

Compton Bassett Matters

Edited by Councillors Barlow and Waite for Compton Bassett Parish Council

Making the best of things...



At times like these, when many in our village are feeling slightly overwhelmed and discomforted by events beyond their control, one is drawn to words of comfort from leaders of the past. As the VE 75th anniversary takes place this month perhaps it is apt therefore that we might reflect on the wisdom of Winston Churchill, who some of you may know stayed in Compton Bassett when inspecting our army and reconnaissance bases during the war. Now a controversial figure for some, none can doubt the impact of his oratory and I think his turn of phrase especially sums up the mood at present.

“The English know how to make the best of things. Their so-called muddling through is simply skill at dealing with the inevitable”, he said.

There may well be some light at the end of the tunnel even if that tunnel is not quite as straight as we would hope. It is fortunate therefore, that during lock-down and self-isolation we are able to enjoy the delights and the beauty of our rural setting as well as the friendship and support of our friends, and neighbours in our fabulous village.

The recent Easter issue of CB Matters drew inspiration from those who live amongst us for its content and although we may not have a large population, this second special VE day issue also harnesses some of the amazing talents of those who live amongst us. The variation in articles and contributions we have curated for this issue draws upon the memories and recollections of many people who have lived here for some time and recall the events of the past as though they were only yesterday.

They say it is at times of distress that you really find out who your friends are and the Parish Council have been delighted and gratified by the response of all those unsung heroes helping one another during this difficult time. We are truly blessed to have such a caring community.

Those who came forward to act as volunteers have been called upon when needed and 65 essential tasks have now been carried out. Others who live here have close family living nearby have been able to collect items for them whilst they stay out of harm's way. Those who have benefitted and those that just want to help have given generously to the volunteer fund and this special issue was subsidised by these kind parishioners.

Again our aim is to entertain, inform and educate and if we achieve just one of that trio of objectives, our job here is done. Whilst the current restrictions are getting increasingly tiresome, please keep healthy, stay at home where possible and above all keep safe. As Winston himself once said in a world that was less conscious of political correctness, “keep b**gering on...”.

Julian Barlow

A Warm Welcome to Compton Bassett – Penny and Philip Warner who have recently moved into White's House.

'FJ': The Many Lives of William Spurrett Fielding-Johnson

Leicester-born William Fielding-Johnson, FJ to his friends, came to Compton Bassett in 1930 when he bought Manor Farm from the Co-op; later on he added Streete and Dugdales Farms. He was a hands-on man, very popular and much respected in the village. The juxtaposition of a dairy farmer in a small community and his flying and battlefield skirmishes in two world wars is extraordinary but describe the verve and single-mindedness of the man.

Leicestershire Yeomanry

A cadet officer at Rugby School, he joined the Leicestershire Yeomanry in 1913 as a Second Lieutenant and was despatched to the Western Front in November the following year. On 13 May 1915 FJ was on the front line in the Second Battle of Ypres with 'B' Squadron in a 300-yard-long trench. After prolonged overnight shelling, German soldiers attacked at first light, overrunning part of their position and forcing them out. FJ and his Major, the two remaining 'B' squadron officers, led the surviving men down the trench and managed to join 'C' Squadron but here their situation worsened, as now they were attacked from front and side. 'C' Squadron's Major ordered sandbags across the trench in a desperate attempt to defend their position but soon he and all other officers were killed along with most of the men.

In a fast-deteriorating situation, FJ found he was now the last officer left from both squadrons and with just 13 men. Facing annihilation, he decided their only hope was to try and cross the railway line behind them to join a brigade of Dragoon Guards on the far side.



FJ with Noel at Manor Farm 1933.



Yet to do this they had to traverse an expanse of open ground, covered by German machine guns. So FJ got the men to carry sandbags with them to build and rebuild parapets as they crawled their way across the railway under continuous fire. Somehow all of them made it to safety. For his coolness and conspicuous gallantry he was awarded the Military Cross (MC), then the second highest award for bravery.

Officers of the Leicestershire Yeomanry in 1914. FJ is standing second from left in the photo.

Royal Flying Corps

Leaving the regiment in October 1915 he joined the Royal Flying Corps as an observer, involved with reconnaissance. FJ and his pilot took off for a shoot one afternoon in January 1916, but at 100 ft their aircraft stalled and spun to ground, which killed the pilot instantly. His colleagues were close at hand and pulled the two men from the wreckage and were amazed to find that, although unconscious, FJ was still alive.

Recovery took a long time but he returned to duty, electing to train as a pilot and in October 1917 he joined 56 Squadron. Over the next seven months he earned the accolade of flying ace, achieving the shooting down of five or more enemy aircraft. Now he was Acting Flight Commander, but his posting finished in May 1918 and he was sent back to England with a second MC for his great skill, daring and good leadership of fellow officers.

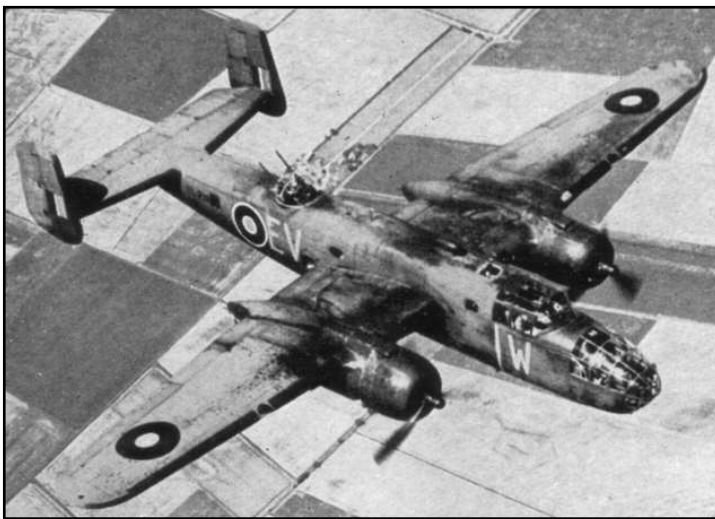


Captain William Fielding-Johnson at the controls of his SE 5a B37, March 1918.

Second World War

When war was declared on 1st September 1939, FJ was 47 but immediately volunteered and was given a commission as pilot officer on the 3rd, and promoted to flying officer on the 7th! Active service commenced in June 1940 as a rear gunner with 214 Squadron, for which highly dangerous job the life expectancy is estimated to have been around five sorties. By September 1940 he had flown 19 sorties and was then transferred to staff duties. But in March 1942 FJ was back in the air as Commanding Officer of 1483 Flight training aircrews and he also participated in every sortie that his unit took part in; this earned him the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) in September 1942. Just after D-Day in June 1944 he was wounded during a mission as a replacement air-gunner, and after three months recuperation, he joined 180 squadron as Squadron Leader. He was also responsible for the physical and mental well-being of aircrews, dealing with the frayed nerves of airmen due to operational exhaustion. FJ's calm, friendly manner and natural authority made him the ideal person to consult for advice. His diplomacy was soon tested in late October 1944 at a pre-flight briefing,

when an air-gunner complained of feeling unwell and his captain accused him of cowardice in front of the assembly; it was FJ who calmed things down and volunteered to take the place of the sick gunner. So it was that FJ climbed into the top gun turret of a B-25 Mitchell bomber (*below*) with a South African Air Force crew, taking off to bomb the bridges at Venlo, south of Arnhem, in broad daylight. Reaching their target, bombs were dropped and they headed home. At this point they were hit by ground fire under the port wing. FJ saw



from his top gun turret a stream of fuel gushing from the wing tank, so he radioed his pilot to suggest that power be cut to the engine to reduce the risk of fire. This was tried but suddenly the port engine burst into flames. As fire took hold of the aircraft, the pilot gave an order to bale-out and the two gunners nearest the rear escape hatch donned parachutes and jumped; the navigator became stuck in his confined space but was freed just in time to parachute out of the burning aircraft. All the crew eventually found each other on the ground, just inside allied territory and made safe passage back. This experience enabled them to be members of the exclusive Caterpillar Club, open only to those who parachuted out over land from a doomed aircraft.

FJ's only son Hugh also joined the RAF, flying Mosquito fighter-bombers. In December 1944 FJ and Hugh achieved the distinction of both having been awarded with the DFC, thought to be the only case of a father and son in active service. Sadly, two months later Hugh and his navigator were shot down over Germany.

FJ returned to a life on the farm in Compton Bassett as well as chairing the family business in Leicester. His wife Noel had ably run the farm while he was away and was instrumental in the many awards for their 'Effjay' herd that came their way. After FJ died suddenly in February 1953 during a board meeting in Leicester, Noel carried on with the farm before finally selling up in 1963. She died in 1975 and is buried in St Swithin's churchyard alongside FJ.

Laurie Waite



FJ in 1942 with his DFC

Second World War Quiz

1. Which football club's ground was used as a prisoner of war camp until May 1945?
2. Which Wiltshire village was abandoned in December 1943 and has been used by the MoD ever since?
3. Which Major commanded an artillery battery in the Normandy Landings, was a sailor, politician and conductor?
4. Which Lieutenant-Commander served with British Naval Intelligence and wrote a book about a flying car?
5. Which Marlborough schoolboy commanded a landing craft on D-Day, was a teacher, novelist and Nobel Prize winner?
6. REME was formed during the war and now have their museum based at Lyneham. What does REME stand for?

My Recollection of the Making of *The Dam Busters* Film

At this time when we are remembering the Second World War, one of the greatest exploits was the famous Dam Busters' raid on Germany. One of the reasons it is so famous is because of the film that recreated the true story of Operation Chastise when, in 1943 the RAF's 617 Squadron attacked the Möhne, Eder and Sorpe dams in Nazi Germany. It profiles the brave bomber crews and the role of the eccentric but brilliant inventor Barnes Wallis and his bouncing bomb. Robin Clark, who has lived in the village for some time has fond memories of the film which his father helped produce and which was the most successful British motion picture of the year...

I own as a family heirloom a pewter pint pot inscribed,

“R. Clark ESQ

With the appreciation of the PATHFINDER ASSOCIATION
& ROYAL AIR FORCES ASSOCIATION on the occasion of the Premiere of “THE DAMBUSTERS”
May16/17th 1955”

My father, Robert Clark, was then head of production of Associated British Picture Corporation and responsible for the film, having bought the film rights to the story.

I remember being forced to rent an evening suit from Moss Bros in order to attend the Royal World Premier at the Odeon in Leicester Square having just turned seventeen. I was fortunate to meet Richard Todd, the actor and Barnes Wallis, the inventor during the evening.

At the time we lived in Hendon, Middlesex which was convenient for Elstree studios where the film was made. During production there was a constant flow of film people coming to the house. Total Film rated the film as the 43rd greatest British film of all time and as a family we have always been very proud of my father and the film. I still like watching repeats of *The Dam Busters* with or without the black Labrador.

Robin Clark



1954. Ground level filming of a Lancaster modified for the film, mid upper gun turret and bomb bay doors removed.

Did You Know?

Guy Gibson, leader of the Dam Busters raid, took his initial pilot training at RAF Yatesbury. He rated 'Average'. Flying very low, at just 30m or less, one Lancaster hit the sea and another ploughed straight into electricity cables.

VE DAY 75th CELEBRATION **FRIDAY 8 MAY 2020**
DECORATE YOUR HOUSE **RED, WHITE AND BLUE**

Escaping from the Hungarian Revolution, Autumn 1956

Katharina Dry-Halasz came to Compton Bassett in 1997, buying her home as an uninhabitable cottage and restoring it. She chose it for its beautiful, peaceful location with good access for work and to close friends...

In 1956 there were two crises that occurred at roughly the same time, The Suez Crisis and The Hungarian Revolution. As Hungarians living in Budapest at that time my brothers and I were terrified of the possibility of being arrested and imprisoned by the occupying Russian forces. We were what the Russians called 'Kulak', just one of many thousands who were unsympathetic to Russian politics.

Following the revolution where Russian troops opened fire on protestors in Parliament Square in Budapest, we decided to escape to a safer country and we chose Austria because we had contacts in Vienna. We left Budapest in autumn 1956 just with the clothes we were wearing and a few identity documents. We travelled in a friend's lorry and then on foot to the Austrian border. Another friend's mother who lived nearby knew when there would be a change of guards at the heavily protected border zone.

We arrived at her house, waited until the midday change of guard, and then walked past the empty bunker with machine guns sticking out of slots in the walls. The three-metre-wide ditch was a trap, very deep, narrow and filled with dry broken branches so you couldn't pull your feet out if you got caught and would make a lot of noise to alert the guards. However, the four of us made it across to the Austrian side of the ditch where I collapsed through sheer fear and exhaustion, then rolled rather than walked towards the border post.

The Austrian border guards took our names, inspected our documents and registered us as political refugees. One of our party called some friends in Vienna (they were workers for a charity helping refugees) who came and picked us up by car and took us to their apartment in the city, where they gave us clothes, food and lodging until we could move on. We were really frightened being there because there were so many refugees (Austria couldn't cope with the influx) and nothing happened to get us further away from danger. After about two weeks, when we felt we couldn't rely on the friends' hospitality any more, the British consulate suddenly offered free flights to England. We left immediately, landing at Blackbushe airport, just outside London, where we were received with great kindness and a welcoming smile. There was the possibility to travel on to the USA, Canada or Sweden but at the time the consulates were not accepting applications so I stayed in England.

As I had trained as an architect at the prestigious Technical University of Budapest, we were put up in temporary student accommodation in South Kensington and I was given a job at a surveyor's office associated with Imperial College, creating imaginary preliminary architectural designs. We used to visit the newly built dining hall at London University where the food was lovely and we were given vouchers so didn't have to pay! We were all students, all in the same predicament, so there was great camaraderie. I was introduced to Sir Hugh Casson's office in South Kensington (he designed the architectural part of the Great Exhibition of 1951, for which he was knighted) and offered a job that paid £7 per week which was an incredible opportunity that started me on my architectural career and was where I met my future husband. The rest is history, ending up with my yearning to be in the countryside again and living in Compton Bassett!

Katharina Dry-Halasz



Katharina, 3rd from left, dancing on the terrace at home in Fülöpszállás, Hungary, just before the Second World War. The second photo shows Katharina with her brothers and dogs in the mid 1930s.

Meanwhile, Down on the Farm...

It is hard to connect the green fields around Compton Bassett where I work each day, with the world of the virus. Hard to think it is the same world. But, of course it is. The virus shows how connected we really are.

Life on the farm continues as before, cows are fed every day and milked twice a day, the animals oblivious to what is going on.

I feel immensely privileged being able to spend my working hours in such beautiful surroundings, even more so during this exceptional period of sunshine.

Spring is a wonderful time of year on the farm, the prize for enduring the repetitive routine of looking after the cattle in sheds and the dark cold winter days. In March, the day length increases along with the temperatures and at last the grass starts growing again. The trees and plants absorb the moisture and the water-logged ground starts drying up. The day the cows go out is a joy for both us and them. Seeing them gallop around the fields in such an obvious display of pleasure and excitement is justification of our extensive grazing system, rather than keeping them indoors 365 days a year which some dairy farms do nowadays.



Both these heifers are Holstein-Friesian cross; one being known as Red and White.

Spring, rather than autumn, is also the time that we plant our crops. Being organic, it works better for us to plant our seed into ground that is warming up and the plants will grow quickly and will hopefully out-compete the weeds, that we find so difficult to control. The recent rain has been immensely fortunate, the seed that has remained dormant in the soil for the last few weeks is finally germinating. For those who are familiar with our farm will know the fields that we have cultivated this year; Blackwells, the field adjacent to Blacksmith Lane has been planted with grass and the big field on the top of the downs has been drilled with barley. We will cut the barley in July before it is fit, the grain is soft like brie, and ensile it in a clamp back at the farm. It makes excellent silage, high in starch, which complements the high protein grass with which it's mixed, and will be fed to the cattle next winter.

The days of spring calving herds have gone. We are now encouraged by our milk buyers to calve all year around to enable a level profile of production. We calve around 12 cows a month which produce some replacements for the herd and some Aberdeen Angus Cross calves which we sell to farms who rear them for beef.

We have all experienced shopping recently in supermarkets, and finding shelves stripped of staple foodstuffs that we have grown accustomed of never running short of. Recently, a UK government advisor, Professor Tim Leunig, was quoted in leaked emails as saying we didn't need farmers, because the value of their output was a tiny share of the UK economy and we could import all the food we needed, perhaps at lower prices. Food security was not high up on the political agenda, maybe the effects of Covid-19 will change that?

Charles Reis

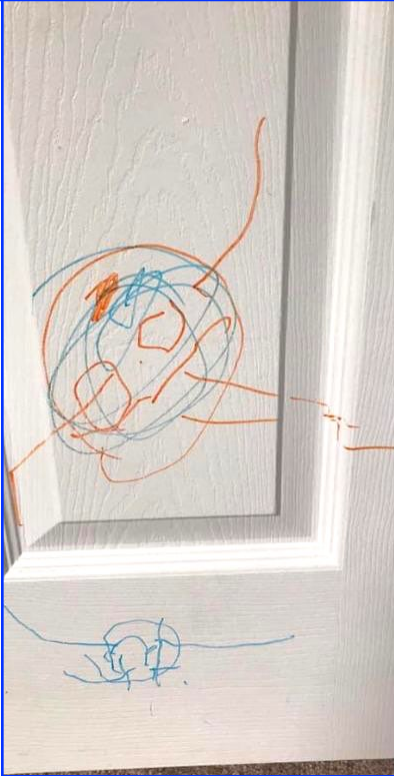
SPRING WATCH – Swallows were spotted over Compton Bassett on 6th April and Swifts on 29th April.

I was watching the London Marathon and saw one runner dressed as a chicken and another runner dressed as an egg. I thought, 'This could be interesting'.

Police arrested two kids yesterday. One was drinking battery acid, the other was eating fireworks. They charged one and let the other one off.

A vicar, a priest and a rabbit go to a blood bank. Rabbit says, "I think I might be a type O".

Budding Banksy Unmasked



Wrestlers in Action, 2020
Eli Williams (b. 2016)

Crayola marker on wooden closet door.

Williams, a fledgling artist with a reputation for drawing it like he sees it, has honed a style that harkens back to the Realism movement.

In the latest addition to Williams' *Quarantine* series, the subject is WWE wrestlers in action. Williams rejects Romantic conventions and delivers the raw emotion of wrestlers Rey Mysterio and Jeff Hardy in the ring.

Critics agree that *Wrestlers in Action* is a thought-provoking composition that challenges the viewer to reflect on their own emotions stemming from being a prisoner in their own home during a toilet paper shortage.

Gifted to the artist's parents, 2020.

Bletchley Park Advice

SIX GOLDEN RULES

1. Keep your head ; obey any instructions that may be given by those in authority—calmly and immediately.
2. Disperse. Don't crowd together in the street.
3. On the warning being given, seek cover unless your job demands otherwise.
4. Learn the very simple and efficient measures for dealing with incendiary bombs and with incipient fires generally. (See Page 13).
5. Help one another. Set an example of calmness ; take care of children, the aged, or the injured, especially if you are unfortunate enough to be caught in a crowd.
6. Don't stand around staring at the sky. Curiosity killed the cat.

Let us, therefore, brace ourselves to our duty, and so bear ourselves that if the British Commonwealth and Empire lasts for a thousand years men will still say, "This was their finest hour!"

THE RT. HON. WINSTON CHURCHILL, M.P.,
Prime Minister.

I met my girlfriend whilst she was working at the zoo. There she was in her uniform - straightaway I knew she was a keeper.

I went out to buy some camouflage trousers today but couldn't find any.

Are you drinking more while in lockdown ?

yes

no



ANSWERS: WW2 Quiz 1. Swindon Town. 2. Imber. 3. Edward Heath. 4. Ian Fleming. 5. William Golding. 6. Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. Capital Cities: 1. Moscow 2. Singapore. 3. Helsinki. 4. Baghdad. 5. Tokyo. 6. Stockholm. 7. New Delhi. 8. Canberra. 9. Bridgetown. 10. Phnom Penh. 11. Quito. 12. Athens. 13. Budapest. 14. Kingston. 15. Monaco. 16. Windhoek. 17. Kathmandu. 18. Belfast. 19. Taipei. 20. Bangkok. **Cranial Probe:** Finger lickin' good KFC - yellow. confused.com - yellow. Have it your way (Burger King) - pink. Have a break (Kit Kat) - green. Get the London look (Rimmel) - purple. Because you're worth it (L'Oréal) - orange. Best a man can get (Gilllette) - green. Simple (comparthemarket.com) - pink. Every little helps (Tesco) - pink. Get some nuts (Snickers) - orange. **Anagrams:** 1. Compton Bassett. 2. St Swithin's Church. 3. White's House. 4. Goodenoughs. 5. Briar Leaze. 6. Whispur Cottage. 7. Streeare Farm. 8. Yew Tree Cottage. 9. Lower End Farm. 10. Estate House.

Your Area Coordinators for Volunteer Help, Advice or a Chat

AREA 1: Freeth to No. 35 Compton Bassett (SN11 8RD & 8RE)

Coordinator: Laurie Waite

Contact: 815995 – 07831 131171 – Email: lauriewaite@hotmail.com

AREA 2: Compton Farm to No. 48 The Old Laundry (SN11 8RE, 8RF, 8RG, 8RH & 8RQ)

Name: Pete Szczesiak

Contact: 815006 – 07484 364252 – Email: peter.szczesiak01@gmail.com

AREA 3: No. 49 to Breach Farm House (SN11 8RH, 8SW, 8SP & 8SN)

Coordinator: Julian Barlow

Contact: 760788 – 07747 852070 – Email: julian@barlowcomms.co.uk

**Are you at risk of severe illness if you catch Coronavirus?
Stay home, stay safe and use our service!**