

## **Tales from the Hills**

(Ashmansworth and Crux Easton)

In 1856 the remains of an unidentified young woman were found buried under the rector's lawn in Crux Easton. The woman had been dead for some time. Subsequent investigation showed that she had died during the Roman occupation of the village and had lain undisturbed for over 1500 years. You can see her skeleton in Reading Museum.

Somebody cared, because the excavators found a Romano-British flower pot beside her. The pot is now missing, last seen in the possession of the curate!

A more scandalous inhabitant of the rectory was William Franklin. He announced that he was the Messiah, and people came flocking to the church from far and wide to hear him preach. He and his partner, the so-called 'Spouse of Christ', moved into the rectory with the then rector of Crux Easton, William Woodward, and his wife Margaret, in 1649.

Unfortunately for the rector, his fellow incumbents from the surrounding parishes, concerned at the loss of their parishioners to the Crux Easton Messiah, applied to the courts. The result was that Mr Woodward lost his living and he, his wife, and Mr and Mrs Messiah were all evicted from the rectory.

The rectory was also the childhood home of the great pioneer of aviation, Geoffrey de Havilland. His father, Charles, was the rector. Geoffrey went on to found the de Havilland Aircraft Company. He produced the legendary bi-plane, the Tiger Moth; the Mosquito bomber which was so fast that, even as early as 1940, it was able to bomb Berlin, unescorted, and get safely home; and the first jet airliner, the Comet. Tragically, his supersonic jet fighter, the DH 110, while being displayed at the Farnborough Air Show in 1952, crashed into the spectators, killing 32.

On flying visits to Crux Easton, Geoffrey would take off and land on one particular field still known locally as 'de Havillands'. A few years ago this field hosted a mass rally of Tiger Moths, flown in by enthusiasts from both here and abroad to celebrate de Havilland's achievements.



**Geoffrey de Havilland**

*Agricola*