

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **A Visit To The Original Ship Mayflower**

Most Americans are unaware that the Mayflower, the most famous ship in this Nation's history, allegedly still lives - as a barn in the tiny Quaker village of Jordans, Buckinghamshire, England. For more than three centuries she has lain upside down on a brick floor, her hull serving as the roof of a barn which is owned by the Society of Friends.

The original coat of red paint has long since disappeared, but the sturdy oak timbers are still solid. The curved beams are bleached white and stand out like the skeleton ribs of an enormous whale.

We read about this historic ship in a small magazine called "Tradition," a monthly magazine of America's picturesque past. We were so thoroughly impressed that we sent the article, written by Henry N. Ferguson, assistant general manager of the Pori of Brownsville, Tex., on to our grandnephew, Ralph Hitchcock, in London, asking him to visit the barn and report back to us. He did just that and we report to you today his interesting comments. Ralph is a member of an American engineering firm now in England trying to solve the traffic problem in the City of London.

He writes: "Jordans is a beautiful little area in Buckinghamshire. The whole county of Bucks is quite rural and unspoiled despite the fact that it is so near London. Jordans is near Beaconsfield (Disraeli's hometown), and only 45 minutes' drive from central London.

"The barn itself is so uncommercialized that if it had not been for its picture appearing on the material you sent me, we would have gone right by. Even after entering the barn there was not a soul to be seen. The barn is definitely built from an old ship. The Quakers, unlike most others in their position, do not insist that it is the Mayflower, although there is good evidence that it is. I noted the cracked beam. There is also an old document under glass appraising the Mayflower, in 1624.

"We went to the old ranch house next door to get any literature available (which I have enclosed) and find out what we could. The old man took us through the old house. We saw the cross pieces on the door (pictures in your article) with the carved floral design.

"About 200 yards downhill from the barn is the old Quaker cemetery where we saw William Penn's grave. Nearby in the village of Penn we had a beer at The Crown, about 500 years old and very picturesque and cozy with a gigantic fireplace. It is one of the best inns I have stumbled upon here in England.

"We then wandered through, the old village of Chalfont St. Giles. Chalfont comes from chalk fountains (springs). The cottage in which John Milton finished 'Paradise Lost' and began 'Paradise Regained,' is there. It is a terrific place. They have first editions of every work of Milton. There are some beautifully bound and printed books dating from the 1600s. One room of the house is a folk museum with all the old cooking gadgets. There is a grand rotisserie dating from the 18th Century and a flitch hook for a flitch of venison or bacon.

"All in all, it was quite an interesting day. So close to London, but I might have missed it if I had not received material all the way from Monterey."

Oddly enough, the Mayflower barn is not listed in any of the British guidebooks, although it is located only 20 miles from London. Yet the site has become a place of pilgrimage for practically every American visitor to England who learns that the famous vessel still may be seen. Since the turn of the century, the Jordans Society of Friends has made every effort to encourage visitors to seek out this historic shrine.

The story unravels, through a frayed and yellowed bill of sale, dated May 16, 1624, and is exhibited in the barn. This ancient bit of crinkled paper indicates that the vessel was sold as salvage to a Buckinghamshire farmer named William Russell. It brought only \$384 in the transaction. Its five great anchors went for less than \$100. The set of sails brought \$45 and "ye pitch pot and kettle," \$1.90.

A brass tablet inside the Mayflower barn marks the spot from which a timber was taken from the ancient ship to be placed in the Pacific Assn. Peace Portal located on the boundary between the United States and Canada. The gift commemorates the peace which has lasted for more than 100 years between the United States and Great Britain. The date on the tablet is Feb.12,1921.