

MINUTES OF THE 29th MEETING OF AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY HELD IN AYNHO VILLAGE HALL ON WEDNESDAY 26th MAY 2010

Present: – Brian Reynolds – Chairman & Acting Treasurer

Peter Cole – Secretary.

Altogether 29 members and guests attended.

1. Apologies

Three apologies for absence had been received.

2. Correspondence Peter Cole

The Secretary said that he had been asked to look for a family by the name of Holmans, but as the person concerned had been born after the last available census of 1911, he had been unable to find anything. He had looked at the 1911 and 1901 censuses in case the name appeared, but it hadn't.

When John Fulcher came back to Aynho last Wednesday, he took advantage of the visit to ask him several questions that either he had thought of, or people had asked at the Farm Walk through Ryelands Wood.

Brian and Peter had taken John down to Aynho Wharf for the first time since the War, and John had said that the whole area to the north was a mass of railway sidings. When asked how frequently did trains arrive at Aynho with trucks of fuel cans, John replied that it was at least every day, and often several loads per day. None arrived by lorry. The fuel came from refineries at Fawley and Wales.

John's company had 10 Scammell lorries, and there were 20 drivers qualified to drive them. One point Peter had managed to get quite wrong originally, when he thought that Army lorries arrived to collect fuel for their needs. John said that all petrol was sent out by rail, so men had to take required loads down to the station sidings for collection.

This covered large parts of the country, although there were other army petrol dumps far away, but John never knew exactly where any load was going. Whereas the incoming loads were all large, the outgoing ones were much smaller.

They supplied the Navy and Air Force with ordinary petrol, but they never handled aviation fuel or anything like that at all.

The Pioneers were simply labourers, just loading and unloading petrol, whereas the R.A.S.C. were the ones who were responsible for everything. They had reveille at 6 am, had breakfast and then went either to the railway station or Aynhoe Park.

There were hardly any trees in the park at that time. Most of the petrol can "haystacks" (each of 1000 gallons) were situated close to the military roads, as the lorries backed up to long chain rollers to discharge the cans. The numbers of "haystacks" constantly varied due to supply and demand.

Shortly before D-Day all their fuel went down to the soldiers to take with them to Normandy, but soon after D-Day, and by the time John had arrived there, all the fuel was coming from Fawley via PLUTO, (the Pipe Line Under The Ocean).

When writing up the minutes he had recalled that in January Dr Jim McDermott had stated that the Aynho Cartwright's finances were in a bad way, only resolved when Major Fairfax of Edgcote died without an heir in 1881, so his estate went to them. This contradicted what Sally Strutt said last month that the Edgcote Cartwrights had remained there until 1926. He had emailed Sally, who said that she had attended our January meeting, and afterwards had taken this up with Dr McDermott. He had replied that it was his error, and the person who had left his estate to the Aynho Cartwrights, was Major Fairfax Cartwright of Flore. Peter has therefore amended our January minutes accordingly.

3. Chairman's Report
Reynolds

Brian

In connection with the last meeting Brian said that £100 worth of books about Edgcote had been sold.

Brian reminded everyone about the Fringford walk on 30th June in the morning. In the evening Deborah Hayter will talk about the landscape and early settlement in Banbury.

The pond at Rambler Cottage was drained, and four parts of a shoe were found. These have been identified as being from a high quality shoe, possibly put into the pond when it was first created, as was a common practice.

Aynho History Society will have a stall at the Village fete in June. Brian asked for help in the morning to set it up.

He has spoken with Peggy Harmer about her experiences in Aynho, and more importantly about her service in World War 2.

4. Finance Report

Brian Reynolds

The Acting Treasurer reported that funds currently stand at £1225.

Brian will make some proposals at the next meeting for discussion about the future organisation of our financial structure.

5. Those Coaching Days Barry Smith

Brian introduced Barry Smith, whose family have been farmers on the Spencer Estate just outside Northampton for six generations.

Barry said he wanted to concentrate on the century of change stretching from the early 1700s to about 1840. Most of the countryside was scrub and gorse land with open fields. Villages were closed or self-supporting. Life consisted of existence and survival, and most people rarely left their village. Roads only had a hedge on one side, so that the road could be moved over when it became impassable. Stage waggons would occasionally lumber along doing about 10 miles per day, carrying goods such as candle wax and salt, which were unobtainable locally. Until the coming of canals people didn't use knives and forks, just a wooden spoon.

Until 1760 you only had day coaches. The roads just weren't good enough for anything else, and there wasn't much demand for travel. A trip from London to Birmingham would have taken three days, stopping overnight perhaps at Banbury and Aylesbury. A common problem was highwaymen. Cash or valuables would have been kept in a box underneath the coach, and a guard dog would have run along below it.

These coaches had a pitching motion, which combined with potholes made for an uncomfortable journey. Riding inside cost about 6d, and outside 3d per mile. If a person riding outside fell asleep, he was very likely to drop off, hence the modern expression about a person dropping off.

When land was enclosed in the early part of the eighteenth century, it was no longer possible to move roads over. The parish was expected to maintain roads, which was particularly onerous on Aynho, where several major routes met. This all changed with the coming of turnpike roads from about the middle of the century, when tolls were imposed to pay for their upkeep. Toll gates were often franchised out. They were the equivalent of modern-day motorways, and much faster travel became possible. Trade and commerce flourished and people began to travel more freely.

Locally turnpike roads ran from Buckingham to Banbury, one went from Aynho to Chipping Norton and Burford, and another to Bicester. With canals bulk transport of stone and other building materials became much cheaper and easier. Vehicles improved, with a metal rim around the wooden wheels to permit faster movement, and springing to improve the ride. Coaches started travelling through the night.

In 1784 the then Postmaster General awarded the first contract for carrying mail from London to Bath. His name was Palmer, and he also designed and built what came to be known as the Palmer Mail Coach. Within 10 to 15 years a network sprang up between all major towns in the country. Also in the 1790s timetables came into being, and soon regular services to include passengers operated on most routes.

From being mostly where people stayed overnight, coach houses became places where coach parties stopped off for meals. Often during these short stops, relays of horses and drivers changed over. As stops could be as short as 15 minutes, people would choose food that they could carry off with them to finish consuming back on the coach.

By the 1820s or 1830s things had improved so much that you could leave Banbury at 7.30 pm and be in London by 3 am next morning. The stagecoaches would be hired out to the operating companies, and all the horses were owned by stage masters who rented them out as and when necessary. If it was a mail coach, it would have had a crown emblem on the door, and there would have been a post office guard with a primed blunderbuss sitting on top, probably to the apprehension of any other passengers sitting in front of him. Inside it would have been very stuffy, as people were often sick. As they approached towns the coachman would play tunes to signal for a change of horses, to warn an inn of approaching trade, or to warn pedestrians of a fast-moving coach coming through. At the height of the stagecoach era it was reckoned that no fewer than 6,000 horses were kept at Northampton. In addition to bottles of water and cordial, a bottle of rose-petal perfume was carried on board to help ladies mitigate the stench created not only from these horses, but also from open sewers running down streets, by putting perfume on a handkerchief to hold in front of their noses.

The break was a frantic period of activity. A change of horses could be completed in 6 to 8 minutes. Some passengers might want a meal, others just a break from the journeying. From this came the tradition of local people going out to the inn for a meal. Most inns kept three or four coachmen and horses to take people short distances wherever they needed to go, like modern taxis. A young ostler's wages might be less than a pound per year, so even with his accommodation and food provided he would rely heavily on tips. Most stagecoach workers seldom lived to a good age, due to injuries, or rheumatism or arthritis from cold or damp, or from TB or similar illnesses caused by dust or mouldy hay.

The coming of the railways killed off the stagecoach industry, as they were much faster and cheaper. The mail was transferred to the railway as it was more reliable. Almost overnight by 1850 the stagecoach disappeared.

In response to a question Barry said that the Aynho coaching house probably survived despite being so close to Banbury, because it was a junction of several roads, so people could change here.

Brian thanked him for his interesting talk.

6. Forthcoming Meetings

June 30th	Flora Thompson Trail 10.30 am	Martin Greenwood
Ditto	Landscape and Early Settlement in the Banbury Area 7.30 pm	Deborah Hayter
July 28th	Aynho Scenes 7.30 pm	Brian Reynolds