

**THE**

**FAIRHEAD**

**SAGA**

**PART 1**

**THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS**

BY

**A. E. Fairhead**

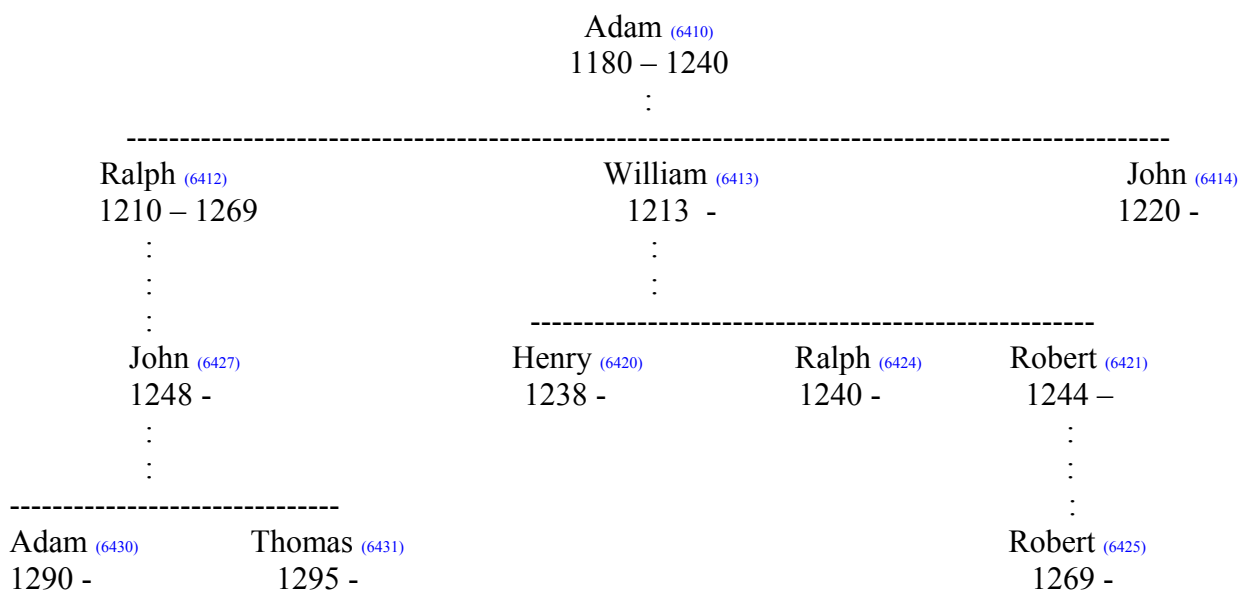
# The Fairhead Saga.

Part 1.

## The First Hundred Years.

This is a narrative of the Fairhead Family built from data collected from the Fairhead Series, and accommodating material with fictitious linkage.

All the male Family characters named Fairhead or any of its variations are taken from pure records and if one is satisfied that published records are true, then those named in this composition actually did exist.



November 1976

A.E.Fairhead  
Norwich

*I have reproduced this story from Albert's original printed Booklet. He has written it in this way to make the information contained in very sparse records more interesting to the reader. Any fact or incident is noted in the footnotes.*

R. A. Fairhead  
Basingstoke  
June 2007

## **Part 1.**

### **The First Hundred Years.**

Adam was a man of good stature; his fair hair hung to rest on those broad shoulders to link with his beard which he habitually combed with his hand when conversing. Nearing six foot in stature, he looked a powerful figure in those skin-clad leggings supported by a circle of cords to point below a wool woven shirt. A belted tunic with a wool-skin head-dress in some way suited this impressionable character.

Having been born in the year 1180, he was now 40 years of age, although his father contended that the time of his birth was before midnight on the 31st of December 1179 and not the following morning.

"That sundial does not give a true reading in dull wintry weather," he claimed.

Adam with a mixture of pride and shame would relate the story handed down from father to son over the years of how his forebear Oersted, the Viking chieftain, set out with a band of robbers to raid and plunder the English coast in the year 787 and how they made for the Wash, finally misjudging the course of the Nene to become bogged in the swamps at a point near Farcet.

The boat was never floated again and Oersted settled here.

His life was, however, short, having received a fatal arrow from a Saxon defender. He left a small son also named Oersted who spent many hours with his mother while she was at work in the fields and had it not been for the succour given by the monks at the Abbey of Thorney it is doubtful that he would have survived.

He did not, however, make old bones, having been killed at Ellendune while fighting with King Egbert against the Mercians, and of the two sons he left behind, one was killed at war fighting with Alfred the Great.

For too many years past there had been wars and a number of the Family suffered as a result, but now at least for a short while there was peace and Adam\* felt grateful that he had received such blessings as he now enjoyed.

Some headway had been made since inheriting the farm from his father and he was now on good terms with the monks at the Abbey who were the Lords of the Manor of Farcet, but he disliked the Lord-Serf relationship. He had now repaired a serious breach of conflict that he had with them concerning his marriage to Johanna who was said to be the daughter of a villain attached to the monastery farms and the Lords would not permit them to marry.

Adam had attended the Manorial Court at the Abbey applying for permission to marry Johanna, but this was not granted.

Among his friends was a certain Richard Le Rede who farmed at the adjoining Manor of Yaxley and when he heard the result of Adam's application he told his father the whole story, to which he replied "I owe this young man something. Will you please ask him to give me a call so that I may give him some advice."

\*Beaufront Close Rolls.

To this Adam complied.

He was ushered into a well furnished room, which gave the appearance of satisfying means to meet an elderly man drawn to the fireplace in a comfortable cushioned chair.

"Good morning, Mr. Fairhead, do come and sit down and let me know of your troubles," and turning to his son remarked, "Leave us, son, so that we can have a chat and see what can be done to help Mr. Fairhead with his problem."

Turning to Adam, his son having closed the door behind him, the older man continued, "Why don't you forget the whole thing ? There are plenty of other young women who would be pleased to become your wife."

Adam snapped, "Be that as it may, the girl I want is Johanna and I intend to have her with or without the Lord's permission."

"Hush, hush." interjected Mr. the Rede. "This is almost treason."

Adam now a little less agitated replied: "Sir, if that is all the help that you can give me I'll be going. 'Tis a wasted journey. We have not fought Romans and Saxons to be denied the choice as to whom we can marry. Good day, Sir."

"Calm down," the senior man demanded. "Do not get so agitated and I will tell you a story."

"Excuse me, Sir, I am unable to appreciate such stories in my present mood," Adam replied and again he left his seat and turned to the door.

"Sit down, man." the senior man ordered to which Adam obeyed.

The older man continued, "The mother of this girl once worked for us and in my mind I often see her cleaning in this very room; this was during my father's time. I was very much in love with her, but my father would not listen to any question of marriage. 'Marriage to a servant girl, I have never heard the like, are you mad?' he would say. I persisted and replied that I was determined to marry her in spite of my fathers objections."

"Oh, will you? " he replied. "Very well, if you do you will cease to be my son and this estate will pass to your cousin. I really mean this," and I believe he did.

"I then took the cowards way out and submitted to my father's wish, but the girl was already pregnant and was to give birth to my child. I think that my father new this but it made no difference. She was sent home, had the child, and eventually married Richard Colvot who brought up the child, your Johanna. "Now you will understand, Adam" - he was now becoming less formal – "I cannot have this story known. Consider my son Richard, also his mother, so I must beg you to let the matter drop."

"Oh, no," replied Adam. "You must attend the next Manorial Court and testify that Johanna is not the villain's daughter."

"I cannot," the elderly man replied. "Think of my reputation."

"Do you mean that you would ruin our lives in order to save your reputation? No sir, I will not have it so." Adam was adamant.

“Very well then.” The elderly man surrendered. “I will go to the Abbot and tell him the story and I do hope that he will give me an undertaking to keep my past entirely to himself.”

A week passed by and Adam had then made up his mind that he would expose Mr. Le Rede for his past conduct, when a messenger arrived with a note stating that the Order of the Manorial Court had been rescinded and that the Abbot gave his blessing to the marriage and that he hoped that they would both be happy.

Adam and Johanna had now been married some twelve years and were blessed with a family of three sons and one daughter, Ralph now 10, William 7, Joan 2 years old and John, the new arrival.

Some educational assistance had been given by the Monks at the Abbey where the three boys attended for instruction for three days per week at a cost of 3/10d each. This, with intensive study at home, enabled them to become well endowed at a period when the educational status was comparatively low.

William seemed content to spend the few hours that he had free from his studies at work on the farm, and as he became older the keen interest in this occupation grew.

Ralph however, was more attracted to town life and almost at every opportunity he would saddle his horse for the journey to Peterborough, a journey fraught with the danger of possible attacks by Highwaymen. It was in June 1224 that Ralph, then 14 years of age, set out from Farcet for the journey to Peterborough, when a few miles from the city he was held up by a pair of ruffians, who stole his horse, and although Ralph was unharmed this gave considerable anxiety to Adam and Johanna by the delay of his return now in a bedraggled and worn-out condition and very footsore.

“No more, my boy. you must stay at home,” ordered Adam. “When this journey is necessary I will arrange for you to have some protection.”

Ralph was now confined to the farm and this for an indefinite period, but this was too much for him. Time and again he revolted against this restriction, but his father was adamant; “You have no need to go there and must stay at home.” His word was final.

It must have been about eight months after the horse stealing incident, at almost 15 years of age, that he decided to run away from home. He did not want to stay farming, the city life was for him and his mother and his father would never consent to any thing but the farm.

It was in the Spring of 1225 that he saddled another of his father's horses before dawn, and stole from the farm heading south-east for London. 'They'll find me if I go to Peterborough, but not in London' he thought. He had already packed a bag with food from his mother's well stocked larder and prepared a bait for the horse as he was aware of the long journey that would take many hours.

Back home was a note which read -

*Dear Papa and Mama, by the time you read this I will be well on my way to London. That is the place of wealth where there are opportunities which I am sure will come my way. I am sorry to have caused you any trouble but if I remained at home I am sure that there would be more ahead for me. I will send you the money to the value of Bessie, the mare, when I start earning. I am sorry that I had to take new. Please don't troy to find me. I will arrange for a messenger to contact you when I am settled.*

*Your loving son, Ralph.*

"Come William," Johanna called after finding the note in Ralph's handwriting. "Tell me what happened to your brother." Both Johanna and Adam were not very conversant with modern handwriting with the Quill.

Meanwhile Ralph was well on his way through Huntingdon, over the Icknfield Way at Royston, through Ware and into North London. At times a tear would come to his eyes at the thought of the home he had just left, and on several occasions he felt like turning back, but he always wanted to go to London and it was no good giving in now that he was on his way, he assured himself. With this determined thought he reached the City and at this moment he felt more homesick than ever before.

"Now what was he to do? He was lost." Such thoughts kept repeating themselves.

The weather was warm and he had a few pence so he assured himself that he would come to no harm.

In an open courtyard he settled down to rest for the night and on the morrow he decided he would look for work.

Work was not easy to find by a lad who was a stranger in a big town and the days passed even into weeks with no work and now no money or food.

"I'll go home" he muttered to himself.

Almost at that moment a strange gentleman appeared and enquired, "Whose horse have you, boy?" "It's mine or at least my father's" Ralph replied. "I'll give you four marks for it" the gentleman continued, "and then you will be able to get yourself a meal and get into somewhere for the night. You look as if you have been roughing it." "Will you be kind to her?" Ralph begged. "Of course, lad," he replied. "here, take the money," He led the mare away and Ralph broke down and wept, "What am I going to do."

After a short time he felt better. With the four marks in his hand he mused, "I will now be able to get something to eat and I am going to have a real bed tonight. I'll spruce myself up and tomorrow if I look more clean and tidy I may be able to get work."

He felt much happier the next morning as he walked down Ludgate Hill, gazing at all the windows, a notice caught his eye: 'Boy wanted who can write - apply here.'

His heart began to palpitate. He now felt frightened. 'Come on Ralph, where is your courage!' he murmured to himself as he crossed the steps to a large door which supported a very large knocker; a little more hesitation, then he raised his hand and gave it two loud bangs. He then waited in silence.

"Come in, boy." The voice belonged to a tall man with greying hair who opened the door.

"You want work Can you write?" he asked in a fatherly voice.

"Yes Sir, I can read as well" stammered Ralph.

"Where did you learn to write?" he further inquired .

"Thorney Abbey. The Monks taught my brother and myself."

"Well what are you doing in London" he asked and Ralph told him the whole story. He was less nervous now.

"Try your hand at that" demanded the old man, throwing a script in front of Ralph to a nearby desk. "Sit down, boy, and get on with it" he demanded.

Ralph willingly obeyed and after a few minutes the old man snatched the paper away from him, murmuring, "Not bad, boy. I'll give you a trial at two marks per month. Start tomorrow at eight. Off you go."

Ralph, quickly in the street again, turned his eyes to the building that he had just left. A large hand was removing the "Boy Wanted" notice and as Ralph cast his eyes higher he saw for the first time, "John Blendick, Merchant & Shipper".

The young lad was 'on top of the world' to use a phrase. He was at last a city boy, he felt, even the dirty streets of horse-dung and Straw appeared to look cleaner. What would Papa and Mama think now?

Eventually he returned to his lodgings where he had spent the previous night. Conditions there were rather crude: a large room accommodated quite a number of varying individuals; straw was strewn on the floor for bedding which would be removed and burnt in a courtyard below when it became infested with fleas.

Most of the unfortunate occupants would sleep in their dirty clothes adding to the stale smell that polluted the air.

Ralph received more favourable treatment. There were a number of cubicles which offered a little privacy. In each of these was a Hessian mattress filled with straw which would also be fated to destruction when fleas took possession. The cleanliness of the occupant would determine the life of the mattress. It was in one of these cubicles that the 'Young Gentleman', as Ralph was called by the landlady, was given preferential treatment.

Early next morning, long before the given time of eight, he was at the door of the office of John Blendick. Strictly at eight the door opened with a welcome from a middle-aged man: "You're the boy who the gov'nor took on yesterday". He continued, "I'm Samuel Treton, the head clerk". Ralph settled down to work and soon learnt of the extent of John Blendick's empire

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Two years had now passed since Ralph first walked into the office of John Blendick and what amazing progress he had made in that time. He now held a less junior post and had acquired considerable knowledge of this expanding business.

Mr. Blendick grew to like and trust him placing more and more responsibility on those young shoulders

More suitable accommodation was found for him in property owned by the firm and he had been granted two long holidays which he had spent at his home in Huntingdonshire.

His parents were now very proud of him. "I knew that he would make good", Adam boasted.

It was in the summer of 1227 that Ralph, while busy at his desk one morning, was interrupted by a feminine voice enquiring, "Is Papa here?" He immediately turned to find (as he admitted afterwards the most lovely creature that he had ever set his eyes upon.

He held his breath, words would not follow, and the owner of the voice continued, "Did I frighten you, I am so sorry, I just wanted to know if my father was here". Ralph now slightly recovering from the momentary Shock Stammered, "Who is your father?" "Mr. Blendick, of course," was the reply.

Words were a little freer when Ralph replied "I'm so sorry, Miss, Mr. Blendick is at the Wharf". "Thank you" she replied as she turned and left.

Ralph had known that Mr. Blendick had a daughter but had thought little of it. This girl was quite different from anyone he had ever seen before, quite a contrast to those he had known at home in the country.

All during the morning the concentration of his work was perpetually being broken by the thoughts of this lovely being.

\* \* \* \* \*

Many years had now passed since that first encounter with John Blendick's daughter Matilda and it appears that however much John liked and admired Ralph, he made up his mind that his daughter was for a higher ranking man than the country boy from Huntingdonshire, and for that reason he had deliberately kept the two apart.

Ralph\* was now over thirty years old, and had taken over the position of head clerk from Samuel Treton who owing to his age had ceased to do regular work; in fact Ralph did much more than Treton ever did. He undertook journeys to the Blendick property in Kent and as John became older, more work fell to the younger man.

The question of marriage was never a serious matter in the mind of Ralph. He had met a number of young ladies but nothing serious had developed.

About the year 1240 John Blendick became ill, now almost 15 years since Ralph\*\* met his daughter at the office on that summer morning, the old man having successfully kept the two apart - now she was here again, older, but to this young man even more beautiful. "Do Come, Mr. Fairhead, Papa is ill and would like to see you;" and almost in the same breath, "I have a cab outside, please hurry".

Ralph boarded the cab, placing himself by the side of his feminine companion. Intense high blood tension seemed to have taken over his whole body. He could find no words, but the silence was broken by Matilda: "I have been wanting to see you ever since we met almost 15 years ago but Papa would not permit me. He was afraid, I suppose, that I might grow fond of you and he wanted me to marry David Galum, the son of one of his business acquaintances, but I have told him that I would rather remain unmarried".

\* Calendar of Charter Rolls

\*\* Rotulis Finium



This narrative of the father-daughter relationship eased the tension somewhat at last. Ralph could now speak: "How is your father?" he enquired. "he's ill but not seriously so, but says that he must see you because of business at Sandwich. He wants you to go as he is too ill to travel".

All the barriers were now broken down and the conversation ran freely until they reached Leonis House, the Blendick home.

Mr. Blendick was not seriously ill, just as his daughter had said. He was very pleased to see Ralph "I am so glad that you came at once. I want you to go to Sandwich for me to attend that cargo from Spain".

With the business concluded the young man was on his way again in a much happier frame of mind.

The ice was now broken, and as the weeks passed by he saw more and more of Matilda now as she assured him, "Father's restrictions have been lifted" and the office was no longer 'out of bounds'.

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By this time many changes had taken place in the Fairhead home in Huntingdonshire.

William was now married, a pretty straightforward affair with no problems.

He became friendly with a neighbouring farmer's daughter, Agnes Laner. This friendship developed into love which gripped them both to such an extent that only this final step could satisfy there craving desires.

They had now been married almost four years and were blessed with two sons, Henry two and a half years old and Ralph born this year.

Accommodation for this new family was arranged by the addition to the house occupied by his parents. This was quite a Common practice for that period as seldom did any member of the family break away to live separately after marriage.

William\* was now gradually taking over the responsibilities of running the farm.

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Meanwhile in London things could not go better for Ralph.

John Blendick, fearing that his daughter, now passing from youth, would settle for an unmarried State permanently - the last thing he wanted for his only daughter, began to feel hat he had done her a serious injustice.

"You should not have restricted her so much. These young girls have a right to the man of their choice, and not yours", his wife, a kindly individual, warned him.

"I always wanted the best for Matilda", was his apologetic reply.

They were seeing more of each one another Ralph, no longer lost for words, added to his vocabulary those used in the act of lovemaking culminating in a proposal of marriage which was

accepted.

"I have always wanted you from the first day we met" she added at that joyous moment.

John Blendick relented and wished them both happiness and in a peculiar way felt more relieved and happy than he had been for many a day.

It was arranged that they should marry in May 1243. This was the occasion when the whole family from Huntingdonshire travelled to London along the same route taken by Ralph some eighteen years earlier.

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By the year 1250, all of Adam's children were married. John followed William, his choice being Sybil Braniham, daughter of Walter Braniham whom he met at a most unusual place, a bull ring on Market Hill in the town of Buckingham.

This was a centre of attraction about the year 1250 and the young boys in those days would saddle their horses and travel many miles to witness Bull-Baiting. It was a Cruel sport: a Bull would be tied to a stake and then attacked by dogs, mostly Bulldogs.

It was about two years after this first encounter that Sibyl's love-pull drew John to her home county where they took a small farm and became engaged in Sheep-Farming.

It was on this farm in the village of Ivingehowe, actually in early 1262, that John came across a bag containing gold and silver ornaments comprising of Vases, Snuffboxes, Candlesticks and various items, obviously stolen, which were hidden in a cave. John took them home and Sybil became alarmed at the find, suggesting that they must have been stolen.

"You must report this find to the Sheriff" she demanded.

"This could make us rich" John protested.

"But it's not ours; it must have been stolen. You must not keep it or if they find it here they will think that you stole it. Please give it up" she begged.

"Don't be in a hurry. This is worth thinking about. I will wait until morning and then decide" he finally added

By the morning he had decided to do the right thing. Fairheads don't hoard stolen property,' he excused himself. "I will go to the Sheriff right away," he added and carried the bag outside, placing it in the cart ready for the journey.

He had just returned to the room when a knock was heard at the door and upon opening it Sybil faced A man of perhaps 40 years clad in Sheepskin, even to the extent of head-covering which was also a muff of skin.

"Where is it?" he demanded.

"Where's what" answered Sybil shivering with fright.

At that moment John\* appeared to be greeted with, "Give me that bag"

The next obvious question, "What Bag?" was punctuated by a thud from the fist of the intruder to send John reeling back across the room.

The wool-clad man pushed past Sybil demanding, "Where is it? Where is it?".

At that moment steps were heard outside, when the intruder took a leap through the window just as John was getting top his feet again. He plunged to the window to see the man running for all he was worth and in the opposite direction was none other than the Sheriff and his Assistant.

"You look dazed: didn't expect to see me" greeted the man of the law. "Come on, hand them over; it's no good – it's all up with you now!" demanded the Sheriff.

"You mean the Silver ornaments" was John's reply.

"So you know all about them. I thought somehow you did," continued the Law man. "Come on, hand them over."

"I did not steal them," John defended himself, "but I think I know who did – it was that man that ran away just as you came."

"What Man? I have seen nobody running away," which remark was interrupted by the voice of the Sheriff's Assistant calling: "here it is, Sir."

"Here's what?" This came from the now irritated Sheriff.

"Why, the stolen goods. I've found them," was the reply from the now delighted Assistant.

"Ha! Ha! So you did not steal the silver. Come on, " and he slipped a par of handcuffs over John's wrists.

He was taken to Eyllisbury, the journey turbulent of self asserted encores, "I did not do it," but the Sheriff was satisfied that he had found the right man, and cast him into gaol.

In spite of many protests by John and his wife Sybil nothing could sway the Sheriff from the belief that he had the right man in custody.

This was clearly a case for soliciting the help of brother Ralph in London.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of July of that year the King appointed Gilbert Preston to enquire into this story of theft which brought about the release of the much wronged john.

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John's sister Joan married Thomas Edoft, a local freeman, one of the best archers in Huntingdonshire. He was a fine man, well respected in the county. Now Adam has all his family happily married.

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It is now more that thirty five years since Ralph added to the Family history that story of the "country boy who had made good". He was now a London City Merchant of some standing, having inherited the Blendick empire upon the death of his former employer.

Ralph and Matilda were blessed with a son, John, now reaching teenage years who was showing great promise for the future.

The position was less favourable for brother William, now a father of three sons, Henry, Ralph and Robert.

Adam had been dead some ten years. The hard conditions under which he lived were not conducive to old age and these severe circumstances were steadily becoming worse, as the Norman conquest brought about a depressed condition for many Freemen.

Under an existing arrangement William had to cultivate a given area of the Lord's land in return for the unmolested and privileged state that he held as a Freeman.

The Lord was now demanding that William's sons should contribute labour to his farms, and it was in May 1264 that William was summoned to the Manorial Court to answer a case for not complying to this demand.

"Can you give any reason why your sons should not give labour to the Lord's estate?" demanded the presiding Abbot.

"I have now extra land and need their help to till it to support my family," begged William.

"Much of the land that you own, you do so by the grace and good will of Henry, our most gracious Sovereign, and if you do not adhere to the Lord's wishes this may be taken away," William was told.

It was common in those days to invite disobedience to God and King, brining about the state where severe disciplinary action could be taken. William was not to be caught by blasphemy against either God or King.

"I have my rights as a Freeman and those of my sons retain those rights," William replied in defence, but the revealing reply was, "The land under which you have sole rights cover your house, a croft, a measurement of 4 acres 1 rood and 1½ acres of meadow for which you pay 3 shillings and 10 pence to the town of Farcet."

"I still have the rights of a Freeman handed down from my father from his father which I will pass on to my sons and their sons," were William's last words as he left the court.

Even in those difficult times, a Freeman had certain rights, well known to William which he was determined to hold, that right was his by inheritance.

William's son Henry, a strong robust young man of 22 years, heartily supported his father in his determined stand for freedom.

"They will never get me to work on their farm and become their slave. I'll run away like uncle Ralph did," he threatened.

Henry at this time had found the girl of his choice, Ayelina, the daughter of Nathaniel Strangrunt, a friend of the family who owned a farm across the border in the County of Cambridgeshire. The two got married in the year 1262 and Nathaniel offered them accommodation. "There are some twenty to thirty acres of good land that you can have, my boy; there is more than I can work now," he added.

William did not want to lose Henry, but at least the boy had a better chance to retain his freedom, he thought.

So Henry\* started farming on his own account in Cambridgeshire and William was now left with two sons, Ralph and Robert.

Another 4 years had gone when the love-bite started nibbling at Robert, the youngest son. There appeared to be trouble here as the young lady so love-stricken was the daughter of a villain. This was in truth playing into the hands of the Lord of the Manor as this girl, Elena Cayfwelle, was the daughter of Nicholas Cayfwelle, a bondman, and was not free to marry other than to a bondman in the same Manor.

"Drop this nonsense," William urged him. "The Lord will demand that you give service to the Manor as this girl they regard as their property. You will have to live on the Estate in one of those lowly Silly Cotes. Don't be a fool!"

The love bug had taken control. Robert was the weaker of the three sons and the final outcome was as William had predicted.

Robert and Elena were very happy at first.

They took possession of the Silly Cote, a one roomed building of hard baked clay and thatch, and what few utensils they had mustered were so willingly supplied by his mother Agnes.

He was given a stretch of land to work for himself, although he had to work for three days per week on one of the Manorial farms to retain it. Also, part of the crops grown on his land had to be surrendered to the Lord, often leaving insufficient for himself for his own subsistence. The work became harder as time went by and although he was deeply fond of Elena this affection became strained.

Visits to the Fairhead home, when he managed to break away, always meant tales of distress, hardship and unhappiness.

The tale of woe embraced such accounts as "I have to plough an acre each day, sometimes with snow, wet and cold, the boy leading the oxen hoarse with shouting at them and suffering with cold.

"I have become a slave to the Lord. What can I do?" was the tormenting question.

"I'll see what can be done," his father assured him.

Robert, now in a weeping state, continued: "Elena is with child and that rough Silly Cote is not a suitable place for a baby to be born in."

"Cheer up, son." His mother was now endeavouring to console him. "I'm sure your father can help you."

Robert's\* health had been failing for some time due to excessive hardship. Had he been born into serfdom it would have been less difficult, but now having got into this conditional way of life he would have some difficulty in freeing himself from the bondage. He was now a cotar, the lowest form of villainy.

Back in London, life was progressing very favourably for that branch of the Fairhead Family.

Matilda brought happiness into Ralph's life and the newly acquired wealth added considerably to their comfort, but to Ralph perhaps the greatest benefit derived from this wealth was the fact that he was in a position to give their son John a good education.

"My education repaid me so well and now we can afford it nothing but the best opportunity must we give John," Ralph perpetually pointed out to Matilda.

John had responded remarkably well to the teaching that afforded him. He had excelled in matters of trade and commerce and had studied law, although this last subject was not so much the written kind but that which was brought about by tradition and custom, the unwritten law.

When about 20 years of age he fell in love with Joanna Bartelot and although his father used all the persuasive means possible to delay this union, he was unsuccessful and the marriage took place in 1268.

By this time, as a young man, he had acquired a very high status in affairs in London, commercial, legal and governmental. His quality and ability was recognised throughout the City of London, even acknowledged by King Henry III who appointed him a member of the common council which took part in the administration of the City and affairs of state.

Ralph now felt rewarded for his insistence on first class educational opportunities for his son and proudly boasted of these achievements. He lived to see him reach this status; then, having been so rewarded and satisfied with these accomplishments, he – as having completed his work – died suddenly.

He was buried at St. Andrew, Baynard Castle, amid a large gathering of mourners which included many important men of that day. Among those present was his brother William from Huntingdonshire.

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"John, I need your help," William appealed to his nephew when they were together alone.

"Your cousin Robert is now in bondage to the Lord and I want you to use your influence to get him freed from this villieny. He is not well and I am afraid that he will die.

"What! Robert a villein? It can't be!" exclaimed John in amazement. "I will certainly see to it."

What a comparison of two cousins of the same stock, one a merchant and King's Councillor

and the other a slave.

It was a week later that two figures on horseback were riding over the fields of Farcet Manor when two serfs at work spotted the trespassers. "That tall one looks like a gentleman from some town. I've seen his sort before. And the other might be his groom. Whatever can they be doing on this muddy field?" one enquired of the other.

"Look out! They're coming this way!" exclaimed one.

"Can you tell me where we can find Robert Fairhead?" asked John.

"You don't mean Robert, the cotar?" replied the smaller man of the two.

John nodded.

"You will find him ploughing in yon field away to your right," replied the informant.

"Thank you," replied John, throwing a few pence at their feet, and he was gone.

Robert was found as directed. He was wet and cold; mud hung to his wrapped legs and feet. The boy driving the oxen was even more to be pitied: a few weathered skins hung around his body, offering little or no protection against the fearful elements.

"Robert, you don't know me. I'm your cousin John from London. I've come to get you out of this mess. Where do you live?"

Robert was staggered. "Why, John, I wouldn't have believed it. When I have unyoked the oxen, stabled and fed them, I will take you to see Elena. She is with child. Did you know?" Robert nervously rambled on.

John was very disturbed at what his eyes witnessed on arrival at the silly cote, making him determined to all in his power to eradicate his cousin from this foul habitation.

Elena welcomed John with open arms. "Such a lovable creature," John thought.

Her action indicated a sense of shame as 'this young gentleman' witnessed the conditions of the hovel which Robert and his young wife had to share. It was a one roomed affair, not more than 14 feet square with floor of hard earth which near the doorway had turned to mud. At one end where a number of skins and other garments strewn over a hand made couch. Smoke from a fire designed to escape from an aperture in the gable showed determined obstinacy, leaving a blackened haze in the vicinity.

John had heard of conditions in which vagrants sheltered in London, but nothing like this.

He turned to his companions. "You must leave this place. I will see to it."

Thorney Abbey was about a distance of ten miles from Farcet and in a very short time John and his groom were at it's gates. The place was surrounded by a high wall, almost barricaded of from the outside world. To obtain admittance was at any time difficult but to strangers it was almost impossible.

"Who are you and what do you want?" was the inevitable enquiry upon arrival at the gate.

"I'm John Fairhead from London and I wish to have an interview with the Abbot."

"If you have no previous engagement you cannot see him," replied the doorkeeper as he slammed the door in John's face.

"Not so fast, man. I am one of His Majesty's Inquisitors and I demand to see the Abbot," John directed.

The attitude of the doorkeeper changed and John found himself in a large enclosure of well kept gardens through which a hard roadway led to the Abbey Cloisters.

This garden was occupied by a number of serfs at work and an odd monk here and there acting as warders like a prison.

At one corner to the right was a clump of trees where a gathering of monks and others had taken place. Also through the gaps in the trees two nuns could be seen in the crowd.

John went over to investigate what was happening and as he became closer he could see that a gallows were erected and furthermore an unfortunate man was hanging by the neck. John was terrified at this barbarous sight but satisfied that the unfortunate man was already dead and that there was nothing he could do now to save him.

"What – what has he done to deserve this terrible fate?" he enquired, thinking that perhaps he had killed somebody.

"he stole a fish from the pond," was the casual answer.

This kind of brutality safeguarded any possible disciplinary action by the unfortunate serfs who dared do no other than that so ordered to do.

There was still some difficulty in getting permission to see the Abbot, John being told again and again that this head of the Abbey was not available and that he, John, must leave.

However, John was not to be brushed aside, and pushed his way past the guards right into the office where the Abbot was at his desk. He was a robust type of man who looked as if he did justice to himself even if he did not do so to others.

"What are you doing here? Throw this man out! Gallows are for intruders who force their way past my guards," he angrily questioned.

"Calm down, man!" John was now dictating. "You cannot treat me like that unfortunate serf that you have just hanged. I am a King's Inquisitor and I demand to be treated as such."

The mood changed. "Sit down, Mr –er- what did you say your name was?"

"John Fairhead, Sir. I have come to ask you to release my cousin from bondage of your Manor," John replied.



"You, a King's Inquisitor, have cousin, a serf?" he enquired.

"Yes, he is the son of a Freeman and you have no right to subjugate him into serfdom. The normal codes of behaviour forbid it," continued John.

"Tell me," the Abbot said, now cool and genuinely desirous of reasoning. "How did your cousin become subject to serfdom?"

"He married a daughter of one of your serfs attached to the Manor," was the explanation.

"The fool, but we will soon have that put right." He was now most amiable. He then rang a bell. A servant arrived. "Bring me wine for my guest from London."

The good news travelled fast to Farcet and the Fairhead household was overwhelmed with joy: "Robert is now free?" "Cousin John is wonderful." They echoed.

John, having got his cousin out of trouble, had to rush back to London to attend a meeting before the mayor and other members of the Commonalty when it was decided that "William de Bettoyne, Geoffrey de Norton, William de Leyre, Ralph de Alegate, Geoffrey Hurel and Hugh Purthe should prepare an account of 20,000 marks, expenses of the Commonalty and present it to the Treasury and Barons of the Exchequer on Monday after Trinity at York".\*

Such was the busy life of John Fairhead.

Also at this time his mother Matilda had to attend Court regarding a debt of £8 due from her late husband Ralph to Aron fit Leonis Judo. The matter was settled by the payment of a further half mark.\*\*

There was also a question regarding part of John Blendick's estate which he gave to the Convent of St. Quen, Rouen, for the safety of his soul. In those days the safety of one's soul could supposedly be bought by worldly goods.+

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returning again to Huntingdonshire, the Fairhead home, Adam's daughter Joan as stated previously married Thomas Edoft about the year 1250. Thomas and Joan were very happy. They lived in a large thatched clay-lump house surrounded by servants, not far from the Fairhead farm. Thomas, a Freeman, was comparatively well off and devoted much of his time to the welfare of the less fortunate. Joan's brother William and Thomas were great friends and many leisure hours improving their skill at archery.

A son was born to Thomas and Joan about the year 1252 which was named after his uncle William. With the training given him by his father and uncle he emerged with adulthood into a fine archer, one of the best in Huntingdonshire.

He had reached the age of 25 years when he met Maria Leyre, a girl who was carrier assistant to Simon Lewis, a Monk from the Abbey, who shared archery practice with William.

William's father Thomas did not approve of his son's association with Simon Lewis, but as William pointed out, "This was sport and not politics." He argued with his father, "I don't like the

\* London Letter Books

\*\* London Letter Books

+ Rotulis Finium

monks and their cruel behaviour but apart from that Simon was a decent enough kind of fellow." Maria, as ordered, would carry arrows and refreshments as William and Simon roamed the country side in pursuit of objects for archery practice. This inevitably meant that Maria would be handing out refreshments to both William and Simon and spending much time in their company.

As time went on William found that Maria was gaining greater absorptive interest than that of the archery and what made this feeling more compelling was that although he could put archery to the back of his mind, his thoughts of Maria were paramount.

At last he felt that he could no longer keep the matter to himself so he told Simon how he felt. "It's no good, my friend, she is to marry Henry Hare from the Manor," was Simon's definitive reply.

"Do you mean Hare, the cotar, who works at Hill Farm?" asked William.

"The very same," was the answer. "Do forget it."

William went home and told both his father and mother about Maria and the disappointing information he had received from Simon.

"You must forget it, son. You'll get over it," his father tried to reassure him.

"I suppose I must, although it will be hard. I do hope that she will be happy with Hare."

As far as William was concerned this had to be the end, but Henry Hare got to know of Maria's affection for William; in fact she had talked about William more often than Henry found agreeable. He now became madly jealous, so much so that he could not keep this to himself and told the story to those gathered at the Inn.

"don't let this upstart Freeman get the better of you. He's got almost everything and now he wants our girls." This urging came from his workmates.

"Challenge him!" they cried, now getting excited at the prospect of a duel. "I don't know about that," Henry relented; "he's a good archer and I might get killed."

"You've no guts!" They were tormenting him now.

"I've guts alright but there is no sense in being killed," he pleaded.

"I'll kill the swine." This was Robert le Forester, a clever archer who although very good was often beaten by William Edoft at archery competitions and he grew to hate him for it.

"If you take him on in a duel, I'll stick an arrow into him. They'll not know it was me and think it was you who plugged him," continued Forester.

Henry felt almost a new man. "Yes, this was a way of getting rid of this man who after my girl."

He went home that night and spent some time in thought, his mind wavering, but the return to the Inn the following evening with further persuasion by his mates finally converted him to accept the duel

William Edoft was unaware of what was happening, until the story was told to him by one of the servants. He was, however, persuaded by his parents to have nothing to do with this "nonsense" as his father considered it.

He tried to put it out of his mind, but whenever he went into the village he was confronted with "Coward, coward, afraid of Henry Hare! He might kill you."

William made up his mind that he should see Henry with the object of calling the whole thing off, but Henry would not listen. "I'll kill you for stealing my girl," he threatened, thinking that Forester would do this for him.

In those days it was regarded honourable to settle a dispute by a duel and not to attempt to challenge as cowardice, and William was not to be branded as such, so there was no other way out but to accept and agree to the contest.

Thomas and Joan were worried about it, but felt that they could not encourage William to run away as this would mean that he would never be able to return to the village and face the villagers.

The Lords of the Manor would not agree to the contest.

"The girl must marry Hare and there was nothing more to be said," the Abbot ordered.

It often happened that the Abbot would not permit their land to be used for certain activities with which they did not approve, when this would be overcome by using Fairhead's marsh. It happened on this occasion without even William Fairhead's permission. Had he know at the time that they intended to use his marsh he would have done all that he could to have stopped the duel taking place.

Almost the whole village were talking about the proposed duel and as cruelty in those days was commonplace, the natural outlook of the people was moulded to accept and enjoy the sight of cruelty and even death.

It was in January 1279 that the villagers assembled on Fairhead's marsh, full of excitement to witness this eagerly sought duel. They had chosen an umpire to see fair play or perhaps fair slaughter, although it was the latter – the slaughter - that they were really eager to see, but to most of them this must be fair.

A distance between the combatants was paced out. The onlookers with their thirst for blood were now highly stimulated at the prospect of killing. Arrows began to rain from both directions. It seemed that neither assailant could hit his opponent, when at that moment an arrow caught Henry on the right side of his skull as he had released one simultaneously to penetrate the forehead of William.

Both men were seriously wounded. A Fairhead cart was on the spot already for such an event and the two men were taken to their respective homes.

Poor Joan, the mother of William, went hysterical at the sight of her son.

Back at the site of the duel, the onlookers rushed for Forester, thinking that he had wounded William as he had threatened to do, and had it not been for Ralph Fairhead they would have lynched him, that mad craving for blood still much in evidence. However, he was taken away and

cast into Huntingdon Gaol on a charge of murder.

In spite of all attention and help that was given William with all the careful nursing by Joan his mother he died within a month, the arrow having penetrated his brain.

Henry Hare lived for a further month, the injury not quite so damaging, the arrow having struck him to the right side of the skull.

Forester spent many years in gaol and it seemed as if this unfortunate man was destined to stay there indefinitely.

One day late in 1287 Mrs. Forester paid a visit to Joan Edoft in order to endeavour to mend the terrible breach between them and she was so surprised to learn that Joan was very concerned for her and the fate of her husband.

"I'll see if my cousin John can help." With these words she concluded the interview, and as promised she sat down and wrote this note –

*Farresheafde*

*14<sup>th</sup> December 1287*

*Dear John,*

*It is now almost 9 years since my William died & I still do not know who was responsible for this Hare or Forester. My mind would be eased if the truth was known. Poor William cannot be brought back and I feel that it is unjust for Mr. Forester to kept in prison if he did not kill my boy. Please John do what you can to find out who really did this. That poor Mr. Hare died and Mr. Forester will die also if nothing is done to bring him to trial. I am grieved at the thought of what Mrs. Forester is going through. Your uncle William is sending a carrier with this letter.*

*Your loving cousin,*

*Joan Edoft.*

However, the matter was hastened, and Robert le Forester was brought to trial at Westminster on the 12<sup>th</sup> January 1288 \* and was found to be not guilty of killing William Edoft; the arrow that slew his was proved not to be his; the tip from the arrow belonging to Forester was later found buried in the tree behind where William stood.

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To continue the story of John and his young wife in London, they were not blessed genetically, the first child having been lost at birth, narrowly bring death to the mother also, but the second was fatal to both mother and child and John Fairhead became a widower at the age of 40 years.

It was his secretary, a young lady named Julianna Drury, who became the second Mrs. John Fairhead and in the year 1290 she bore him a son which was named Adam after John's grandfather

They were very happy, John now having an heir and Julianna, a very capable young woman, assisted greatly in the business.

Adam was born at one of the most difficult times in the Island's history. Edward I was in most grievous trouble: war with France was forced upon him by the French King, attacks and reprisals between the Cinque ports and the French, followed war between them and the Gascons. There was also trouble in Wales and Scotland.

A tax of two pence in the pound was levied to provide a fleet of Cinque port ships which succeeded in certain reprisals on the French coast but did not save the south coast of England from being harassed by French mariners who effected a landing at Dover and burnt a great part of the town.

John with his interests at Sandwich became very much involved – Sandwich being a great port in those days, from which armies were shipped to France, hence the French attacks on this and other ports.

One story which remained very vividly in John's memory all through his life started with a messenger arriving with a letter which read thus :-

*Duchy of Aquitaine,  
Whitehall.*

*29th June 1295*

*Dear Fairhead*

*The King has instructed me to approach you regarding certain goods that are needed by the Gascons in the Duchy of Aquitaine.*

*It is understood that you and other merchants in London and elsewhere hold stocks of these goods in your warehouses at Baynard Castle. These unfortunate subjects are being perpetually harassed by the French and are unable to renew the much needed supplies. Please arrange to call on me so that we may discuss the situation.*

*Yours etc.,*

*Henry de Crowe,  
Earl of Aquitaine.*

John lost no time in complying to this request and was told the Gascons requirements.

"I can supply most of their needs, but for grain and flour we must look to John Plot and for leather, hemp, flax, and wool Simon Gut is the man," John explained.

"That would be splendid," his Lordship replied. "Could you get in touch with these gentlemen?"

"As to the matter of a ship," his Lordship continued, "the Santa Maria, the ship of Richard Proby, is now available at the docks at Baynard Castle."

So it was nicely arranged. John together with his man John Browewood would travel with the cargo. This seemed to be particularly desirable as there was a question of payment for the goods.

Everything went fine and they succeeded in getting the goods into the port without being molested although the journey was long and difficult.

The unloading went smoothly enough and after taking on wines in part payment for the goods discharged they turned for the journey home. It was when they got to a point nearing the Straits of Dover that the trouble started.

Two huge French vessels came up on either side of the Santa Maria demanding surrender. These came closer and closer until the defensive ship was sandwiched in between the two

Surrender was never an easy act for English mariners and they prepared for the inevitable fight.

The French clambered on board from all directions. A number of them were beaten to death in so doing, but the English being outnumbered had eventually to surrender.

John with the Captain, his man, and the crew were lined up on deck to await their fate.

"Lock them up below and we'll crucify them when we land," one of the raiders demanded.

"No, no, they're not worth troubling about; throw them overboard!" demanded the skipper.

"Half a minute," shouted the Chief Mate. "We'll strip them of their jewellery and some of their clothing. Look at those fine boots!" he continued casting an eye at John's footwear. "Tear them off before you throw them overboard!"

With no further hesitation the pirates did as they were ordered and into the sea went the unfortunate passengers and the crew of the Santa Maria. Removing boots was the most helpful act under the circumstances as those that were able to swim could do so at least for a time, but the many unable to do this quickly perished.

Floating object which could have been helpful were not anywhere to be seen. The sea was now calm. The French ships together with the captured Santa Maria were quickly out of site and the men now struggling in the sea seemed to be doomed.

However, a large log of wood was now seen floating towards John who quickly grasped out to it to find that it was soon to be crowded with more men than it could take and remain afloat, and under the water it went to rise again for another overloading, but at least it provided a moments rest from the struggle of swimming and keeping afloat.

Suddenly, John saw in the distance what thought to be land. Were his eyes deceiving him? Was it really land or just a mirage? He looked again and again attempting to clear the salt water from his eyes and suddenly a decision was made: he now deserted the log and with dire determination set off swimming in the direction of the hopeful shore.

Yes, it must be land; now he was sure it was.

He was a powerful swimmer and it was not many minutes before he was climbing out of the sea onto a sandy beach.

An old fishing boat complete with oars was tethered to a rock and in a few minutes John

had returned it to the sea, using all the strength he could muster at it's oars to direct it to the spot where a few minutes earlier he had left his companions clinging to the log.

Very soon all the survivors of the Santa Maria were happily on land. What land they did not know, but how relieved they were to feel their feet firmly on the good earth, even though it might be enemy soil.

They were replacing the boat in the position it was found tethered to the rock when a voice screamed out, "What are you doing with my boat?" They looked around to find an old fisherman coming towards them in a very determined way.

John came to the rescue. "I'm sorry that I had to take your boat as my friends were all stranded on that log of wood Yonder" He now pointed out to sea in the direction of the life saving object still drifting over the waves.

"That's all right; how did it happen?" he enquired, and John with an occasional interruption from his associates told the old man the whole story.

John was getting a little concerned as to what part of country he was in, which made him put a question to his new acquaintance: "What part of the country is this?"

"don't worry, my friends. You'll be all right, you are in His Majesty's territory just outside Calais. It is not far to walk to the port, but I see that you have no boots. Come along, get into my boat and I'll soon have you in the port where you can get a ferry for Dover."

How grateful they were for such kind help, and very soon they were in Calais and from there quickly home.

John has reflected many times since that terrible experience of how lucky he was to get out of that trouble alive.

Julianna was very worried at John's long absence and she felt it was such a blessing that he had returned so safely as she had a secret that she had kept to herself. "I'm going to have another baby," she now let the secret slip to the joy of both.

It was in the year 1295 that the second son, Thomas, was born.

John and the other merchants that had supplied certain goods to the Gascons were still considerably out of pocket and it was on the 27<sup>th</sup> May 1299 that the King issued the following proclamation: "Know ye that whereas our beloved Mayor, Alderman, Sherrifs and the rest of our citizens of London have graciously undertaken to satisfy certain creditors of Gascons, touching the sum of £1,049.13.11." The amount stated due to John Fairhead, John Plot, Simon Gut and other merchants was £80.19.3.\*

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After Robert's release from serfdom he and Elena went to live with William at Langril Farm, Farcet, the house having been enlarged once more to accommodate the son and daughter-in-law with the prospect of a grandchild.

A male child was born in the summer of 1269, a weak, undernourished infant, that was not

expected to survive, named Robert after his father.

Grandfather William was, however, optimistic. "Take care of him, gal, and he'll make it. I've seen his sort before grow into hefty men," was his confident assurance.

With love and attention bestowed upon the child by Elena and grandmother Agnes (who was determined to do her share) the boy survived to grow to a man of surprising size and strength. Doubtless a gene inherited from a forebear was responsible for this great transformation as however weak the seed at its outset the inherent properties will reveal themselves.

"He's growing up to be much like his great-grandfather Adam. We have had none of our family that have excelled like him before," remarked grandfather William.

At the age of 18 years he became a giant of a man, head and shoulders above his father, and his mother, whom he dearly loved, just managed to bring her head to rest upon his broad chest.

A special bow was made for his son Robert with a spring that could eject arrows further than could be accomplished by any man in Huntingdonshire. He could kill a Boar at 300 feet and, when he had done so, he would throw it's 150 lbs over his shoulder to deliver it to be roasted over an open log fire and then largely consumed by the hunter himself. His ability was sort far and wide as he was capable of doing the work of two men and among them so eager to acquire his services were the monks at the Abbey (the Lords of the Manor).

It was in the year 1288 that a certain John Bernewelle, a monk from the Abbey, approached Robert when at work on his grandfather's farm with the object of inducing him to leave his grandfather for work on one of the Manorial farms.

"No thank you. I'm quite happy here and my grandfather has been very good to me. I won't leave him," asserted Robert.

"If you will work for the Lord, you could become overseer as we need someone of your strength to keep those lazy serfs in their place," continued the monk.

"That would be reason enough why I should not accept you offer," Robert contended.

"If you will not accept, steps will be taken to make you. Don't forget that you are the son of a serf and your father was a serf also," asserted the monk.

This last remark made Robert furious. "What did you say about my mother" he asked.

"She is nothing more that a serf," he replied.

This last remark brought the matter to the pitch. Robert lunged forward, directing his fist to the chin of his opponent with such force that it sent him reeling backward into a patch of sand.

There was silence. Had he killed him?

At that moment more monks were seen coming across the field to the rescue of their companion and Robert now himself scarce.

Upon returning home, his father with interjections from grandfather warned Robert of the



serious position he was now in.

"You do not know your own strength," they both iterated. "Suppose you have killed him."

"He should not have said such things about my mother," was his defence.

At that moment a word was received from the Abbey that the monk was still alive but had a broken jaw.

"I'll go away. It will only cause you all more trouble if I stay," suggested Robert.

In spite of numerous "Don't go's" he decided for the sake of his parents that he would go.

With one of grandfather's best horses, a few provisions and little money he set out for York, an important Capital at that time. The journey was long and tiring, but determined he was to make good in York as his cousin Ralph did in London some years earlier.

The Yorkshire moors were the most lonely and frightening of the whole journey and it was here not far from York that he was assailed by robbers. The three of them on horseback accosted Robert, demanding money, and one of them pulled him from his horse – but they were unaware of the type of man they were molesting.

Robert immediately went into the attack, picking one up bodily, momentarily holding him above his head and then throwing him to one of the others, bringing the two to an unconscious state on the ground.

He then attempted to deal with the third but at that moment a thud came to his head and he knew no more.

After recovering with a terrible headache, he found himself to be alone, robbed of everything he had, and his horse stolen.

After many attempts he got to his feet and staggered on for a while. In the distance he could see a number of cottages. "Could he make it that far? Yes, he must!" these thoughts kept coming to his mind.

He almost reached a cottage when his mind went blank and he knew no more.

The sun was shining through an aperture in the room, giving bright daylight, when he awoke to find himself in bed.

He still had a terrible headache. "What could have happened?" He then remembered the attack on the Moor, but "how did I get here?"

He raised his aching head and to his surprise a woman was in bed by his side.

"What happened? Why are you in bed with me?" he gasped.

"Why, because I have nowhere else to sleep?" was the reply. "You're not afraid of me, are you? Haven't you ever been in bed with a woman before?"

"No, no, but tell me – how did I get here?" pleaded Robert.

"You were found at my door and Richard Cowlby and I dragged you in and put you to bed," and then in the same breath "I'll get you a mug of drink and you'll feel better."

After the drink he did feel better and was now beginning to get a sensual feeling which was brought to completeness by his companion, now almost naked, plunging herself onto his aching body and landing violent kisses to the lips.

Robert could restrain himself no more and relieving satisfaction resulted.

"I love you, I love you," she repeated. "You are so strong."

Out of bed jumped Robert. "I must be on my way. I should not have done this."

"You can't go. Please stay and I will cook you some breakfast," begged Susan.

That stay lasted many days and Robert found that his companion was professional.

"How do you think that I live?" she retaliated when he learned the truth.

"I'll go and get work and then you will not have to do this kind of thing," he added.

"I do not want anyone but you," she replied, "and if you can earn we can be happy."

Callers were now found to be most unwelcome and the appearance of "that giant of a man" kept them at bay.

Robert\* got work at a Timber establishment, felling trees, which until he eventually stepped into Homewood Farm in the village of Thoraldsthorpe and Susan became Mrs. Robert Fairhead.