

The Fairford Flyer

Fairford History Society
Newsletter No 9
July 2009

FAIRFORD HISTORY



SOCIETY

Fairford Polish Event



About 250 people, Polish visitors as well as Fairford residents, attended the unveiling of the Polish Hostel commemorative plaque at the Pitham Path Gate on Leafield Road on Saturday 30th May. The plaque was funded by the Polish Ex-Combatants Association of Great Britain and was the brainchild of Mrs Alicja Swiatek Christofides, one of several people attending the ceremony who had been born in the Polish Hostel at Fairford. The Hostel opened in the grounds of Fairford Park in 1947 and about 1,200 Poles were resident there until it closed. For more detailed information on this subject please see Zosia

Biegus's website at www.polishresettlementcampsintheuk.co.uk. Many of the camp's residents later moved to the Swindon area where they lived and worked while still retaining a strong bond to the large Polish community in Britain. The plaque was placed at what used to be the main entrance to the Hostel thanks to the generous support of the Ernest Cook Trust, which now owns the land. Maurice Jones, the Town Crier, set the scene on a gloriously sunny day by calling the crowd to order. Speeches were made (partly in Polish) by Joe Cusack, the Mayor of Fairford; Czeslaw Maryszczak, Chairman of the Polish Ex-Combatants Association of Great Britain; Nicholas Ford, Secretary to the Trustees of the Ernest Cook Trust; Father Philip Beisly, parish priest of St Thomas of Canterbury in Horcott; June Lewis Jones, President of the FHS; and our Chairman, Geoff Hawkes.

After the unveiling most of the visitors then made their way to the Community Centre for a reception during which they viewed a fascinating exhibition on the history of the Polish community in Britain. Refreshments were served by members of the Fairford History Society. The event was organized by Alicja Swiatek Christofides and Alison Hobson and was judged to be very successful especially as many old friends were re-acquainted and some new friendships made.

A commemorative programme sold out very early during the proceedings but is being reprinted and will be available from the FHS at the cost of £1.

**2009-10 FHS meetings in the Farmor Room,
Fairford Community Centre at 7.30pm**

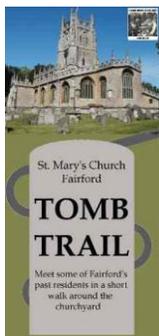
September 17th The Polish Hostel in Fairford - Alicja Świątek Christofides. **November 19th** - Glos Archaeology Sites and Monuments Record. **February 18th** - Ashmolean Museum: **June 17th** AGM (speaker to be arranged)



NEW PUBLICATIONS

FHS Occasional Paper 4 - RICHARD GREEN, SCHOOLMASTER (1713-1767) by Chris Hobson. A short biography of Mr Richard Green, one of Fairford Free School's earliest masters, he was a highly respected citizen of the town. His memorial plaque is on the old school building today. Price 50p

THE ST MARY'S CHURCH, FAIRFORD TOMB TRAIL. This leaflet provides a brief guide to 25 tombs in the church and churchyard that are of either architectural or historical importance from John Tame to Tiddles the Cat! The leaflet provides an entertaining accompaniment to a short walk around the churchyard. Price 60p



FAIRFORD POLISH HOSTEL, 1947-1959 by Alicja Świątek Christofides

A brief history of the Polish Displaced Persons camps in Britain and the programme that was written for the unveiling of the commemorative plaque at the site in Leafield Road on May 30th 2009.

Price £1.00 (published by the author)

The **SON ET LUMIERE MEMORIES OF 1978** CD is also now available.

All FHS publications are available contacting the secretary on 01285 711768. They are also on sale at St Mary's Church, Fairford and at the Community Centre, Archive Room.

ARCHIVE ROOM

This room is full to bursting already and we have only been in situ a year **BUT** if you have any Fairford memorabilia we are very pleased to copy and record items, especially photographs, and return them. Rob Winney, who has been a stalwart in finding items for the Society, recently donated a lantern from the old Fairford signal box. Thanks to him and all others who have donated items.

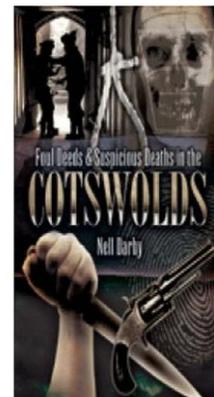
Enquiries

In 2009 FHS has already responded to over 20 family or local history enquiries. One of these

was a phone call from Alicja Christofides which resulted in our wonderful Polish Event. An asset to answering enquiries is the graveyard list which is used for people searching for the graves of their ancestors, even if they are only shown a space! Recently a new headstone was erected on the grave of Nelson Lane. He was a coachman at the Bull Hotel for 20 years and he disappeared the night of September 23rd, 1929 and was found drowned in the River Coln, it appeared he had fallen in. The result of the inquest said he died an accidental death. The day of his death was Monday night and the story goes that the Bull did not pay the grieving widow up to the end of the week as his week's work was not completed. The relatives were very pleased that Nelson's memory is now properly commemorated as the site was previously unmarked.

Acquisitions

Another story is the tale of Ann Ind from Quenington who attempted to murder her father by obtaining arsenic from the chemist in Fairford. The full story is told in a book **Foul Deeds and Suspicious Deaths in Gloucestershire** by Nell Darby. Published by Wharnccliffe this year, it is a new acquisition for the



FHS library. Other recent acquisitions are:-

Place-Names of Gloucestershire by AH Smith in 4 volumes and **The Village School** by June Lewis, which although not a new book, gives some very informative and interesting background of the history of education.

These books and others in the collection may be consulted in the Archive Room. The Archive Room is open on Monday afternoons 2-4pm or at other times by special arrangement (01285 711768)

The Committee 2009-2010

Officers: Geoff Hawkes (Chair) 712053, Ian Westlake (Vice Chair) 712329, Alison Hobson (Secretary) 711768, Gill Compton (Treasurer), Margaret Bishop (FCC rep), John Read (IT), Maurice Jones (FTC rep), Chris Hobson (Publications)

From the Archives

Parish Register Transcription Project

After more than 2 years of 'hard labour' the project to transcribe the Fairford parish registers is now complete. The registers have survived intact from 1617 and all entries of baptisms, banns, marriages and burials have been entered onto several Excel spreadsheets.

Gloucestershire Archives has been supplied with a copy of all the spreadsheets and a copy is also available in the Archives Room of Fairford's Community Centre for researchers to consult.

It is hoped that this project will provide a useful resource from which to answer family and local history enquiries and to assist research about Fairford and its residents in general.

The next step is to incorporate the information gleaned from the parish registers into a database that has been created to record all Fairford residents found in the censuses from 1841 to 1911. This project may take another 2 years - at least!

From the newspapers

A recent trawl through some ancient newspapers revealed a number of interesting items relating to Fairford.

From The London Evening Post, Tuesday, April 24, 1770

"Wednesday last being the day of Mr Wilkes's enlargement, it was celebrated in the following manner at Fairford; 45 Shoemakers walked through the town in grand procession, the foreman carrying a flag with the following inscription, Wilkes and Liberty, Magna Charter, and the Bill of Rights, the rest following with each of them a firelock shooting off 45 times; after their spirited behaviour, they were entertained with an elegant dinner, which was a buttock of beef weighing 45lb, a pudding 45lb, 45 pigeons, 45 pyes, 45 cheesecakes, 45 couple of fowls, 45lb of bacon, 45lb of bread, and 45 pots of beer; after dinner they enjoyed themselves with 45 drams, 45 bottles of wine, and 45 bowls of punch, drinking many loyal toasts; in the evening there was a bonfire consisting of 45 faggots of wood; likewise 45

sky-rockets, beside other grand fireworks and illuminations, each window containing 45 candles. The whole concluded at twelve o'clock in the evening with 45 peals of bell, and loud acclamations of joy."

John Wilkes was a very popular but highly controversial radical politician. He was the publisher of a political periodical called 'The North Briton', the 'Private Eye' of its day. In issue number 45 (which became a rallying cry along with 'Wilkes and liberty') he criticized the government which responded by charging him with seditious libel, removing him from Parliament and, eventually, locking him up in the King's Bench Prison. His release and rehabilitation in April 1770 prompted the celebrations in Fairford and elsewhere throughout the country.

From Jackson's Oxford Journal, Saturday, August 25, 1810

"Lost from Fairford, on Wednesday night or Thursday morning last - Twelve spotted black and white STORE PIGS, very light in the ear, of a middle size; the property of Geo. Robbins. Whoever will give information so that the pigs may be restored to the owner, shall be handsomely rewarded, and be paid all reasonable expenses."

It is not known if Mr Robbins ever found his missing pigs but he remained farming in Fairford until he retired in 1834.

From Jackson's Oxford Journal, Saturday, April 9, 1814

J. Townsend (successor to Miss Green) takes this opportunity of returning his most grateful acknowledgments to the inhabitants of Fairford and its vicinity, for the very liberal encouragement he has hitherto experienced, and begs to inform them he is just returned from London with a new and fashionable assortment of Plain, Twilled, and Wellington Sarcenets, Satins, Silk and Cotton Shawls, Printed Cottons, a great variety of Fancy Muslins, Lace, Ribbands, Flowers, Feathers, Trimmings, Irish Cloths, Dowlases, and various other articles in the Linen Drapery and Fancy Trade.

A good example of the variety of fabrics available to the Regency seamstress in the provinces, this advertisement concludes with

the line: *"Funerals completely furnished"*

From Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle, Saturday, January 5, 1867

"Wanted a Situation as Coachman; country preferred, no objection to hunters. Single, age 28. Can have a good character if required. Apply R B, Post Office, Arlington, Fairford"

And if a bad character is required...?

On a more sombre note, the following item appeared in **Jackson's Oxford Journal for 6 October 1827:**

"Death from swallowing a wasp - Lately, a fine young man, 22 years of age, while occupied in carrying apples from the orchard of his employer, Mr Vines of Whelford, near Fairford, hastily eat a ripe plum, containing a wasp, the immediate and distressing consequence of which admitted of no remedy. Surgical aid not being on the spot, pain at the upper part of the trachea, accompanied by the rapid symptoms of suffocation, followed, terminating the life of the sufferer in less than 15 minutes. In similar occurrences, a strong solution of common salt and water is recommended to be administered."

This is not as bizarre as it sounds. In 2004 eight people died in Britain from wasp and bee stings - so be careful!

What Lies Beneath

During the recent replacement of the nave floor in St Mary's the workmen discovered several fragments of stone that carried parts of an inscription. The fragments were found beneath the existing surface and had been used as part of the foundations for the floor. Four of the pieces (the largest measuring about 14 inches by 7 inches and about one and a half inches thick - sorry, I can't do metric!) were cleaned up to clearly reveal several words and two dates. The surface of the stone had been finished to a very smooth surface with fine lettering but the reverse side was very rough and uneven indicating that it had probably been a grave slab rather than a vertical freestanding headstone. A study of Bigland's 'Account of the Parish of Fairford' of 1791 which lists all the major tombs in the church

and the churchyard at that date solved the riddle.

The surviving lettering matched perfectly the inscription on the grave of William and Ann Haynes and their daughter Mary who died in 1758, 1723 and 1754 respectively. Bigland records this as "On a flat stone in the South Aisle". It would appear that the Haynes stone was removed and broken up to be used as rubble during the reflooring of the church, possibly in 1854 when the church seating was replaced. Unfortunately this is by no means an isolated example of the length to which the Victorians would go to 'beautify' our churches. William Haynes had been a church warden for many years but even this didn't stop his memorial being smashed up after less than 100 years.

The surviving pieces of the Haynes family gravestone can now be seen in the Archive Room in the Community Centre.

Chris Hobson