was completed.

He came to Fairford when he was on the search for a background to one of his paintings.

"As it happened Fairford was a momentous halting place, for on the following morning the landlord of the Bull mentioned an empty house that was well worth looking over, and led his guests to what was to be destined their home for the next twenty years and the scene of Abbeys principal labours. Morgan Hall, a serene, sunny house with walled gardens and old trees about it and in front of the east window eminently fitted (save for a few isolated trees) to be a spacious cricket ground."



Abbey leased Morgan Hall for 20 years from the Raymond Barker family; it originally had been a dower house for the family called Fairford Lodge. The Raymond Barkers bought the house from the Morgan family, (John Raymond [Barker]'s sister Britannia married Charles Tirrell Morgan in 1774). In old deeds the house was called Bakers. Although it is rumoured that the Roundheads stayed at Morgan Hall on their way through to Cirencester there is no evidence for this or that that Major General Thomas Morgan was linked to the Fairford Morgan family. This story has been complicated by the fact that the Frank Cadogan Cowper's mother, the novelist E E Cowper, wrote a book called 'The Invaders of Fairford' linking Fairford to a Civil War adventure. Frank Cadogan Cowper had been Abbey's apprentice.



In January 1891 work started on the refurbishment of the house and the building of Abbey's studio The studio measured 64 feet by 40 feet by 25 feet, unfortunately there are no pictures of the outside of this studio; it was demolished shortly after his death in 1911.

The Abbeys moved in on April 18th 1891. Shortly afterwards Abbey's wife's mother Mrs Mead who is described as a delightful person came to stay as did the artist John Singer Sargent who shared the studio with Abbey. Sargent worked at the east end and Abbey at the west. Many other famous artists came to visit, Alma

Tadema and Alfred Parsons to name two and there were strong links with the Broadway group of artists.

Henry James was a great friend. He found great difficulty in procuring 'new laid' eggs in London so a box was specially constructed so that the eggs could travel safely from Fairford to London. Henry James writes to Mrs Abbey:

"The arrival of the eggs makes me believe in better things. ... I shall bless you as long as they continue, and even when they have stopped, for the memory of them."

In 1902 Abbey was commissioned to paint the coronation of Edward VII, now in the Queen's collection at Buckingham Palace. For his paintings he often used local models, Esther Farmer, the stonemason's wife was asked to pose as one of the ladies for the Coronation picture.

Illustration of Edwin Abbey from Vanity Fair Magazine 1898.

To be continued ... Cricket Weeks at Morgan Hall.

FROM THE NEWSPAPERS - CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

HIGHWAY ROBBERY

The Oxford Journal of 3 February 1781 reported the following dastardly crime:

“Bristol, Jan 31. The Mail that left this City last Saturday night, for London, was robbed between two and three o'clock on Monday morning, by a single highwayman, with a crape over his face, betwixt the eleventh and twelfth milestone, near Cranford Bridge. The highwayman presented a pistol to the boy, and after making him alight, drove away the horse and cart, which were found about seven o'clock on Monday morning, in a meadow field, near Farmer Lott's, at Twyford when it appeared that the greatest part of the letters were taken out of the Bath and Bristol bags, and the following bags entirely carried off...”

There then followed a list of 35 towns and villages ranging from as far away as Aberystwyth and as close to London as Maidenhead which had lost their mail bags, the list included Fairford, Lechlade and Cirencester. Cranford Bridge was on the Bath Road near Hounslow Heath, a notorious area for highway robbery in the 18th Century, then much more extensive than it is today and now partly covered by the runways of Heathrow Airport. The loss of these letters would have been a serious matter for the senders and the recipients. But at least nobody was hurt in the robbery, unlike...

ROBBERY WITH VIOLENCE

A report appeared in several newspapers of a violent robbery that took place at Maisey Hampton in 1843. The Cheltenham Chronicle of 9 February reported the case:

“FOOTPAD ROBBERY AND ATROCIOUS ASSAULT - On Wednesday last an atrocious footpad robbery, attended by personal violence, took place near Maisey Hampton, of which Mr. Lane was the victim. On Wednesday evening last he went to a public house in Maisey Hampton to change a sovereign for his brother, and in returning home he called at a friend's house and stayed there a little while. He left there about a quarter past seven in the evening. His house being about a mile from Maisey Hampton, he went along a footpath across the fields. In crossing one of the fields he saw a man under a hedge. Mr. Lane walked towards the hedge and asked if there was anything the matter. The man replied “No” Mr. Lane said “a fine evening, good night,” and then proceeded on. When Mr Lane was about the middle of the next field, he was struck to the ground by a blow from behind. In attempting to rise he received another blow on the arm, and a man demanded his money or his life. Mr. Lane then gave him some money, when the man said “This is not all you've got: I must have it all or I'll kill you.” Mr. Lane then gave him all he had, which was £1. 12s. 6d. The man then beat him until he was senseless. After lying some time he recovered sufficiently to crawl home. The next morning a young man, named John Mitchell, was apprehended on suspicion, and taken before Mr. Barker, of Fairford. On Friday morning the police took his shoes to match the footmarks, which were traced from the place in the hedge, where Mr. Lane saw the man sitting, to the spot where he was struck. They were found to match exactly. Every nail and also the peculiar mark in the tip was found exactly to correspond with the shoes he wore.”

Thanks to the diligent work of the local police (an early example of a forensic criminal investigation) the 20-year old John Mitchell was tried at the Gloucester assizes on 5 April 1843 and sentenced to death. However, this was commuted to 15 years transportation and he was sent to a prison hulk in the Thames at Deptford on 26 May and then transferred to the ship 'Lord Petre' which set sail 3 July and arrived at Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) on 15 October after a 15-week voyage.

Mitchell had only been released from prison six weeks before the assault on Mr. William Lane as he had been sentenced to six months imprisonment in June 1842 for stealing ducks from Edward Tombs of Lechlade. This John Mitchell is not to be confused with the John Mitchell of Fairford who was transported to Australia in 1831 for seven years for his part in the Swing Riots.

The newspaper report concluded: "Mr. Lane is now lying in a very dangerous state. Mr. Cornwall the surgeon of Fairford, gives very little hopes of his recovery." In fact William Lane, aged about 70, must have recovered as there is no record of the burial of William Lane in the Fairford area within five years of the assault.

A LACK OF TRUST?

A report in the Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard of 29 April 1845 shows how a lack of trust in the police can have serious consequences:

"On Wednesday night last, the shop of Mr. J Dawson, of Fairford, was broken into, and seven trull cheeses, three gammons of bacon, and a fore hock, were stolen therefrom. Some few years ago a police constable, stationed in this town, was transported; and, ever since, most of the townspeople have entirely set their face against any of the cloth. Mr. Dawson, it appears, is one of them, and considers the police useless, for he gave no information of the robbery until Friday, when he, as if by accident, mentioned it to Sergeant Webb, of the county police, who very properly set about an enquiry. From information he received he suspected Henry Rowland, and two others, of notoriously bad character, and informed Mr. Dawson of it, requesting him to assist him in procuring a search warrant. This he refused to do, and the sergeant then took with him a constable and searched the house of Rowland, where he found concealed upstairs a great portion of the stolen property. Rowland has since been taken before J. R. Barker, Esq., and committed for trial at the assizes. Great credit is due to Sergeant Webb, for his exertions, and we hope in future to see the good people of Fairford more communicative with the police than they have been on the present occasion."

The alleged lack of trust in the police by some of the residents of Fairford stems from the case of Samuel Beaumont, one of Fairford's first police constables, who burgled a house in the Market Place on Christmas Day 1836. Beaumont was tried and convicted and transported to Australia for life although he was pardoned in 1849. A full account of this incident can be found in Fairford Flyer 17 in the Publications section of the FHS internet website.

Undoubtedly Beaumont's crime would have shocked Fairford's residents at the time and still remembered almost a decade later. However, the newspaper article may have overstated the case and perhaps even have 'invented' some of the 'facts' because John Dawson wrote a letter to the newspaper which was published in the 6 May 1845 issue in which repudiated his alleged lack of faith in the police. Mr. Dawson also stated that he sent for Sergeant Webb immediately after the robbery had taken place and told him of his suspicion that Henry Rowland was the culprit. Perhaps the lack of trust was misplaced in the police when it should have been in the press of the day?

Henry Rowland was tried at Gloucester assizes in August but for some reason was acquitted. However, Henry failed to learn from his narrow escape as he was jailed for six weeks in 1847 for stealing ducks from Thomas Iles and in 1851 he was given a sentence of 12 months with hard labour for stealing a watch from John Beal.