

Fairford Flyer

No 67

October 2024

FAIRFORD HISTORY



SOCIETY

Membership fees were due in September and remain at £5. Visitors are always welcome at £3. You can pay at the meeting or by bank transfer, Lloyds Bank, sort code 30-92-06 A/C Fairford History Society No 02170130). You can also leave the subscription at the Community Centre in the FHS post slot by the FTC office door. Thank you to all who have paid already.

FHS Meetings 2024-25

All meetings are at 7.30 pm in the Farmor Room, Fairford Community Centre on the third Thursday of the month, (except for January and February 2025)

2024/2025 Programme

17 October Industrial Archaeology in your Garage, Shed and Attic by Bill King

21 November Lost Railways in and around Gloucestershire by Colin Moulden

2025

16 January History of Christmas and wassailing by Robin Burton (afternoon meeting at 2.30pm)

21 February Edwin Cuss (afternoon meeting at 2.30pm)

20 March John Putley on a topic to be decided.

24 April (4th Thursday) Maps and LiDAR imagery for historic studies in and around the Fairford and Cirencester areas by Peter Vujakovic of *GlosGeog* (Gloucestershire Branch of the Geographical Association)

15 May Fairford's part in the Second World War by Chris Hobson

19 June AGM Show and Tell

Dates for your Diary

October 12 10-4pm Tercentenary of the Baptist Chapel including a display by FHS

October 26 -November 3 Cirencester History Festival

Edna Dawes Lunch Club

FHS has received an email request from Katie Bull who runs the Edna Dawes Lunch Club which is based at Fairford Hospital and supported by the Friends of Fairford and Lechlade Communities. The Club meet on a Monday and Wednesday. She was wondering whether any of your members would like to come in and have a chat/talk to her members? Most of them have lived locally for many years. Please contact:

enquiry@fairfordhistory.org.uk and I will forward your names to Katie.

September Meeting

A splendid Roman soldier, also known as John Burdon from the Ermine Street Guard and his lady (Jennie Sanford, who was volunteered to assist (she enjoyed wearing the jewellery, but not the shoes!) gave us a really interesting presentation. John described the daily life of a Roman soldier. Trainee soldiers were given an extremely strenuous training course, having to marching 20 Roman miles in 5 hours fully laden with various items of armour and kit, sometimes making an encampment then eating, sleeping, taking the camp down the next day and walking back to their garrison. It was only after the training course had been successfully completed that they were sworn in as a Roman soldier. No soldier was stationed in the country of their origin. John also described the soldier's uniform and equipment. He brought with him a very impressive shield, a javelin and two stabbing swords. He also described some of the methods of warfare. He also brought a

comprehensive array of medical equipment; there were specially trained soldiers who carried a first aid kit. The Legion's doctors became extremely skilled in treating wounds of warfare. There were also some items of household kit including a writing tablet, a child's doll and various utensils. Altogether this was a fascinating and entertaining presentation.



Photographs Jennie Sanford and Alison



While Cirencester was a very important Roman town, there is also evidence of Roman settlement in the Fairford area. During an archaeological dig at Horcott before gravel quarrying took place, the foundations of a small Roman farmstead was discovered and nearby a large Roman cemetery dated about AD 250 to 350 was excavated. Other, more extensive, Roman sites have been found throughout the Upper Thames Valley and slightly further afield at the well-preserved villa at Chedworth which is well worth a visit.

Prior to the meeting one of our members sent us information about two Roman coins that had been found in a field close to the mill at Whelford. The oldest coin bears the head of the emperor Constantine II who was born in Arles in the south of France in AD 316. He was the son of Constantine I, the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity. Constantine II came to power in 337 after some of his male relatives and potential rivals were 'eliminated' in the usual Roman way. Constantine was killed in an ambush ordered by his youngest brother Constans in 340. The other coin found at Whelford was minted in the reign of the emperor Valentinian I who was born in what is now Croatia in AD 321. He was elected as emperor in 364 having spent much of his adult life in the Roman Army. During his reign he campaigned in various parts of Europe, North Africa and in Britain. Valentinian was known for his very bad temper and in 375 he was campaigning in what is now northern Hungary when he fell into a violent rage and died of a stroke.

An interesting new addition to the FHS Archive Room

In November 2020 we received an email from Mr Tom Roberts of Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He had inherited a painting of Fairford's market place from his late mother and wished to gift it to the FHS. His plans to fly over to the UK were thwarted by the outbreak of Covid but he and his wife finally arrived in Fairford on 20 September and stayed overnight in the Bull Hotel. Tom very kindly presented the painting to the FHS and our Chairman then gave Tom and his wife a conducted tour of the town. The painting is by an unknown artist and is undated. It shows the George Inn with the name of Robert Foresheew displayed as the landlord. He was the innkeeper of the George from about 1837 to at least 1841 so the painting may well date to this period. The painting will be on display at the next meeting on 17 October. This is a very welcome addition to the artefacts held by the FHS.



Newspaper Cuttings

North Wilts Herald 14 February 1936

(Application for a renewal of the stage play and cinematograph licence)

Fairford Assembly Rooms

Superintendent Hopkins said he felt he could not recommend that this application be granted. These Assembly Rooms in Fairford were very primitive – two old Army huts with wooden floor and a stove in the centre. As head of the police in that district, he felt there was a very great risk, as in case of a fire, it would be a veritable death trap. The Chairman (to applicant): We will grant the application for six months; then you must make another application.

North Wilts Herald 26 June 1936

A Carnival Dance

A carnival dance was held at the Assembly Rooms last Thursday. Dancing to music played by the Midnight Revels Band took place until one o'clock, and at midnight there was a confetti battle. On leaving for home each patron was presented with a gift. The organiser was Mr C Caudle, of Cirencester.

North Wilts Herald Friday 14 August 1936

Licences Renewed

Dr A C King-Turner applied for a renewal of the stage play and cinematograph licences for the Assembly Rooms, Fairford. Supt Hopkins explained the six month's licence which was granted for the Assembly Rooms and said Dr Turner's application was for a renewal of the licence until the new hall was erected. The plans of the proposed new hall entirely complied with the regulations. The application was granted.

Gloucestershire Echo Thursday 30 July 1936

PUBLIC HALL FOR FAIRFORD - GENEROUS GIFTS MAKE THE BUILDING POSSIBLE

Fairford is to have a public hall, Colonel A J Palmer having offered to erect the building provided the people of the town are prepared to pay for furnishing and other necessary equipment. The hall is to be erected on a site adjoining the Plough Inn, the site having been given by Messrs. Arkells, brewers of Kingsdown, Swindon. The generous gifts of the two donors have been made following the failure of the Jubilee Committee to obtain sufficient subscriptions to carry out their own intention to build a hall. News of the gifts was given at a well-attended public meeting held at Farmor's School last evening. Dr A C King-Turner presided and said that a hall would be built to accommodate 360 people, and suitable for the holding of dances, cinema shows and other social events. A subscription list is to be opened and funds already standing to the credit of the old Jubilee Committee will be transferred.

TRANSFER OF FUNDS

Dr King-Turner was able to announce that he had received a letter from Sir Arthur Hirtzel offering to give 20 per cent of the amount subscribed up to December 31. His donation would have a limit of £50. He stated also that other donations could be expected. Captain Barber, who was secretary of the Jubilee Committee, said that at a recent meeting of that committee they passed a resolution expressing their appreciation to Col. Palmer and to Messrs Arkells for their generous gifts. The committee recommended that any funds standing to their credit should be transferred to a fund equipping and furnishing and for the upkeep of the new hall. Dr King-Turner, in his statement, said he hoped they would carry unanimously the resolution of the committee. "We tried for a long time to raise enough money to be independent and build our own hall," he said. "Subscriptions were conspicuous by their absence, and in fact we had practically no money at all. In the minds of people was the wholesome fear of the enormity of the funds necessary. We could not build a hall at less than £2,000 and to ask Fairford for such an enormous sum was impossible. "We had several meetings at the Park, and Colonel Palmer went into every possible site for the hall. We were like paupers; we had no money. A site in the centre of the town could cost something like £300 an acre, and we did not have nearly that sum. I went to London to see Colonel Palmer on July 15, and he told me to get on with the job. We had a most generous gift from Messrs Arkell. Colonel Palmer said he could not do it all, however, and he wanted Fairford people to furnish and equip the hall. I do not want the poorer people of the town to feel that their subscriptions will not be welcomed. I want every cottager to pay 6d towards it, but I do not care how small the subscription is". Dr King-Turner then mentioned that the hall will be erected by private enterprise but will be transferred to a management committee after it is built. Colonel Palmer would not agree to the hall being handed over until it was free from debt. "We are most thankful for the magnificent gifts of the donors," continued Dr King Turner, "and for the handsome way in which they have come to our assistance. "I do not know of any other town so blessed as we are."

Details of the building were then given by Dr King-Turner, who said that it would have a seating capacity for 350 people and would have a maple sprung floor for dancing and a modern projection room for the cinema operators. In addition, he mentioned the plans of the building had been passed by the rural district council and the Gloucestershire County Council and had received the approval of the Society for the Preservation of Rural England. An application would be made to the magistrates for a stage licence. Speeches in support of the resolution were made by Mr Gantlett (Chairman of the Parish Council), Miss Keble (president of the Fairford branch of the Women's Institute), Mr Farmer (on behalf of the local branch of the British Legion), and Mr R Briggs who spoke as a representative of the tradesmen of the town. All the speakers thanked Colonel Palmer and Messrs Arkells for their generosity. Dr King-Turner then stated that there were hopes that free parking of motorcars would be possible in the Marketplace. He said that the matter had received the support of the police.

At the end of the meeting, he put forward suggestions for the name of the hall, and these included People's Hall, Assembly Hall, Palmer Hall, Jubilee Hall and King's Hall. A large number of those present were in favour of Assembly Hall while others made suggestions combining the names mentioned. The naming of the hall, however, will be decided later.

(The name eventually decided was, of course, Palmer Hall which opened on March 11, 1937.)