

THE MONUMENTS OF St MARY'S CHURCH, FAIRFORD - 18

ALBERT JOHN PALMER (1871-1940)



One of the most colourful but the smallest of the monuments in St Mary's is the brass to Colonel Albert John Palmer who lived in Fairford Park house from 1900 until his death in 1940. Albert Palmer was a soldier, a director of the Huntley and Palmers biscuit firm, and a generous benefactor to Fairford.

Albert was born in March 1871 in Finchley Road, St Marylebone, London, the son of Samuel and Mary Jane Palmer. Samuel was said to have been a co-founder of the Huntley and Palmers biscuit manufacturer but in fact the company was originally founded in Reading by Joseph Huntley in 1822 and he was joined by his distant cousin George Palmer 16 years later. It was George who greatly expanded the business and he was joined by his brothers Samuel and William after 1846 when the company moved into a large new factory. By 1900 Huntley and Palmers was the largest and best known biscuit manufacturer in the world.

Albert attended Holstein House boarding school at Weybridge, the family moving to Hampstead before 1891. In 1895 Albert married Catita (also known as Catherine) Lyle at St George's in Hanover Square. Although born in London she was daughter of Lt Col H C Lyle of Cairn-a-Garriff, County Londonderry.

On 2 August 1899 Albert was appointed Second Lieutenant in the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars and was promoted to Captain in 1907. Albert had a distinguished record of service during the First World War being promoted to Major and then Temporary Lieutenant Colonel commanding 'A' Squadron at Gallipoli and 'D' Squadron during the Battle of Romani, a German-led attack by Ottoman forces on the Suez Canal. In June 1917 he was Mentioned in



Huntley & Palmers Directors 1900



**Albert John Palmer, 2nd Lt
Royal Gloucestershire Hussars**

Despatches, the citation for which reads: “Has consistently maintained his Regiment in high efficiency and has led it gallantly in action notable at Rafa and Gaza on all occasions showing keenness and devotion to duty”. Albert was also awarded the Distinguished Service Order in 1917 and the Serbian Order of the White Eagle, 4th Class. By the end of the war Albert was the commanding officer of the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars but was placed on retired pay in 1920. His wife Catita had also had a very eventful war having sailed to Alexandria and opened a convalescence hospital for men of the Yeomanry regiments.

Soon after the joining the Hussars Albert and his wife leased Fairford Park House from the Raymond Barker family thus starting their long association with Fairford. Albert quickly settled into his new home and became a magistrate for Fairford in 1906 and served on the Gloucestershire County Council from 1911 to 1937. He was also

appointed Sheriff for Gloucestershire in 1921/22, all of which time he remained a director of the family biscuit firm. He was a generous benefactor to the town and opened the grounds and gardens of Fairford Park to the public each year during the Fairford Carnival, a tradition started by his predecessor in the Park, Colonel George C Porter. The proceeds of the Carnival were donated to the Fairford Cottage Hospital of which Albert was a great supporter.

The Palmers also enjoyed the social life of the Cotswolds but often spent their summers in Balintore Castle near the Loch of Lintrathen in Angus, taking some of their servants with them. Albert and Catita also hosted guests at Fairford Park including their young godson David Niven who came to stay at the Park before he started on his very successful career as an actor and film star. In 1930 the Egyptologist Howard Carter, discoverer of Tutankamun’s tomb, was a guest at Fairford Park during Carter’s holiday.

In 1936 Albert paid for the building of a public hall on land donated by Arkells the brewers next to the Plough Inn on London Street. Named Palmer Hall, the building was opened on 11 March 1937 in time for the celebrations marking the Coronation of George VI and is still very much a part of Fairford life today.

Plagued with ill health in the final years of his life Albert died on 29 May 1940 in a Mayfair nursing home. His funeral took place at nearby Christ Church on Down Street on 1 June 1940 and he was buried at West Hampstead Cemetery with a memorial service at Fairford held the same day attended by a host of Albert’s friends and County officials. In his will he left bequests to his many servants including £500 to his secretary F Christian Young, and £500 to his head gardener Albert Derry. In total his estate amounted to £664,889 (the equivalent to about £19 million pounds in today’s money) and probate was granted to four of his nephews as Albert and Catita had no children of their own..

His memorial plaque in St Mary’s depicts a version of the Palmer family crest (his brother Samuel Ernest Palmer was created a Baronet in 1916 and a Baron in 1933) and the motto “Per Crucem Ad Palmam” (Through the Cross to the Palm), The only other inscription simply reads “In memory of A. J. Palmer who for 35 years worshipped here”