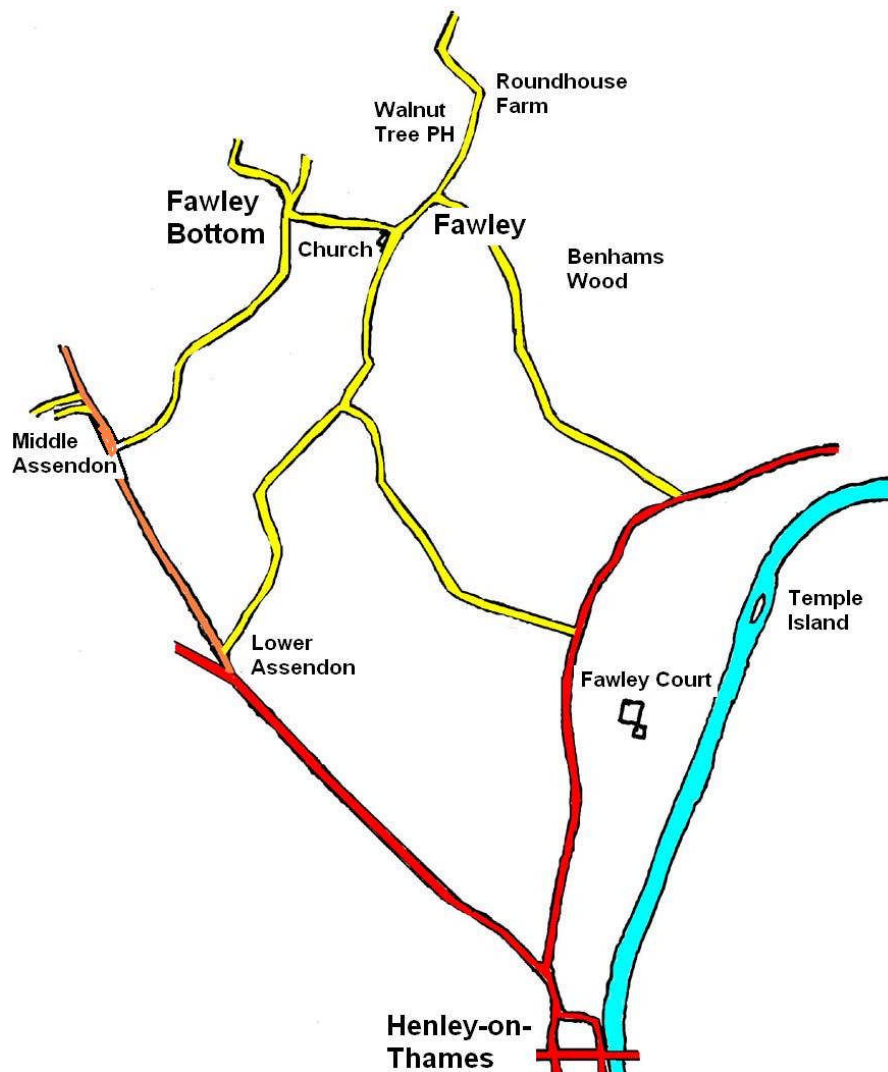


Fawley, Buckinghamshire

My interest in Fawley is threefold:

- It is within walking distance of Lower Assendon.
- It was the home of several of my ancestors.
- The author Cecil Roberts purchased a house in Fawley.

Most of the village of Fawley is situated at about 160 metres (550 feet) above sea level in the Chiltern Hills. It is possible to look out from the village over the Thames Valley and, on a good day, see Windsor Castle. Fawley Bottom, to the northwest, is in a steep valley. In common with most parishes in the area, Fawley parish has a boundary with the River Thames to the southeast. The halfway point of Henley Royal Regatta's course is referred to as Fawley where it passes this boundary.



The name Fawley comes from Anglo Saxon and refers to a fallow-coloured woodland clearing or clearing with ploughed land.

Fawley Court

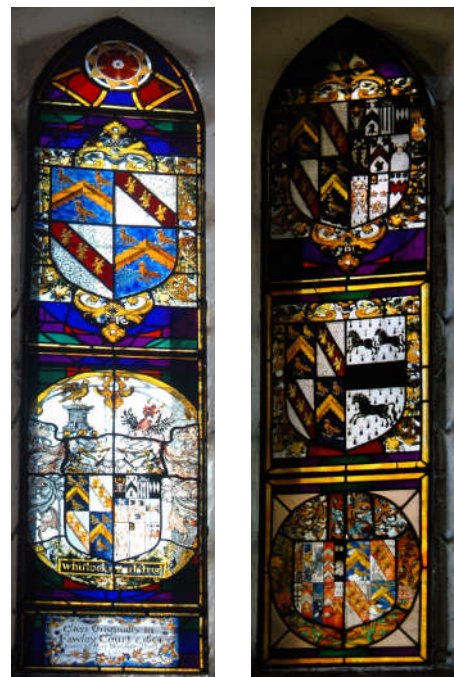


(Left) Fawley Court seen from the River Thames at Remenham
(Below) Stained glass from Fawley Court c1654 now in Fawley church

The house and former deer park surrounding it was established before the Norman Conquest. In 1616 it was sold to Sir James Whitelock, who also bought Henley Park and Phyllis Court. During the civil war it was occupied by James's son, Sir Bulstrode Whitelock, and was the scene of fighting between the Roundhead and Royalist troops. Sir Bulstrode allowed Royalist soldiers to stay in the house in 1642 but they were poorly disciplined and ransacked its contents, leaving it uninhabitable.

The house was subsequently sold to Colonel William Freeman and he completely rebuilt it in 1684 with a design by Sir Christopher Wren.

William Freeman's nephew inherited the estate. He built the Freeman family mausoleum in the grounds of Fawley church and buried a time capsule containing examples of everyday household items of the early 18th century in an artificial barrow on The Mount on the estate. The latter was excavated in the 20th century. The artefacts are now in the River and Rowing Museum in Henley.



In the 1760s Capability Brown landscaped the grounds of Fawley Court. The architect James Wyatt refurbished the interior and also built a fishing lodge and folly on Temple Island.

Fawley Court was sold to Edward Mackenzie in 1853. He enlarged the house by adding a northeast wing.

In 1908 Fawley Court is alleged to have been the inspiration for Kenneth Grahame's book *The Wind in the Willows*. Part of the grounds are now given over to a garden centre known as Toad Hall to acknowledge this.

During World War II Fawley Court was used as an army training camp. It was subsequently sold to the Congregation of Marian Fathers and became the Divine Mercy College for Polish boys. The school closed in 1986 and the Marian Fathers converted Fawley Court into a retreat and conference centre.

The Rixon Families at Fawley

In *Gone Rustic*, Cecil Roberts describes a visit in 1934 to the last of the chair makers, Mr. Rixon. 'He was little old man of 81 with a bright eye and an impish face. His wife produced half a dozen old chairs. Some were made of cherry wood, some of beech. The old chair maker explained how they had been made and took me out to a shed at the bottom of his orchard to show me the lathe on which the work had been done.'

The lathe in question was a homemade pole lathe, once common in the Chiltern Hills. A skilled user could turn out four-dozen chair legs an hour. Machine operators in Wycombe were now replacing the traditional chair makers.

This Mr Rixon was James Rixon, one of three brothers living with their families in Fawley since the 1880s. They were the sons of William Rixon and Hannah (nee West). The families are recorded in the 1901 census.

The first family comprised George Rixon (aged 59, a timber dealer), his wife Elizabeth Rixon (56) and their children Alfred (27, chair turner), William (24, railway porter), Annie (22, dress maker) and Ernest (19, chair turner). They also had two daughters, Emily aged 33 and Sarah aged 30, no longer living at home.

The family of James Rixon comprised James (48, chair turner), his wife Elizabeth (46) and their children John (20, plumbers labourer), Amy (18, domestic maid) and Edwin James (6).

The third family was Daniel Rixon (44, wood turner), his wife Charlotte (55) and their son William (17, garden boy).

Edwin James Rixon joined the Royal Berkshire Regiment in the First World War. He was awarded the Victory and British medals for his service. He was killed in action on April 4th 1917. His name is included on the war memorial at Fawley church.

Other Rixon family graves can also be found at Fawley church. James Rixon died aged 88 in 1940 and his wife died in 1939, aged 84. Their daughter Amy Rixon died aged 93 in 1975.



The war memorial, Fawley church



Rixon family graves, Fawley church

Fawley Cricket Club



The photograph above shows the members of Fawley Cricket Club in about 1895. At the time, Fawley had about 270 inhabitants to produce a team. Among their number is at least one Rixon. (Third from the right in the back row is possibly James or Dan Rixon, aged about 40. The younger members, front right could be Alfred, John, William and Daniel Rixon, who were aged between 14 and 22 at the time.)

The Cricket Club is still active in the village, although today it draws members from a much wider area.

St Mary the Virgin Church, Fawley

The parish church, dedicated to St Mary the Virgin, dates back to the 13th century with its wide tower. It stands in close proximity to the Rectory and the former village school, built in 1850.



Fawley church

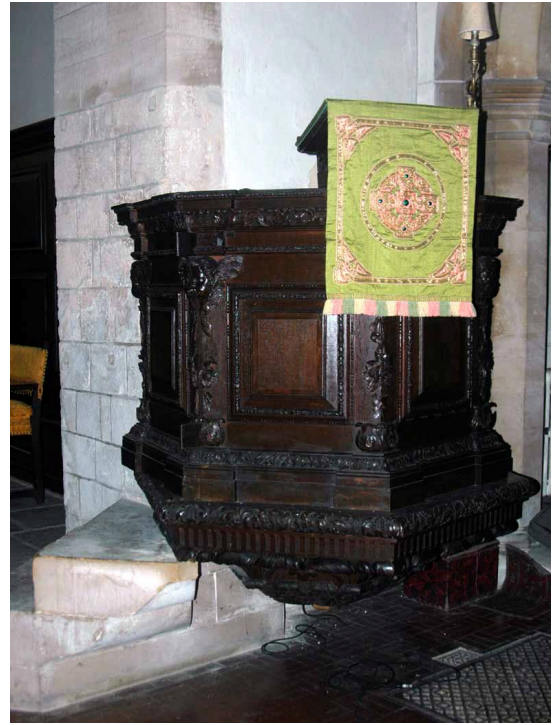


The former Fawley school

In 1633 a mortuary chapel was added to house a monument to Sir James Whitelock. The figures on the monument represent Sir James and his wife. The nave and chancel of the church were rebuilt in 1748 and a new entrance was added through the tower, with a pew for the Freeman family above it. Many of the fittings for this remodelling came from a chapel at Cannons, near Stanmore in Middlesex. The pulpit is one such example that survives later changes to the church.



The Whitelock memorial



The pulpit

The cemetery surrounding the church contains two large mausoleums. The more prominent is that of the Freeman family, constructed in 1750. The other is of the Mackenzie family.



The Freeman family mausoleum



The Mackenzie family mausoleum

The Village Well

Situated on the top of the Chiltern Hills, Fawley does not have a natural water supply such as a spring or river. Before the 20th century, villagers collected water from the roof of their home and stored it in a pond or underground tank. Around 1900 a village well was sunk to a depth of 350 feet on the village green.

The well has been preserved but, by all accounts, was not much used because of the effort involved in hauling the water up such a distance.



The village pond, outside the church



The village well on Fawley Green

In *Gone Rustic*, Cecil Roberts describes an incident during the sinking of the well: ‘..an escapade of the Squire’s daughter. She descended the shaft with some friends and was held to ransom for a round of beer by the workmen she joined at the bottom.’

The Walnut Tree

Fawley does not appear to have had an inn in the 19th century. However, in the 1861 census, Henry Harman, who had been an agricultural labourer, ran a beer house. In the 1871 census, his widow is running a grocer’s shop retailing beer. Thereafter there is no mention of the sale of beer in that century. Perhaps there was insufficient trade for a village of less than 300 inhabitants?

Also in 1871 and 1881, Emma Sharpe ran a grocer and baker shop in Fawley. The baker’s shop appears to have been taken over by Charles Heath in 1891 and was run as a grocer and baker shop in 1901 by his widow Hester Heath.

Fawley’s first dedicated inn was therefore the Walnut Tree, opened in the 1960’s. It attracted trade from outside the village with the advent of the growing ownership of motorcars. As well as serving beers and spirits, The Walnut Tree had a reputation for serving good food. Sadly this inn is now closed, overgrows with creepers and is for sale.



The Walnut Tree in 2001



The Walnut Tree in 2008

The Village Forge

The Fawley village's censuses in the 19th century show that Henry F Charlton, and subsequently his son Henry, was the village blacksmith until 1881. In 1891 and 1901 the blacksmith is Mark Harman.

In the 20th century the smithy or forge was operated only part time as demand for the service diminished. In the 1930s the author Cecil Roberts became friendly with the octogenarian Harman's at the smithy. He bought the blacksmith's house and forge at auction.



The Old Forge, Fawley

The blacksmith's workshop still exists, but is now a retail outlet for Fawley Vineyard.

Round House Farm

Throughout the 19th century mainly farm labourers inhabited Fawley. One farm that employed several families of workers was Round House Farm. In common with many of the village's cottages and Crockmore Farm, it dates back to the 17th century.

With wheat and barley as the main crops grown in the area, it is possible that the round tower was originally a drying house for the grain. This would have been transported to the mills in Henley-on-Thames.



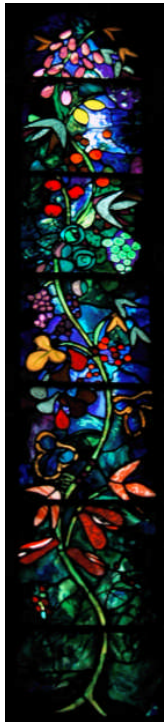
John Piper

The 20th century artist John Piper (1903-1992) lived and worked at Fawley Bottom. He is perhaps best known for his stained glass baptistery window in Coventry cathedral. John Piper was also an abstract painter, painted many stately homes, a photographer and author.

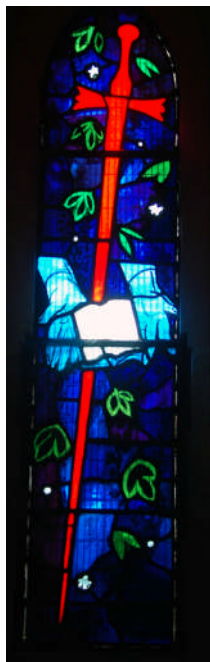
Locally he produced the designs for stained glass memorial windows in Pishill church, St Mary's Fawley, St Mary's Turville and St Bartholamew's Nettlebed. He also helped to restore the two windows from Fawley Court.

The Fawley window is located in the vestry and is a memorial to Anthony Hartley. The Turville window commemorates St Saviour's Turville Heath (1898-1972). The Pishill window commemorates Rev. G.M.Hall (former rector).

There are two windows by John Piper in Nettlebed. The south window is in memory of Col. Peter Fleming, Lord of the Manor, author and soldier. The east window commemorates Dr. Robin Williamson, a churchwarden. The central part shows a tree of life. The left side shows fishes, an early Christian symbol and the right shows butterflies, depicting life, death and resurrection.



Tree of Life,
Fawley



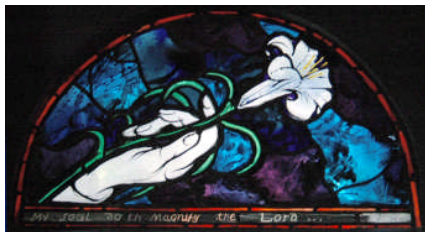
Window, Pishill



East window, Nettlebed



South window, Nettlebed



Window, Turville