

# CAKE AND COCKHORSE



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# BANBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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# *Cake and Cockhorse*

The magazine of the Banbury Historical Society, issued three times a year.

Volume 20	Spring 2016	Number Two
<i>George Hughes</i>	Rhubarb in Banbury and Bodicote	... .. 34
<i>Walter Stagemen</i>	Fires at Farthinghoe	... .. 47
<i>Deborah Hayter</i>	Snippets from the Archives: 10. Newbottle, 1660	58
<b>Brian Little</b>	Lecture Report	... .. 60
<i>Banbury Historical Society</i>	Annual Report and Accounts	... 61

The Chairman's annual report in this issue reveals what a remarkably eventful year it has been for the Society. Particularly gratifying has been the excellent attendance at lectures and other events. At times we have struggled to accommodate all those wishing to attend the regular monthly lectures at the Museum, to the extent that we have begun to consider whether in time we shall need a larger venue. It is a nice problem to have, symptomatic of a flourishing Society. An attractive line-up of lectures and events, better publicity and, we suppose, a steadily rising population have all worked to our advantage.

This issue of *Cake & Cockhorse* once more provides an outlet for the researches of our members, which is as it should be. Walter Stageman makes extensive use of newspaper resources in his account of incendiarism at Farthinghoe in the 1890s, while George Hughes investigates what might with a little licence be called the 'Rhubarb War', featuring Bodicote in a starring role. Our previous issue, containing Richard Hartree's history of the Alcan works sold out instantly and had to be reprinted twice. There is certainly a sizable appetite for Banburyshire history, requiring a steady supply of material. I am in the process of compiling what I hope will be helpful guidance for contributors to *Cake & Cockhorse*. In the meantime, anyone wishing to have a piece of work considered should send it to me, preferably as an email attachment, to the address inside the front cover of this issue. It will be helpful if authors could also suggest relevant illustrations that will add to and illuminate the text. Every contribution will be acknowledged and read.

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Cover: 'Fine Turkey Rhubarb' (see page 41).

## **Rhubarb in Banbury and Bodicote**

*George Hughes*

In the course of tracing my family history I came unexpectedly upon a description of my 3x great-grandfather William Hughes as a ‘Rhubarb Merchant’. To say that I was surprised was an understatement – the family were also intrigued, saying surely it was a mistake and that the vicar had misheard. I quickly typed ‘Rhubarb & Banbury’ into Google, and a new world opened up leading to my writing this article about William and his circle: William Hayward, Banbury apothecary, Peter Usher and the Usher family of Bodicote, John Tustain farmer and druggist of Milcombe, William Bigg, Chemist, and A.B. Rye, Banbury surgeon.

William Hughes was born 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1798, the son of Thomas and Mary Hughes (née Osborne) of Banbury. He was baptised at Bloxham and Milton Presbyterian Chapel on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1798 by Joseph Jevons, his brothers and sisters being the first to be recorded retrospectively in the register from 1786.<sup>1</sup> It needs to be noted here that on Sundays the Chapel was visited by Peter Usher, the unordained minister of Banbury from 1796 to 1814, to whom reference will be made later.

In the election of 1841 William voted for Henry Vincent, the Chartist candidate.<sup>2</sup> Records show that he was one of the first to vote – his leaning being considered radical and a potential threat to law and stability. In the 1841 census William and his wife Sarah Hughes were living at Blackberry Hall on the Broughton Road, adjacent to Crouch Hill Farm and the brick and pipe works, with several other families including his son John and wife Mary Anne. William was recorded as a rhubarb merchant and John as a brickmaker.<sup>3</sup> Blackberry Hall is mentioned in George Herbert’s *Shoemaker’s Window*: ‘Going further up the hill by Blackberry Hall, about where the brickfield is, were some large hills and holes called ‘Andrews Pits’.<sup>4</sup> Blackberry Hall and

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<sup>1</sup> Oxon. Family Hist. Soc. (OFHS) CD: OXF-BAN01, pp. 1-2 of 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Copy of the Poll of the Electors of Banbury*: Potts, Printer Guardian office, Banbury.

<sup>3</sup> 1841 Census: Ancestry UK.

<sup>4</sup> *Shoemaker’s Window*, pp. 43, 45.

Andrews Pits are also referenced in the will of John Walford, baker of Banbury in 1842, who outlines ‘I give and devise my cottages and close in Neithrop aforesaid called Blackberry Hall’ to his daughter Rebecca Walford, noting that it is in the occupation of one William Hughes.<sup>5</sup>

The conclusion to be drawn is that in the early 1840s William Hughes was working as a market gardener using the fields in and around Blackberry Hall in Broughton Road to grow rhubarb. The location of Blackberry Hall is not recorded by George Herbert, nor does it feature on Ordnance Survey maps of the period. Herbert does, however, give an interesting further link in his narrative by highlighting that the fields around Blackberry Hall ‘belonged to a Mr Head, a draper and hosier: he was also a woolcomber’.<sup>6</sup> ‘Mr Head’ was John Head, born in 1781 in Frostenden, Suffolk, recorded in *Rusher’s Directory* as a woolstapler, hosier and haberdasher of Parson’s Lane, Banbury, from 1832 to 1845.<sup>7</sup> Head was recorded as ‘retired hosier’ in the 1851 Census. Retired or not, he owned land in Neithrop. The Banbury Tithe Appointment of 1851<sup>8</sup> records the following (to be read in conjunction with the map of the Neithrop area included overleaf):-

Owner	Occupier	<i>Plo</i> <i>t</i>	Description	Cultivatio n
John Head	Thos Edwards	17	Andrew’s Close	Grass
John Head	John Mascord	18	Market Garden	Garden
John Head	James Batchelor	19	Market Garden	Garden
John Barber	William Jones	12	Shoulder of Mutton	
John Barber	William Jones	15	Close	
John barber	William Jones	16	Close next to Andrew’s Pits	

There was a direct relationship between Blackberry Hall and Andrews Pits which can be traced back to the mid 1700s when Andrews Pits were willed by Richard Croke, former Mayor of Banbury, to his daughter Joanna Clarson and subsequently to Thomas Walford, presumably a great-grandfather of John, the Banbury baker.<sup>9</sup>

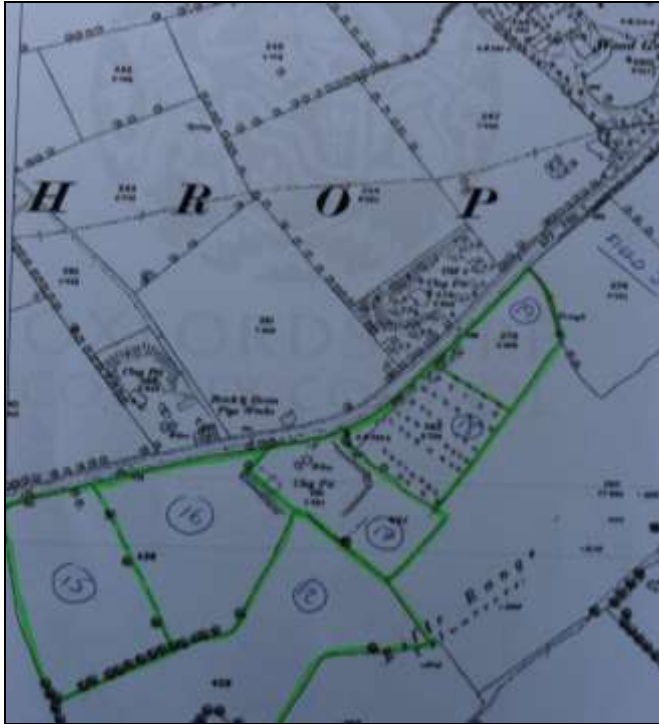
<sup>5</sup> Will of Rebecca Walford 4<sup>th</sup> March 1853: Sourced from National Archives

<sup>6</sup> *Shoemaker’s Window*, 45.

<sup>7</sup> *Rusher’s Original Banbury Directory*, 63.

<sup>8</sup> Transcription from Banbury Tithe Appointment and Tithe Map ref 30/A, Oxfordshire History Centre, Cowley, Oxford.

<sup>9</sup> Will of Richard Croke (Mayor of Banbury, 1693), written 18<sup>th</sup> June 1715 sourced from National Archives.



*Plot 17 is identified as Andrew's Pits with adjacent market gardens being located in plots 18 and 19.*

*William Hughes would have worked this land to produce rhubarb, then owned by John Walford, baker of Banbury – see extract of his will above.*

*The clay pits and brickworks adjacent to Blackberry Hall being just-off the Broughton Road worked by his son John Hughes and others.*

Several people were involved in the development of the rhubarb trade in Banbury and Bodicote. The uses of rhubarb were many and varied. The main use in the late 1700s was for cathartic and medicinal purposes in treating digestive complaints, including constipation and stomach pains. On offer were powders from dried ground roots, Russian and Chinese blends being exotic options that obviously attracted a premium in the market place. The increase in the British appetite for rhubarb led to the concept that to grow the plant and cultivate its root in the British Isles would benefit all, especially those able to grow the plant in our testing climate. To get it to market at competitive prices could make one's fortune.

Cultivation of rhubarb into England began with Dr. James Mounsey, who, for many years was the medical practitioner working for the Russian Emperesses. His 25 years in Russia culminated in his appointment by Peter III for six months in 1762 as chief of the medical chancery. Dr Mounsey returned to his native Scotland in late 1762 complete with packages of seeds supposedly taken from the borders of China and grown in the botanical gardens in St Petersburg. It appears that Dr. Mounsey freely distributed these seeds ‘of the truest and best rhubarb’ to his friends and correspondents, and through them to other interested parties, who it is understood included a certain William Hayward, apothecary, of Banbury.<sup>10</sup>

William Hayward was born around the late 1720s, probably in Leicestershire. He moved to Banbury mid century and married Henrietta Potter, daughter of John Potter, yet another apothecary, at St Mary’s Church on 20<sup>th</sup> June 1754.<sup>11</sup> William and Henrietta had four children, the oldest being another William who went on to become a surgeon. William Hayward must have had quite a large and thriving apothecary practice in Banbury as he is recorded as taking on several indentured apprentices between the years 1751 and 1789.<sup>12</sup> William’s first foray into growing rhubarb took place in the 1770s. Letters between him and the Society of Arts record that he was a serious grower, achieving a Silver Medal in 1789 and a Gold in 1794. The ‘grade’ of medal was awarded for the number of plants in cultivation – the greater the number of plants the higher the award. William’s letter to the Society dated 29<sup>th</sup> January 1794 records that he has a full 800 plants of the true rhubarb, planted at a distance of four feet or upwards apart, growing in Drayton, near Banbury.<sup>13</sup>

Land tax returns for Banbury<sup>14</sup> show that William was renting land in the Drayton area over a number of years from several people, as below:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Occupier</b>	<b>Tax</b>	<b>Freeholder</b>
1753	Hayward, Apothecary	13s 4d	Reverend John Wardall (Wardle)
1789	Wm. Hayward	£1 6s 8d	Eliz Metcalfe
1794	Wm. Hayward	£1 6s 0d	-
1798	Wm. Hayward	10s	Thos Arnold

<sup>10</sup> Clifford M. Foust, *Rhubarb, The Wondrous Drug*, 116.

<sup>11</sup> OFHS CD: OXF-BAN01, p. 295 of 554.

<sup>12</sup> Register of duties paid for Apprentices’ Indentures 1710-1858: Ancestry UK

<sup>13</sup> Extract from Society of Arts letters to William Hayward dated 1794.

<sup>14</sup> 1753 *C&CH.12.4* (1992), 87-9; 1789-98 Oxon Hist Centre QSD L 23.

It is noteworthy that there is reference to a 'rhubarb garden' in the Drayton enclosure award of 1808, John Woodfield (a co-signatory to William Hayward's letter of 1794) was renting a 'messuage and part of the rhubarb garden and other part of the rhubarb garden' from the most Noble Arabella Diana, Dowager Duchess of Dorset.<sup>15</sup>



*The Rev. Peter Usher.*

How William Hayward came to meet Peter Usher is unknown. Documents simply state that Usher took over Hayward's rhubarb business. Some say that William left his plantations to Usher, others that Usher purchased them.<sup>16</sup> Whatever the means, Usher seems to have taken over the business and transferred operations to Bodicote, some five miles distant. Usher (see likeness above) was an enterprising man. He was the unordained minister at the Great Meeting in the Horse Fair opposite St Mary's Church, the centre for dissenting congregations in Banbury. He was born in Cockermouth (Cumbria) in 1773 and was baptised at the Independent Church in Cockermouth there<sup>17</sup>. When and why he moved from Cockermouth to Banbury is unknown, but on the death of the Reverend George Hampton on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1796 Usher

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<sup>15</sup> Oxfordshire History Centre, Cowley, Oxford.

<sup>16</sup> Salette Andrews, 'Rediscovering Rhubarb': <http://humanelivingnet.net/2013/12/11/rediscovering-rhubarb/> 11th December 2013; Foust, *Rhubarb*, 129.

<sup>17</sup> England Select Births & Christenings 1538-1975 Ancestry UK.



succeeded him and held the minister's office until 1814<sup>18</sup>. He and his family occupied the Old Minister's House in the Horse Fair (see photo, below) of the Minister's House. Peter Usher must have watched in fascination as the new St Mary's church rose from the ground, the earlier church having been demolished in 1790.



*The Old Minister's House, housing Banbury Academy from 1797 to 1908.*

Usher retired from the ministry in 1814, moving to Bodicote. He was listed on the poll of freeholders for 1830 as having a house and land in Bodicote belonging to William King, who was recorded as owner of the field known as 'rhubarb ground'.<sup>19</sup> The rhubarb business flourished, passing to Usher's youngest son William Rufus in 1845 when Peter emigrated to America.<sup>20</sup>

The Ushers left in Bodicote went from strength to strength. William Rufus attended the Great Exhibition of 1851 as a manufacturer of English rhubarb, trimmed and untrimmed, and in powder form as Exhibitor 98 in the South Gallery in Class 2, Chemical & Pharmaceutical

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<sup>18</sup> Amherst D. Tyssen, 'The Old Meeting House, Banbury', *Trans. Unitarian Hist. Soc.* 1:3 (1918), 10-11; Jeremy Gibson, 'Banbury Academy, 1797-1908', *C&CH* 19.3 (2013).

<sup>19</sup> *Poll of Free Holders for 24<sup>th</sup> September 1830*; J.H. Fearon, 'Some Notes on Bodicote', *C&CH* 3.7 (1967), 131-41.

<sup>20</sup> Amherst D. Tyssen, 'The Presbyterians of Bloxham & Milton', *Trans. Unitarian Hist. Soc.* 2:2 (1920), 29-31.

Products<sup>21</sup> (see later note). William Rufus, usually known simply as Rufus, had been born in Bodicote in 1807.<sup>22</sup> He was recorded in sequential censuses from 1841 to 1881, in 1841 as a rhubarb grower in Box Hedge, Banbury, thereafter in Bodicote. After the departure of his father for America Rufus was recorded as the farmer of increasing acreage and number of men employed, reaching a zenith in 1871 of 159 acres and eight men.<sup>23</sup>

As well as exhibiting at the Great Exhibition, Rufus also attended the International Exhibition of 1862, known as the Great London Exposition, where he was Exhibitor 668 for rhubarb and other medicinal herbs. He went much further afield, attending the Paris Exhibition of 1867, where he was Exhibitor 101 for English rhubarb and biennial henbane in Group V (for Chemical products) Class 44. In 1876 he attended the Philadelphia Exhibition, the official catalogue recording Rufus Usher of Bodicote, Oxon for medicinal rhubarb; extract of henbane and dried henbane leaves.<sup>24</sup>

Rufus Usher died on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1885 in Bodicote and was buried on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1885 at St John the Baptist, Bodicote.<sup>25</sup> He was succeeded by his son Henry, who was described on his death in 1892 as a farmer and grower and preparer of medicinal plants.<sup>26</sup> The business was taken over by Richard Usher who died in 1898 at Littlemore near Oxford, probably in the asylum for the mentally ill.<sup>27</sup> He was succeeded by Richard Bernard Usher, who attended the Chicago Exhibition of 1893 as Exhibitor 34 in Group 87 and class 54 for medicinal herbs and pharmaceutical extracts.<sup>28</sup> Richard Bernard's death in 1948 at the age of 67<sup>29</sup> marked the end of a family business that had grown and prepared rhubarb for the market for almost 150 years. They had survived some challenging times in their business. The prospect of easy profits had

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<sup>21</sup> Great Exhibition of 1851 – list of Exhibitors.

<sup>22</sup> OFHS CD: OXF-BAN01, Presbyterians page 5 of 7.

<sup>23</sup> 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871 and 1881 Censuses: Ancestry UK.

<sup>24</sup> List of Exhibitors for the International Exhibition of 1862 (Great London Exhibition) and the Index of British Exhibitors, Paris Exhibition of 1867.

<sup>25</sup> OFHS CD: OXF-BAN02, p. 89 of 359.

<sup>26</sup> Will of Henry Malsbury Usher, 1892: Ancestry UK.

<sup>27</sup> Will of Richard Usher, 1898: Ancestry UK.

<sup>28</sup> *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 13 July, 1917; List of Exhibitors for Great Britain at the Chicago Exhibition of 1893.

<sup>29</sup> England & Wales Death index 1916-2007: Ancestry UK.

created cut-throat competition that led to the introduction of some very dubious practices. From the early 1830s rumours of rhubarb adulteration were rife. Domestic rhubarb was allegedly offered as Russia Turkey and East India rhubarb. Certain fashionable London druggists were reportedly selling 30lb of powder made up of 20lb English, 7lb East Indian and 3lb Russia Turkey while charging for 100 per cent expensive imported produce. At its worst, disreputable sellers offered expensive exotic rhubarb ‘cut’ with English-grown rhubarb and substances that might include flour, turmeric and even satinwood sawdust.<sup>30</sup>

An anti-adulteration movement began to gain momentum under the aegis of Dr Jonathan Pereira (1804-53), London physician, pharmacologist and author of the standard work *Elements of Materia Medica*. Pereira was one of the most distinguished experts of his day and took a keen interest in the reported adulteration taking place and, along with other like minds, formed the Pharmaceutical Society in 1841. Pereira took issue with sculptured rhubarb roots of the ‘dressed’ or ‘trimmed’ variety that mimicked ‘the Russian kind’ and were to be found in show bottles in London druggists’ windows. Pereira described such products as the ‘produce of Banbury in Oxfordshire’, meaning the Ushers of Bodicote.<sup>31</sup> The gloves were coming off and professional outrage had a champion who seemed to have Bodicote in his sights.

We now come to a very interesting character in the plot, William Bigg, who became, perhaps unwittingly, a correspondent of Pereira’s. Bigg had been born to a Swansea Quaker family in 1813<sup>32</sup> He moved to Banbury in 1834, opening a chemist and druggist’s shop in the High Street and quickly became a leading light in the town.<sup>33</sup> In 1841 he was living in his shop in the High Street with his apprentices G.V. Ball and Robert Gardener.<sup>34</sup> Ball was to become a leading Banbury chemist at 23 Parson’s Street, leaving in his will of 1892 the money for People’s Park.<sup>35</sup> William Bigg became a Banbury councillor in 1844 and a founding member of the

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<sup>30</sup> Foust, *Rhubarb*, 184, 191.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 186.

<sup>32</sup> Society of Friends. Monthly meeting Division of Wales No 694: 1801-1837.

<sup>33</sup> Barrie Trinder, ‘The Social and Economic Hist. of Banbury’, Leicester Univ. PhD Thesis (1980), 13, 70, 163, 165, 357.

<sup>34</sup> 1841 Census for Banbury: Ancestry UK.

<sup>35</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 2 August 2007.

Mechanics' Institute.<sup>36</sup> Dr Pereira, who had not forgotten his pointed barbs aimed at the Ushers, penned several queries in a letter of 1845 regarding 'rhubarb cultivated in the neighbourhood of Banbury' on behalf of the Committee for the Advancement of Pharmacological Knowledge, set up by the Pharmaceutical Society.<sup>37</sup> The questions, eight in total, were sent to William Bigg and to Arthur Briseley Rye, surgeon of Banbury. Rye was born in Rochester (Kent) in 1812.<sup>38</sup> He set up in partnership in Horse Fair in 1839, going into practice by himself in 1858.<sup>39</sup> The reasons why Messrs Bigg & Rye were chosen is unclear, but Bigg being an apothecary and chemist, a councillor and leading light of the Mechanics' Institute and Rye being a senior surgeon, and a former student of Pereira, were presumably instrumental in Pereira's choice.

Bigg's and Rye's responses to Pereira's questions ('Answers to queries respecting cultivation of English rhubarb near Banbury by Mr William Bigg') are fully detailed in the *Pharmaceutical Journal*, Volume 6 (1846). Bigg's replies were, to say the least, unexpected and detailed. He pulled no punches and wrote of adulteration that must have been music to Pereira's ears. Pereira's questions 1, 2 and 7 and the 'Mr Bigg responses' are outlined below:-

### **Question 1)**

How many persons cultivate rhubarb for medical use in the neighbourhood of Banbury? State their names and the number of acres occupied by each person?

### **Answer 1)**

*Three parties cultivate rhubarb root for sale, in the neighbourhood of Banbury viz. Rufus Usher of Overthorpe and Bodicott, Thomas Tustian of Milcombe and Edward Hughes of Neithrop. The exact number of acres is not known, but probably does not exceed twelve altogether. On some portion of such land other crops are occasionally grown.*

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<sup>36</sup> Trinder, 'Social and Economic Hist. Banbury', 13, 70, 163, 165, 357.

<sup>37</sup> *Pharmaceutical Journal*, Vol. 6 (1846-7).

<sup>38</sup> Ancestry UK.

<sup>39</sup> *Rusher's Directory*, 89.

**Question 2)**

For how many years has medical rhubarb been cultivated in the vicinity? What number of persons are employed in its cultivation and preparation for the market?

**Answer 2)**

*The cultivation of rhubarb for medicinal use was first undertaken in this neighbourhood by a surgeon and apothecary named Hayward about fifty years ago. That gentleman died in 1811. His widow (of a second marriage) is living and states that Mr Hayward, having communicated the results of his experiments to the Society of Arts in London, received from them two medals – one of gold, the other of silver. The number of persons employed in the cultivation does not probably exceed six or eight men and boys and sometimes women.*

**Question 7)**

Which is the principle mart for English rhubarb root? Is it entirely consumed in England, or is any of it exported? What is the average price of it?

**Answer 7)**

*The principle, and with a small exception, the only mart for English rhubarb root is London. It is there purchased by the wholesale druggists, who would probably state that a great part of it is subsequently exported. Some of it is sold no doubt to the Jews & Turks as English, but I strongly suspect that a much larger proportion is sold to the Christians as foreign.*

*The ‘cuttings’ make, I dare say, a very decent powder mixed according to conscience with East India rhubarb. The price is variable, and though I have often in the course of the last ten years heard it quoted, I cannot trust my memory for a figure\*. The trimmed is of course the highest – from two-thirds more to double the price of the ‘cuttings’.*

*I have heard it stated on computation that not less than twenty tons are, in various forms described, annually sent to the market.*

*\*The large pieces fetch more in proportion to their sizes. The prepared root is rubbed over with powder, and sometimes when damp with ochre.*

The referenced parties cultivating rhubarb in the Banbury area in answer 1) are inaccurate and slightly misleading. Although Rufus Usher is correctly identified, the other parties have incorrect Christian names attributed to them – probably due to poor transcription and typesetting of

the original handwritten document. Clifford M. Foust identifies the Banbury cultivators as simply 'Usher of Overthorpe & Bodicote'.<sup>40</sup> Rufus Usher did in fact live and rent land in and around Middleton Cheney and Warkworth in the 1830s.<sup>41</sup>

Whether William Bigg understood the ramifications of his responses to Pereira's questions can only be guessed at. Suffice it to say that several things happened in the locality of Banbury and Bodicote around this time:-

- 1) William Bigg disappeared from the Banbury area with no records after 1845 being found. He does however re-appear in the 1851 Census for Luton (Beds) as the manager of the London & County Bank, a startling change of location and occupation.<sup>42</sup> Did he realise that to stay in Banbury would have left him open to the mercies of the Banbury growers? Suffice it to say that William Bigg prospered in his adopted town, eventually becoming the first Mayor of Luton in 1876.<sup>43</sup> Peter Usher Senior made an exit by emigrating to America in 1845. Did he go or was he pushed? Did he simply think at the age of 72 he would leave it all to his son Rufus and make a new start with his second son Peter, or did he see the writing on the wall?
- 2) William Hughes left Blackberry Hall to live in Constitution Row in Broughton Road, literally going downhill. His fortunes seemed to take a dip with the grand title of rhubarb merchant being replaced with gardener and seedsman until his death in early 1847, his obituary in the *Banbury Guardian* of 9<sup>th</sup> April describing him as a 'medical herb cultivator', interestingly making no mention of rhubarb. *Rusher's Directory* recorded his widow Sarah carrying on the business until her death in 1849.
- 3) Following the untimely death of Dr Pereira in 1853 the pursuit of perceived wrongdoers slowed but was not entirely forgotten. Eventually, in 1855 a Select Committee of the House of Commons investigating the adulteration of food, drinks and drugs took testimony from growers and vendors, pharmacists and physicians, professors and drug grinders.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *The Wondrous Drug*, 284 n.114.

<sup>41</sup> *Northampton Mercury* 1838 records 8 bushels of potatoes being stolen from land rented by William Rufus Usher in Middleton Cheney.

<sup>42</sup> 1851 Census for Luton: Ancestry UK

<sup>43</sup> Detailed obituary in the *Luton Times & Advertiser* 8 March 1878.

<sup>44</sup> Foust, *Rhubarb*, 190.

Throughout 1855 and into 1856 the hearings continued with the subject of rhubarb developing into one of the committee's more difficult and challenging topics. Eventually on 7th March 1856 Rufus Usher himself was called in front of the committee, some seven months after its formation, to give his evidence.

Dr Foust gives over several pages<sup>45</sup> in his rhubarb epistle to the performance of Rufus Usher, who, to say the least, was having to make a vigorous defence of his product to protect his livelihood. He took umbrage at prices being quoted for English rhubarb, predictably denied any knowledge of drug adulteration and went on to highlight letters of support from Dr T.H. Tustin, dispenser at the London Hospital, who cited the experiments carried out on English rhubarb, such that it had been prescribed for many years at the hospital, and Theofilus Redwood, saying that Usher's samples sent to him were 'better than any I had previously seen'. Rufus, ruffled but not cowed by his grilling, returned to Bodicote to grow and prosper with his rhubarb even through the enactment of legislation in 1860 covering the adulteration of rhubarb.<sup>46</sup>

John Tustain is another interesting character in the rhubarb story. He was born illegitimate and in humble circumstances, in Milcombe in 1798.<sup>47</sup> He was recorded in the Poll Register for Milcombe for 1826 as self-occupier of land.<sup>48</sup> In the 1841 census for Milcombe he was recorded as a gardener and in 1851 as a farmer of 36a. and a druggist, employing six men and a boy. By 1861 he was farming 50a. employing six men and three boys and was still a druggist.<sup>49</sup> The question arises as to whether Tustain's success might in any way be related to Rufus Usher. It seems likely. Tustain attended the Great Exhibition of 1851: indeed, they exhibited together as 'Tustian & Usher of Melcome near Banbury'. Tustain also attended the International Exhibition of 1862 where he was Exhibitor 667 in his own right.<sup>50</sup>

A niggling question is how John Tustain, base born in an age of condemnation, made a successful career out of farming? He was recorded in the Land Owner's Return for 1873 in Oxfordshire, just

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 192-5.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 194.

<sup>47</sup> OFHS CD: OXF-BAN02, p. 71 of 657.

<sup>48</sup> *1826 Poll Book for Milcombe in the Hundred of Bloxham.*

<sup>49</sup> 1851 and 1861 Census returns for Milcombe: Ancestry UK.

<sup>50</sup> Exhibitors list for 1862 International Exhibition (Great London Exposition).

before his death, as the owner (not merely the occupier) of 15a.<sup>51</sup> There is a possibility of very grandiose connections. It seems likely that his unknown father was none other than George Spencer-Churchill, 5<sup>th</sup> Duke of Marlborough.<sup>52</sup> It is conceivable that Tustain received some assistance, allowing him to go from gardener to farmer, rubbing shoulders with Rufus Usher, an acknowledged star in rhubarb circles.<sup>53</sup>

From my earliest introduction to William Hughes, rhubarb merchant of Neithrop, I have been striving to establish the location of Blackberry Hall and to connect William to the history of Banbury. I am now satisfied that Blackberry Hall is to be located in Broughton Road and that William Hughes has a place in the rhubarb business of Banbury and Bodicote. There is no doubt, that having attended Bloxham and Milton chapel as a child and having his own children baptised there, he would have met and been influenced by both Peter Usher and Rufus Usher, who was only nine years his junior. No records have been found to link them directly, but it is inconceivable that William Hughes did not work closely with Rufus as he was the main character in the story, the one with the wholesale contacts in the London market place and the internationally acknowledged rhubarb grower.

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<sup>51</sup> *Land Owners Return, 1873*: Oxfordshire History Centre.

<sup>52</sup> Wikipedia reference for the Duke records John Tustain (1799-1873) as his illegitimate child.

<sup>53</sup> Records are clear that John Tustain was associated with the Churchill family of Woodstock some 12 miles from Milcombe. The Duke had 6 other illegitimate children with a lady of greater social standing than of John Tustain's mother.



# FIRES AT FARTHINGHOE

Walter Stageman

This article is very largely based on two sets of news items concerning incendiary attacks in the south Northamptonshire village of Farthinghoe. The first set relates to events in 1896 and 1897 which caused much alarm and mayhem leading to, amongst other things, four arrests, two acquittals and one proper conviction. The second set of events occurred 109 years later.

The first account begins in the *Banbury Guardian* of 24<sup>th</sup> September 1896 which describes a series of arson attacks: the first two were in a haystack and a straw rick on Mr. Ernest George's farm and were eventually dealt with by the Banbury Fire Brigade. They successively had problems with the horses of both of their engines. A man named George Tew was arrested on suspicion of being the culprit, but then there was another fire, again on Mr. George's farm, for which Thomas Tew, George's brother, was arrested. Next, two straw ricks, the property of Mr. Coleman, were destroyed. All of these later fires were dealt with by the Brackley Fire Brigade.

A report in *The Standard* of 29<sup>th</sup> September 1896 states that there had been seven incendiary fires in eight days and the villagers were 'in a state of panic'. At least one fire had been started when one of the brigades was in the village and although the villagers were anxious to assist in quelling the outbreaks they showed 'the strongest disinclination' to leave their own premises unguarded. Someone slit a fire hose with a knife and police were watching all the villagers of whom they had suspicions. But, even so, a barley stack was burnt to the ground.

The slitting of the hose might seem to indicate some level of sympathy or support for the arsonists' actions. In the nineteenth century, connected to the struggle for reform, 'rural aggression took the form of machine-breaking, rick-burning, animal maiming and the invasion of enclosed lands'<sup>54</sup> and in one of the press reports there is an allusion to the use of machinery being a cause of the Farthinghoe incendiarism – but it is,

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<sup>54</sup> John Briggs, Christopher Harrison, Angus McInnes, David Vincent, *Crime and Punishment in England*, UCL Press, London 1996, p.114.

quite correctly, dismissed.<sup>55</sup> It does, nevertheless, show an awareness and remembrance of such grievances right at the end of the century. This is despite the fact that, locally speaking, there is not really very much to remember and what there is was a long time ago.

Neither does it appear plausible to believe that these fires were so-called social crimes – some such, especially arson and poaching, had an element of covert protest. Social relations within rural society often generated bitterness and recrimination; arson was sometimes seen as a way of expressing a grievance. Incendiary attacks frequently became the meeting point for large displays of collective protest and celebration.<sup>56</sup> In some parts arson did mark a stage in the development of what has been seen as a rural war, but it is perhaps more appropriate to look upon Farthinghoe's attacks as an example of that which happens from time to time when an individual, or a group of individuals, feels a wish for some unknown, and perhaps unknowable, reason to start fires. Attacks such as there are nothing new: in the Old Testament Samson set fire to the Philistines' cornfields by letting loose jackals with torches tied to their tails. Samson was perhaps not, technically speaking, an arsonist at all as arson is the crime of intentionally and maliciously setting fire to a structure; some part of it has to be burnt. In earlier times 'arson was rarely prosecuted'<sup>57</sup> and it accounted for less than one per cent of indictments, but in 1861 the common-law offence of arson was greatly enlarged, largely because of rural unrest.

On 1<sup>st</sup> October the *Banbury Guardian* reported that there had, for some time past, been acts of 'malicious mischief' going on in the village: gates taken off, pigs and other animals released at night and articles thrown down wells. There is a lawless spirit abroad – but nothing like a 'rural war'. A labourer's hovel was destroyed and but for wet thatch the whole end of the village might have been destroyed. A barn and more ricks were destroyed in the village; then ricks on Mr. Deeley's farm, half-a-mile from the village, went up in flames. The report speculates about the 'pure maliciousness' of the attacks and dismisses the ideas that the attacks were due to the introduction of farm machinery or the work of a secret society.

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<sup>55</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 1 October 1896.

<sup>56</sup> John Archer, *'By a Flash and a Scare': Arson, Animal Maiming and Poaching in East Anglia 1815-1870*, Breviary Stuff Publications, London 2010 (First publ. OUP, 1990).

<sup>57</sup> Sharpe, J.A., *Crime in Early Modern England 1550-1750*, 1992, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Longman, London and New York, p.244



*The Limes, the Deeley farmhouse.*

A later report suggested that the incendiarism had its causes in troubles in the church choir.<sup>58</sup>

By now, Captain Kellie McCallum, the Chief Constable of Northamptonshire, had visited the village, as had two of the magistrates of the Brackley Divisions. Policemen in plain clothes had been called in and lone houses were being watched, ('there is a feeling of insecurity all through the village') and the Tew brothers remained in custody.

They were reported in *The Morning Post* of 3<sup>rd</sup> October as having been committed for trial after a hearing lasting six hours at Brackley Petty Sessions. A postman named Freeman claimed to have spoken to George Tew coming from the direction of the fire and a Mrs. Franklin recognized the coat and hat of Thomas Tew as those worn by a man seen on a wall adjoining her house and near a hovel which began to blaze. Bail was refused. Fourteen fires had taken place and police were in the village.

Next, as reported in the *Banbury Guardian* of 8<sup>th</sup> October, there was a fire in a pig-sty belonging to Mr W. Coleman at The Fox Inn and fires in two more hovels. Freestone (sic), the postman, received a letter threatening to shoot him and claiming that the two men in custody were innocent – and that everything that has happened is a consequence of the abovementioned troubles in the church choir, and half of Farthinghoe will be burnt down.

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<sup>58</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 31 October 1896.

The following week's *Banbury Guardian* described four further outbreaks of fire: 'exciting scenes' took place. First, a rick in the twenty-acre field (which is really larger) was fired, then a rick on Mr. Lucas's farm at Cockley, in Greatworth parish, went up and, as the London and North-Western Railway passed by, it attracted the attentions of the passengers. Then a hovel opposite the church was set alight but some men from Marston St Lawrence who were passing by extinguished this and then, immediately, some cottages on the other side of the road were found to be on fire. A little girl was sleeping in one of the bedrooms upstairs and Mr. Tustain, the stationmaster at Farthinghoe, rushed up and carried her to safety. Less seriously, 'an unfortunate cat was roasted in the flames'.



**Cockley Hill Farm in 1904**

The next day, a Monday, there was another arrest. Walter George Wilkins, a baker, in the employ of his father, George Wilkins, was arrested and taken into custody. Evidence was given before the magistrates by John Heritage, a labourer, that when he was on his way to work at Cockley Farm, he saw Walter Wilkins going in the direction of the hay rick and Cockley Field. The first person at the rick fire was the accused but he did nothing to put out the fire. Numerous other witnesses, including George Ernest Jackson, a Cambridge undergraduate and son of the rector of Greatworth, testified that they had seen the accused near to a number of the fires. He was committed to take his trial at the Assizes on 17<sup>th</sup> November.

Walter Wilkins had a good job, he was the church organist (and so had dealings with the church choir) and he had a stable, comparatively well-off background. His father was a manager of the village school, the enumerator of the 1891 census and a baker. So his background can scarcely be described as deprived. These few facts do not really match up to any of the abundant modern descriptions of arsonists. Barker<sup>59</sup> describes both arson and arsonists: it is often considered to be a crime of the young, mostly carried out by males (although in the nineteenth-century young female domestics were often involved), the parental background is heavily marked by pathology, there has been childhood deprivation followed by job dissatisfaction, a dearth of rewarding heterosexual relationships, poor medical health, an association with alcohol, a link with enuresis and cruelty to animals and an emotional significance to the property destroyed. In spite of all this, a substantial proportion of cases have no obvious motive. Walter Wilkins was young and male, perhaps his job was not all that wonderful, perhaps he did have a drink problem (he was later arrested for drunkenness) but he did have a fiancée and we have no way of knowing if he were subject to involuntary urination.

Thomas Tew (and perhaps also his brother George) may possibly be thought of as conforming more nearly to some of these criteria. He came from a much poorer background and he worked for Mr Herbert Deeley, one of the farmers whose properties were fired, and he had displayed violence in the past. He was charged by his mother (or more likely by his step-mother: they were both called Sarah) with threatening her and with breaking her furniture, but the case was dismissed because, when brought into the witness box, she refused to give evidence.<sup>60</sup>

So, three men were locked up. There was nearly another. A solicitor's clerk in Banbury was prosecuted for willingly and knowingly giving a false alarm of fire to the fire brigade. A complicated sequence of events involved a practice for the new steamer at Bloxham, the manual engine being despatched to Farthinghoe, the steamer being turned round before getting to Bloxham, a telegram being sent to Bloxham which resulted in the Bloxham fire brigade going all the way to Farthinghoe and the belated discovery that there were no fires after all. The upshot was that John Wheaver, the clerk, was acquitted because the court believed him when he said he was only reporting what he had heard. Lots of others

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<sup>59</sup> Ann Barker, *Arson: A review of the Psychiatric Literature*, OUP, 1994.

<sup>60</sup> *Northampton Mercury*, 20 October 1893.

also believed there were fires – many went out to Farthinghoe by train and others cycled there only to find no excitement at all.<sup>61</sup>

The story continued with Thomas Tew being sentenced to five years' penal servitude at the Northamptonshire Assizes and George Tew being acquitted of all charges. The main evidence came from Mrs. Elizabeth Franklin who went and saw Mr. Hands' hovel on fire, came back to her house and saw a man on the wall of her garden; she caught hold of the left side of his coat, it gave a rent and the man got away. When the man was brought to her house he was wearing a coat and hat similar to those of the man on the wall. His Lordship, in addressing the jury, said that circumstantial evidence was as good as positive evidence in many cases and the timing was not of a lot of importance as people in villages were not very particular in the matter of time. The jury immediately returned a verdict of guilty.

George Tew, on the other hand, was acquitted. He had had a difficult time during his incarceration and was given a seat. His Lordship caused laughter when he said he had thought for a long time that there was no case to answer. Likewise, Walter Wilkins was acquitted of all charges: the judge said the witnesses contradicted each other and, 'It was only a case of great suspicion'.

Thomas Tew was stunned by the guilty verdict and was removed in a half-dazed condition: he declaimed, 'As true as God is in heaven, I did not do it. I went home at nine o'clock'.<sup>62</sup>

One week later the *Banbury Guardian* reported an extraordinary turn of events. A pillar of the community, Mr. John Jarvis, of Elm Cottage, Farthinghoe, a Primitive Methodist Local Preacher and parish councillor, made a statement that he was the man found on the wall and whose coat was torn. He spoke to two of the Deeley farming family, one of whom was Thomas Tew's employer, who told the rector, who told the police. The rector also wrote to the Home Secretary drawing his attention to the case and the Chief Constable when he heard of this development wrote to the Home Office as well. Mr. Jarvis explained not saying anything before as being due to very ill health and not wanting to be dragged into the matter; Mrs Franklin used violent language to him and he thought she might get him into trouble. The *North-Eastern Daily Gazette* of

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<sup>61</sup>*Banbury Guardian*, 12 November 1896.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.* 19 November 1896.

24<sup>th</sup> November expanded on his reasons: ‘he was very ill having cancer of the liver – if he fell into the hands of the police it would kill him’.



*The Deeley family.*

This turn of events caused a stir in the vicinity, and, as the *Banbury Guardian* of 10<sup>th</sup> December reported, a petition was sent to the Home Office: ‘The petition was signed by the principal farmers in the village, by the leading residents, all the witnesses for the prosecution (except the police), and by Mr. John Jarvis, the man who admitted to being on the wall... We understand that the petition is being supported in influential quarters, and a well-known nobleman has undertaken to assist what is believed to be the cause of justice by personally waiting on the Home Secretary in reference to the case’.

For some time past, details of the whole story had been appearing in newspapers nationwide. On 11<sup>th</sup> December the *Financial Times* joined in with a moan that ‘some foolish person wrote to a small print... giving details of a method whereby any place could be set on fire with absolute certainty... Much evil could be done if this method were acted upon by readers of the daily newspapers and London magazines.’

The petition and the review of Thomas Tew’s case produced a speedy result. The *Banbury Guardian* of Christmas Eve reported that he arrived

back in Farthinghoe unexpectedly on the previous Saturday. He was released from Lewes prison and had had experience of two other prisons as well: 'It has taken exactly a month to secure his liberation. He spoke of his short experience of Lewes prison as being very hard, and the plank bed he described as a 'board'. He presented such a woe-begone appearance at Lewes station and suffered so much from the cold that a man gave him his top-coat... His appearance has changed so much that it is difficult to recognize him. His somewhat heavy moustache has disappeared, and his last tonsorial professor had evidently gone as near the scalp as possible without removing it... 'In Lewes prison I had to pick a certain quantity of oakum from seven o'clock in the morning till five at night. My breakfast was six ounces of bread and a pint of oatmeal gruel'. He spoke at greater length about his release and journey home and said, 'I think I ought to have some compensation'. His father expressed his gratitude to Lord Jersey and all who had in any way contributed to his son's release.'

The following week's *Banbury Guardian* took up this wish for compensation and announced that a subscription list was to be opened because Tew, of course, 'receives no compensation, although he has lost his situation and thirteen weeks' wages, which were at the rate of 13s. a week'. By the 14<sup>th</sup> January 1897 the paper had collected £6. 5s. towards the £8. 9s. which was needed to recoup Tew for his loss of wages – the Earl of Jersey had contributed £2. Neither George nor Thomas had permanent employment yet but had been employed in hedge cutting for some weeks past.

The fires were still very much in the public's mind: for example, in Brackley the unfortunately named 'Sunflower Troupe of Nigger Minstrels' included a recitation, 'The Farthinghoe Fires' in their concert; it was well received.<sup>1</sup>

The next important development was that there was the re-arrest of Walter George Wilkins in Farthinghoe: 'he was apparently in the very act of firing a hovel there'. (An incidental development is that he had been arrested and fined for being drunk in Brackley. Three policemen testified against him<sup>2</sup>). Mr E.J. George had been looking round at the different Jubilee bonfires that could be seen from near his farm when he saw Wilkins go across the farmyard. Almost immediately the hovel there

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<sup>1</sup> *Northampton Mercury*, 5 March 1897.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 16 April 1897.



was seen to be on fire, Wilkins ran off, straight into the arms of Constable Haynes who was keeping watch nearby. ‘This is an extraordinary sequel to the alarming series of fires in Farthinghoe last year’.<sup>3</sup>

In due course, Wilkins was brought to trial. He pleaded not guilty. The case was that Mr. George’s servant coming back from the Jubilee bonfires saw a young man who ran up against her in the farmyard. The prisoner made for the road to Charlton and ran into a police sergeant (sic): ‘the young man was very violent going to the station and that was not the conduct of an innocent man’. Wilkins’s defence was that the policeman had started the fire. The judge, in summing up, said there was very little direct evidence against the prisoner, and the jury, after a short deliberation found they could not agree and so the case would have to be tried by another jury.<sup>4</sup>

There was little delay in holding a second trial. There was an appeal for an adjournment on the grounds that the jurymen would have heard about the case and be prejudiced, but even though the first trial was only a week earlier ‘His Lordship did not think there was any objection to the case being heard. He never knew a case tried a second time in which the evidence was quite the same as that given at the first trial, and generally speaking, counsel made a good deal of it’.<sup>5</sup>

The evidence adduced at the first trial was then repeated and after a retirement of fifteen minutes the jury returned a verdict of guilty. His Lordship said that this second trial had been ‘most efficient’ and sentenced Wilkins to penal servitude for three years. The prisoner, who was on the eve of being married when he was arrested, walked out of the dock with a firm step.

And that was that, although the *Leicester Chronicle & Leicestershire Mercury* of 12<sup>th</sup> August 1899 did report an unfortunate corollary:

‘WANTED TO SEE THE ENGINES: An extraordinary case of arson was brought before the Northampton County magistrates on a Saturday, a servant girl named Alice Ada Mary Lowe, being charged with setting fire to two straw ricks at Moulton, Northamptonshire, on August 3, and doing damage to the amount of £60. When arrested she said to PC McLeod: “When the golf house at Kingsley was burnt I thought I should like to see the fire brigade at

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 25 June 1897.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 18 November 1897.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 25 November 1897.

work, and I told Master Tom so. Before then I thought I should like to see the fire brigade at work because when I lived at Farthinghoe I saw several rick fires at a distance, and my missus would not let me go and see the engines”’.

She was remanded for a week for her state of mind to be inquired into.

Wilkins served his sentence, was released and got married. Then, according to the 1901 census, he set up as a grocer on his own account in Balsall Heath, Birmingham. Ten years later he was still a grocer but was employed as such in Derby and by then he had his own family. Nothing further seems to be recorded about Thomas Tew, but his brother George married and continued to live in Farthinghoe. In the 1901 census they are the previous entry to Wilkins’s father George, who continued baking and selling groceries in the village despite all the trauma and upset that had gone before.

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As time passed the fires were almost completely forgotten about. But then, in 2005, began what seems superficially at least to be a set of arson attacks that mirrored the earlier series.



*St Michael's church, Farthinghoe*

This second series of attacks commenced in September 2005. The *Banbury Guardian* of 27<sup>th</sup> October reported that villagers were ‘Living in Fear’. As the community was said to be reeling from the attacks and the police said they had no suspects, the serial arsonist struck again.

Farthinghoe suffered ten attacks in two months, six taking place in as many days. Following a meeting in the village hall the previous week another fire was started in the building's toilets on Saturday. The first attack was to a farm outbuilding and the following attacks were to two barns, St Michael's church and 3,000 bales of hay at the Fox Inn. Three people were arrested, but all were released without charge.



*The Fox Inn, boarded-up after the fire of 2005.*

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In December 2005 a car workshop in a farm building was set ablaze,<sup>6</sup> which resulted in the closure of the A422. According to the *Banbury Guardian* of 29<sup>th</sup> December these other fires were at Brackley Gorse Farm, Bishop's Farm on the A43, a barn full of hay in Helmdon Road, Greatworth, and Greenacre's Farm on the A422. These attacks were soon attracting national attention and the *Guardian* of 13<sup>th</sup> January 2006 published a lengthy article entitled, 'Village where flames of suspicion leap ever higher': 'The old stone wall is scorched, the ivy and clematis are burned down to black skeletal remains, and a pile of ash lies on the pavement. This is the scene where, on Monday night, three cars were torched, their blaze threatening a house nearby.' Attacks on the church's outbuildings, the village pub, the community hall and a number of barns

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<sup>6</sup> [www.FireFightingNews.com](http://www.FireFightingNews.com), Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> December 2005.

and cars were mentioned. There was a mobile police station in the village, there were door-to-door enquiries and every house was given a smoke alarm. Then, on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2006 the BBC News Channel reported that a man had been arrested and questioned about twenty fires started in Farthinghoe and also for obtaining money by deception. There was a £5,000 reward for information. Two days later, the same news source reported that the man had been released pending further enquiries.<sup>7</sup>

As Archer says, ‘whilst history does not repeat itself, general trends in social circumstances and political ideology can parallel past events’.<sup>8</sup> It is undoubtedly pointless to even attempt to see connections between what happened in the nineteenth century and what happened in 2005 and 2006. Apart from location, the two sets of events seem to have little in common. Nevertheless, though we may learn no lessons the stories are at least of vicarious interest in that we can experience, through our mind’s eye, the feelings and actions of those involved at the time. Our imaginations may be caught because the stories contain traumatic and life-changing instances of arrests and re-arrest, trials and re-trial, animosity, false alarms, acquittals, penal servitude, a petition, release from prison, a financial subscription and a copycat attack by a poor servant girl.

## SNIPPETS FROM THE ARCHIVES: 10

*Deborah Hayter*

### **Newbottle Parish Registers, 1660** (Northants Record Office)

*‘A Register of the Severall Collections made in the Church and Parish of Newbottle by means of the Kings letters Patents etc or by private request, beginning Anno Dom: 1660.’*

	<i>s</i>	<i>d</i>
<i>April 1<sup>st</sup> – Gatherd for certaine Inhabitants of Metheringham com Lincoln</i>	07	04
<i>April 27<sup>th</sup> - For Thomas Bull of Middleton Cheney</i>	05	02
<i>June 10<sup>th</sup> - For Thomas Jackson of Frinkford &amp; his son in Law</i>		

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.charleswells.co.uk/home/news/fox-at-farthinghoe>, Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> December 2011

<sup>8</sup> Archer, *By a Flash and a Scare*, p. 159.

In the year 1660 (running from March 25<sup>th</sup>, according to the old calendar) there were six of these special collections, and we are not told why the inhabitants of Milton Abbas in Dorset, or the esquire of Clanogh, county Downe needed help, but in 1661 there were 22 collections, and several of these were for fires. The parishioners of Newbottle dug into their pockets for fires in the Old Exchange in London, in Little Milton, in Willenhall (Staffs), Ilminster (Somerset), Elmley Castle (Worcs), Brill (Bucks), the city of Oxford, Bridgnorth (Salop), Pontefract (Yorks), Great Drayton (Salop), and Gawcott. They also contributed towards the rebuilding of the churches in Scarborough (Yorks), Conover (Salop), the Collegiate church at Ripon (Yorks) and the church of Bolingbroke (Lincs). Amounts ranging from three to seven shillings were raised for all of these, though it is noticeable that the Oxford fire netted eight shillings, and Thomas Edwards of Farthingoe got 8s 9d – we are not told why he was appealing for charity. More surprisingly, 6s 10d was collected for ‘the Protestants of Lithuania’, 5s 5d ‘for the fishing trade’, and 3s 7d ‘for the repair of the harbour of Newhaven’, revealing that the good folk of Newbottle were not parochial in their outlook. You might have thought that they wouldn’t even know where Lithuania was, and might not care at all about their Protestants.

‘The King’s Letters Patents’ were sometimes referred to as a ‘brief’ or a ‘church brief’, and were royal mandates authorizing a collection for a deserving cause. They were addressed to the incumbent and churchwardens and would be read out from the pulpit. The parish clerk would make the collection at the end of the service and hand over the money to the person gathering donations who would be travelling with the letter. The sum raised would usually be entered into the churchwardens’ accounts, without much detail, as in ‘paid to a letter of request’ sometimes giving the provenance (‘out of Shropshire’).<sup>9</sup> Later in the seventeenth century the requests became much more frequent: the Kings Sutton Churchwardens’ accounts show that the sums raised were much smaller in the 1690s, usually about two shillings. No churchwardens’ accounts have survived from Newbottle, but the vicar, Thomas Harris, took the trouble to list all these charitable donations in the parish register, with a certain amount of detail, where otherwise he recorded baptisms, marriages and burials.

*Ed. note.* See also the *Parish Accounts for the ‘Town’ of Bodicote, Oxon, 1700-1822*, ed. J.H. Fearon, BHS Vol.12 (1975). Between 1703 and 1734 there are nineteen entries of collections (Introduction, pp.xv-xvi).

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<sup>9</sup> See 1690s entries, especially pp 203-4, in *Kings Sutton Churchwardens’ Accounts 1636 – 1700*, Ed. P. Hayter, BHS Vol. 27 (2001).

## Lecture Report

*Brian Little*

**Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2016**

***Local Clergy in the Middle Ages***

Dr David Robinson

David Robinson had done an enormous amount of research into the lesser clergy in the medieval period. He was interested in the very large number of unbeneficed clergymen, who never attained the assured income and position of being the rector or the vicar of a parish.

Dr. Robinson filled in the background, explaining how the parochial system worked, and the part played by the monasteries, who ‘owned’ a number of parish churches, took the main part of the income and put a chaplain, a ‘vicar’, to serve the church and take the services. There were also many posts which depended on the voluntary support of the local lay people: in some churches, chantries had been created by wealthy people who wanted to employ priests after their death to sing masses ‘for the health of their soul’. In other places, where there was no parish church, there might be a chapel which would have no glebe land or tithe income to provide an income for a full-time priest, but where a priest might be supported by willing locals who wanted a priest in their community. Surprisingly large numbers of priests had risen from the ranks of the peasantry, even with very limited opportunities for education, and Dr. Robinson described how the education required for a priest was minimal: they needed to be able to say or sing the Latin mass but not necessarily to be able to translate it.



## **Banbury Historical Society**

### **ANNUAL REPORT 2015**

Last year we instigated a new pattern of activities for the society: instead of an autumn and winter series of lectures from September to March, followed by a couple of summer outings and the AGM, we had for the first time a year's worth of society activities, from September through to July. (We feel everyone is entitled to August off). Last year's extra event in April was an historical artefacts quiz: members brought along an extraordinarily wide range of curious exhibits and then everyone had to guess what they all were. The prize for the most interesting object went to the one-legged milking stool brought along by Trevor Parry: he had been given it by a Swiss Boy Scout at an international Scout Jamboree in 1957.

Before that we had had Dr. Stephen Johnson, of the Museum of Science in Oxford, talking about the brilliant scientist Henry Moseley whose career was cut short by his death at Gallipoli. Moseley is the most important scientist of whom none of us had ever heard. Dr. David Stuttard gave us 'The Romans who shaped Britain' in February, and in March we had Stephen Wass talking about his research into the landscape around Farnborough Hall and the novel ways in which water was used there. In May there was a very wet excursion to the National Waterways Museum in Stoke Bruerne, and in June Stephen Wass led a group of members round the grounds of Farnborough Hall. But the major event of the society's summer was the event at Broughton Castle to celebrate the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the sealing of the Magna Carta. This was put on jointly with the Museum Trust with help from the Magna

Carta trust. Sir Bob Worcester chaired, Professor David Carpenter spoke, Anton Lesser performed, the sun shone, the castle and its gardens looked wonderful, every ticket was sold and a cheerful time was had by all. Many thanks are due to Simon Townsend, Susan Walker and Martin Fiennes for putting it all together. The AGM in the 19<sup>th</sup> century ballroom at Tudor Hall school rounded off the year.

Autumn 2015 began with Dr. Jon Healey on poor relief in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, followed by Barrie Trinder on Banburyshire's Victorian Boatpeople, and Dr. Kate Tiller on the Great War at Home. This last was preceded by a short film put together by the Museum and fronted by Dale Johnson of the Museum, all about Banbury's WW1 Munitions Factory. Then we had Professor Chris Dyer on John Heritage, a (fairly) local wool merchant at the end of the middle ages. At this December meeting we also had another book sale, selling BHS volumes as well as books produced by BHS members. This is always an impressive number.

We think that the society has survived the shock, but during last year Jeremy Gibson left Oxfordshire for Hampshire in order to be closer to family. Not only was Jeremy a founder member of the society, but over the years he had taken on many of the tasks involved in running a society such as ours, not least the editorship of *Cake & Cockhorse* for some time, and being the General Editor of the Records Volumes. A member of the committee was heard to murmur 'is it even constitutional to have the Banbury Historical Society without Jeremy here?' It took the committee several meetings to be sure that we had covered everything that Jeremy used to do for us. We thank him for all the expertise, knowledge and time that he has so generously given to this society over so many years, and we look forward to the next volume in the BHS records series, on Georgian Banbury, which he has now in preparation. At the last AGM Beryl Hudson also left the committee and we thank her for the many years that she had organized summer outings for us.

It has been good to welcome some new blood onto the committee: David Pym and Susan Walker have both come forward with new ideas and a willingness to organize events.

On leaving Oxfordshire Jeremy Gibson generously handed over his local history library to the society, for the use of members, and all these books are at the moment still sitting in boxes in the Resources room at the Museum. This collection is a lifetime's accumulation of everything that could possibly be relevant to local and family history in Banburyshire and is full of interesting volumes. Discussions are ongoing



about how best to house these and how to make them available for members to consult, and we will keep you posted.

Chris Day continues to edit *Cake & Cockhorse*, and the last issue consisted of a long history of the Alcan works in Banbury. We had to have this reprinted twice as a write-up in the *Banbury Guardian* caused a rush of non-members (but presumably ex-Alcan employees) to the Museum shop to buy copies.

As our secretary, Simon Townsend, is also Director of the Museum, we are kept informed of new ideas and developments taking place as the Museum moves forward as an independent trust, and we are making use of joint opportunities for publicity, sending out details of BHS lectures to the Museum's mailing list, for instance. Together with the *Banbury Guardian's* new willingness to publicise our lectures as 'nib' pieces ('news in brief'), this has led to high attendances at our recent lectures.

Very many thanks to all the members of the committee for what they do to keep the society going, especially to Margaret Little as membership secretary (and it is good that she has been kept busy recently joining up new members) and to Geoff Griffiths our treasurer, in whose capable hands the society's funds seem to grow: he remains adamant that at the moment there is no need to increase subscriptions.

**Deborah Hayter.** March 2016

## BANBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Banbury Historical Society was founded in 1957 to encourage interest in the history of the town of Banbury and neighbouring parts of Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire.

The magazine *Cake and Cockhorse* is issued to members three times a year. This includes illustrated articles based on original local historical research, as well as recording the Society's activities. Over one hundred and fifty issues and five hundred articles have been published. All but the most recent volumes have been digitised and are available on the Society's website (see inside front cover). Most back issues are also still available in their original form.

There are now over thirty volumes in the records series. Those still in print include:

*Banbury Baptism and Burial Registers, 1813-1838* (vol. 22).

The earlier registers, *Marriages 1558-1837, Baptisms and Burials 1558-1812*, are now out-of-print, but are available on fiche and CD from Oxfordshire Family History Society, website at: [www.ofhs.org.uk](http://www.ofhs.org.uk)

*Oxfordshire and North Berkshire Protestation Returns and Tax Assessments 1641-1642* (vol. 24, with Oxfordshire Record Society).

*King's Sutton Churchwardens' Accounts 1636-1700*, ed. Paul Hayter (vol. 27).

*The Banbury Chapbooks*, by Dr Leo John De Frietas (vol. 28).

*Banbury Past through Artists' Eyes*, compiled by Simon Townsend and Jeremy Gibson (vol. 30).

*Early Victorian Squarson: The Diaries of William Cotton Risley, Vicar of Deddington, Part One, 1835-1848*, ed. Geoffrey Smedley-Stevenson (vol. 29).

Part 2. *Mid-Victorian Squarson, 1849-1869* (vol. 32).

*Victorian Banburyshire: Three Memoirs*, ed. Barrie Trinder (vol. 33).

*Rusher's 'Banbury Trades and Occupations Directory' 1832-1906*

(Alphabetical Digest and DVD facsimile) (vol. 34).

Current prices and availability of other back volumes, and of *Cake and Cockhorse*, from the Society, c/o Banbury Museum.

In preparation: *Georgian Banbury before 1800: Banbury Vestry Book, 1708-1797 and other contemporary records.*

The Society is always interested to receive suggestions of records suitable for publication, backed by offers of help with transcription, editing and indexing.

Meetings are held during the autumn and winter, normally at 7.30 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month, at Banbury Museum, Spiceball Park Road, Banbury. Talks are given by invited lecturers on general and local historical, archaeological and architectural subjects. Excursions are arranged in the spring and summer, and the A.G.M. is usually held at a local country house or location.

The annual subscription (since 2009) is **£13.00** which includes any records volumes published. Overseas membership, **£15.00**.

All members' names and addresses are held on the Society's computer database for subscription and mailing purposes only. Please advise if you object to this practice.



## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This will take place on Thursday July 14<sup>th</sup> 2016 at 5.30pm in the Church Barn, Thenford, by kind invitation of Lord and Lady Heseltine.

### AGENDA

- 1) Apologies for absence
- 2) Minutes of the previous AGM
- 3) Annual report and accounts for 2015 (published in *Cake & Cockhorse*)
- 4) Election of Honorary Officers (Secretary and Treasurer)
- 5) Election of Committee members
- 6) Adoption of revised constitution (as previously circulated)
- 7) Appointment of auditor
- 8) Any other business

Please send any nominations for Secretary, Treasurer or Committee members to Simon Townsend, Hon. Secretary (c/o Banbury Museum or [simon.townsend@banburymuseum.org](mailto:simon.townsend@banburymuseum.org) ).

Directions: go through Thenford village towards the church which is signposted on the corner; there is a paddock in front of it and the Barn is on the left.

After the meeting and refreshments we will go up to Thenford House where Lady Heseltine will say something about the house.

**ABSOLUTELY NO CAMERAS PLEASE**