

THE MONUMENTS OF St MARY'S CHURCH, FAIRFORD - 15

JOHN HUMPHREYS (1734-1803) AND FAMILY



John Humphreys was born in 1734 and may have been the John Humphreys son of another John who was baptised in Tetbury on 9 August of that year. The earliest written evidence of John Humphreys of Fairford is the record of his marriage to Margaret Stephenson at Christ Church in Spitalfields, Middlesex on 11 June 1772. John was a maltster and baker and is listed as such in the 1791 British Universal Directory.

John and Margaret had three children. Their first born, John, was baptised at Fairford on 14 July 1773 but he only survived for two months and was buried on 12 September of the same year. Their daughter Elizabeth was born in 1775 and married William Jenner Lane of Marston Meysey and later of Poulton. The couple had at least four children and eventually retired and lived in London Street until their deaths within a year of each other in 1862/63. The third child, Mary, was baptised at Fairford on Boxing Day 1776 and remained a spinster living in Fairford until her death.

Fortunately the wills of John, Margaret and Mary have survived give us some details of their lives, relations and property. John wrote his will on 1 April 1803, just ten days before he died, and left his house and land to Margaret and then, after her death, he willed it to his daughters Elizabeth and Mary. He also asked his friend John Stephenson (possibly a relation) of Faringdon to sell off much of his property (including his “dairy and farming utensils and farming stock”) and place the proceeds in a trust, the interest to be paid to his wife. Margaret’s will written in 1828 bequeaths her property to her unmarried daughter Mary and also set up a trust for her. Margaret stipulated that after Mary’s death the property was to be divided between the children of her daughter Elizabeth Lane. Mary is recorded as living in London Street in 1841 and 1851 but she also owned or leased other property in Fairford including the George Inn in which she was one of three leaseholders during the 1840s.

Margaret died on 4 July 1831 and in March of the following year her son-in-law William Jenner Lane placed an advertisement in local newspapers to sell one of Margaret’s properties describing it as “A comfortable dwelling house, with malt house, bake house, and large granaries, stables, etc and every convenience for carrying on the malting, baking, and dealing business, to a large extent. The above premises were the property of the late Mrs Humphries, and are most eligibly situated in the best part of Fairford”. The sale may not have been as straightforward as was hoped as another advertisement in September 1832 advertised the sale of just the malt house and bake house.

John and Margaret's daughter Mary died on 18 July 1855 at the age of 79 and was buried at Fairford five days later. In her will, written two months before her death, she left most of her property to her sister Elizabeth including her half share in a house in London Street and another in the High Street (both rented out to tenants) along with a garden in the Crofts. This garden was first leased by Margaret Humphreys in 1805 and the lease renewed in 1851. Mary also left £10 annuity to her domestic servant Amelia James who stayed on in Mary's house in London Street and became the servant of William Jenner and Elizabeth Lane and later lived on her annuity in the Crofts.

The obituary notice of Mary's death in the 18 August 1855 issue of the Oxford Chronicle reads: "Mrs Mary Humphris [sic] of Fairford, in her 79th year, beloved and respected by her relatives and friends and likewise by the poor, who at all times experienced her kindness, but more especially when they laid on the bed of sickness."

The monument to John Humphreys, his wife and two of his children was made by the Lewis family of stonemasons of Cheltenham. It was probably erected after the death of John's wife Margaret in 1831 as Lewis memorials prior to about 1820 are signed 'John Lewis' whereas the Humphreys monument is signed 'C. Lewis'. There are Lewis-built monuments in many churches throughout Gloucestershire and neighbouring counties and many of them feature the blue-gray marble background as used on the Humphrey memorial. The Lewis family, father, son and grandson were producing church monuments from about 1796 to 1860 and although their memorials have been described as "in no way outstanding" and unambitious, they are sound, workmanlike and unostentatious monuments which were aimed at the pocket of the reasonably well-off yeoman class of potential purchasers.

The memorial to the Humphreys in in the south aisle of Fairford Church reads as follows:

ERECTED IN AFFECTIONATE
REMEMBRANCE
OF JOHN HUMPHREYS,
WHOSE REMAINS ARE DEPOSITED
NEAR THIS PLACE.
HE DEPARTED THIS LIFE APRIL 11TH. 1803,
AGED 69 YEARS.
AND OF
MARGARET, HIS WIFE
SHE DEPARTED THIS LIFE JULY 4TH. 1831,
AGED 84 YEARS.
ALSO OF JOHN, THEIR INFANT SON.
AND OF
MARY HUMPHREYS,
THEIR DAUGHTER
SHE DEPARTED THIS LIFE JULY 18TH. 1855,
AGED 79 YEARS.
"REDEEMED NOT WITH CORRUPTIBLE THINGS
BUT WITH THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST."



But in fact the family is not buried inside the church but outside in the churchyard close to the south wall of the church and just a few feet away from the memorial. The plain headstones are marked simply with their initials and the years of their deaths.