

MINUTES OF THE 40th MEETING OF AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY HELD IN AYNHO VILLAGE HALL ON WEDNESDAY 29th JUNE 2011

Present: – Rupert Clark – Chairman
 Brian Reynolds – Treasurer
 Peter Cole – Secretary.

1. Apologies

There were three apologies.

2. Chairman's Report

Rupert Clark

Rupert declared our presence at the Fete a success, particularly with the debut of the Aynho fireman's uniform, which Brian had brought back from his visit to Elizabeth Cartwright-Hignett. The company which originally produced it in Victorian times unfortunately has no records dating that far back. It may have been worn either by her grandfather or possibly by William Whiteman.

Regarding Nelson's carriage, if it still existed in recognisable form, it would be extremely rare. The remains of it may be buried just to the west of Green Lane. It is believed that some one in the village may have some metal parts of it.

Details of the History Walk will be available next month.

3. Secretary's Report

Peter Cole

Peter said that Jean Darby had very kindly provided him with details of the Militia Lists for Aynho for the years 1762, 1777 and 1781, and the Aynho Land Tax for 1798. These were all on display at our stall at the Church Fete.

In her book "Lili at Aynho", Mrs Cartwright-Hignett refers to her paintings of Mrs Jones's Cottage and Mrs Page's Cottage, and she is sure that they are one and the same building, but she didn't know where the cottage actually was, but it must have been a substantial one. Her pictures have pencilled notes made by Lili that one was son Willie's study in the cottage, and the other was Willie's dining room in the cottage, where he was staying while work was being done at the Park House.

Peter has been studying the 1841 and 1851 censuses. There is no mention of Mrs Jones or Mrs Page in the 1851 one, but in 1841 a Mrs Jones is shown as a tenant of Stephen Ralph Cartwright, who was living at the Rectory. This would have been the obvious place for the boy (or boys) to have stayed at. As there is no evidence of any separate cottage having been built in the grounds of the Rectory, the most likely explanation is that the tenants lived in the north wing of the Rectory, which was demolished sometime after 1906.

He gave this information to Brian to take to Elizabeth when he went there early this month, and Elizabeth agreed that this was the most likely explanation.

Brian said that some fireplaces remained from the north wing, so these could be compared with the paintings.

4. Finance Report

Brian said that the funds stood at £1,170, all but £68 of which was in our bank account.

He mentioned that one of our members, Marjorie Tolchard, who had sadly died recently, had had a children's' book published posthumously. It is called "The Mundus Lock". He will get a copy to show anyone who would like one.

5. Ridge and Furrow

Barry Smith

Barry said the ridge and furrow system looks like a form of corrugation in the grassland, found quite clearly in parts of Western Northamptonshire, Warwickshire and South Leicestershire. It is a great historical feature of the grassland of medieval England. In traditional ploughing you have the ploughshare, a sharp point, which digs into the soil, a mole board, which turns the soil over, and a board or plank, which forms the side of the furrow.

In Aynho we had common pastures or meadows around the open fields, known as Flaggy Doles and Pill Doles. These were common ground, open to those of the right of the parish. In a village like Aynho of some two or three hundred people, there would be a main street, and on each side would be farmsteads end-on to the road. Behind would be a series of buildings to accommodate cattle, sheep and possibly oxen. The land of a farm would be scattered in common fields around the village. From 1619 there was a three-field system here called West, Nether and Lower fields, which were rotated yearly on a cooperative basis, wheat in one, root crops or barley or rye in another, with the third lying fallow. A plough would be drawn by a team of eight oxen, and these would be difficult to turn, so they would lumber along as far as they could, then turn and go back. These long strips were used as a farming unit, gathered together in groups for cropping purposes of approximately 25 acres called furlongs. Examples in Aynho parish were Raynsbury Furlong and Middle Sands Furlong. The length of the strips varied relating to the distance the oxen teams could continuously plough without resting, varying according to gradient and soil type, These lengths were also called furlongs, confusing as a distance measure, as they were of no standard length. The ploughs worked outwards from the centre of the strips and after a time the ground became heaped upwards from the outer edge of the strips, the lowest part called the furrow, to the highest part in the centre called the ridge.

A farmer would have strips in each of these fields. The distance between the strips was approximately 25 feet, because this was the best one for broadcasting corn. The strips often curved towards the end rather than being straight, because the teams of oxen in four pairs started to turn well before the end of each strip. These strips became units of area of occupation, and they were then recorded in wills, etc. Churchwardens and Manorial Courts played a big part in the administration of this. Sometimes a parish bull and a plough were kept, and these were worked on a communal basis. However often yields and harvests were poor, and in many cases, after making bread for the family, there was little or no seed left over for the next year's planting, which was a very real disaster.

A north to south alignment would give the best sunlight, a gradient would be good for drainage, and they would try to give everyone a certain amount of land of the best quality. Ridges and furrows like this have probably not moved at all since the 7th or 8th century, so they became compacted and as hard as a rock. There have also been problems with anthills. At the lowest point the headland was higher than the bottom of the furrow, so water collected there, and channels dug through the headland.

The teams of oxen didn't have reins, but the boy in front would have a goad, with which he prodded his beast, and the man at the back had a pole, to tap the backside of the rear animal, and this is reckoned to be the origin of a rod, pole or perch measurement. In his own Church at Harlestone the standard size of a pole was marked in the stonework.

Harvesting was done much more early than we do now, to prevent birds from taking the seeds. The cottagers had rights to glean in the fields, but they could only do this when the stooks were removed and church bells rang to sound the start.

In the 17th and 18th centuries the typical farm was about 25 acres. If a calf was born, it was decided right away whether or not it was going to be a plough animal. If so it would be trained to either be on the left side or the right. It would be given a short name if pulling to the left, or a long one if to the right. A farmer could plough about an acre in a day, which involved walking about eleven miles. They would plough once, go over it with a crude kind of harrow, then put the seeds in, and do it again. In fallow years they would leave it during the autumn for grazing and the pigs to forage, and then plough it after Christmas and again in the early summer.

The plough oxen were kept in ox houses. This was a very inefficient way of farming. It was a hard grind, walking up and down in every kind of weather, sometimes with obstinate animals, for very little reward.

Everything started to change with the Enclosure Act, when Parliament decided that the strips should be abolished and reassigned into enclosures, as we know them today. It was introduced partly to help prevent the spread of disease like foot and mouth. This culminated in 1792, when many small holdings disappeared, causing great hardship, creating larger farms, which were

mostly in the centre of their land. In addition more people were eating meat, so requiring more animals than before.

The death knell of the ridge and furrow system was really sounded as early as 1832, when the seed drill was perfected. Corn was imported, and this was increased with the coming of canals, which enabled much quicker and cheaper movement of corn and other goods. During the Napoleonic wars we were blockaded, and numbers of troops were sent on manoeuvres in this area with many horses, so an extreme shortage of corn supply caused prices to rise dramatically. Through the 19th century traction engines began ploughing, although most of our fields were too small to be affected by them. Clay pipes came in after the railways, and were used to bring water from ponds for cattle and other animals.

In response to questions Barry said that the change from oxen to horses took place around the 12th and 13th centuries. The ridges and furrows were established by oxen power, but it wasn't really until the 19th century that we had horses that were strong enough to pull the heavy ploughs. He confirmed that one of the reasons why people were given strips in various places was so that everyone had both some good and some not-so-good land.

From 1763 to the full enclosure of 1792 the three-field system of West, Lower and Nether became four-field, with a four-corn system of cropping.

It was noted that there used to be an ox house just to the north of the M40 lay-by on the Aynho to Adderbury road, and there was an ox-pen to the north of Charlton.

The old field names have fallen into disuse, mainly due to the Rural Payments Agency's move to digital mapping, where all fields now have a number. Aynho field names are not lost as we have the rotation maps and 1696 map in Nicholas Cooper's book and the Records Office.

6. Forthcoming Meetings

July 27th	Aynho Church (Please meet at the Church at 7.30 pm)	Anthea Bazin
August	No Meeting	
Sept 28th	Aynho Military Connections	Rupert Clark