'A Curious Celebration!'  
The Fenny Poppers of St Martin’s

‘On every St Martin’s Day, November 11th, volleys of gunpowder explosions from the churchyard disturb the quiet of Fenny Stratford...

‘This is part of a curious celebration which has taken place every year for over two centuries to commemorate Dr Thomas Willis (1621 – 1675), the famous anatomist-physician and Professor of Natural Philosophy at Oxford.’

William Cone, Professor of Neurosurgery, The Montreal Neurological Institute, Canadian Medical Association Journal, 1969

Local 18th century benefactor, Browne Willis, celebrated his famous grandfather, Dr Thomas Willis – a resident of St. Martin’s Lane, St. Martin-in-the-Fields London who died on St. Martin's Day – not only by building a new church, but by firing off miniature canons!

Every November 11th, at 12 noon, 2pm and 4pm, six tankard-shaped cannons, each weighing 9 kilos (20lbs) – the Fenny Poppers – are plugged with gunpowder and well-rammed newspaper, and fired.

In 1856, one of the poppers burst - a fragment was blown onto the roof of the Bull and Butcher which burned down! Afterwards, all six Poppers were re-cast by the Eagle Foundry, Northampton.