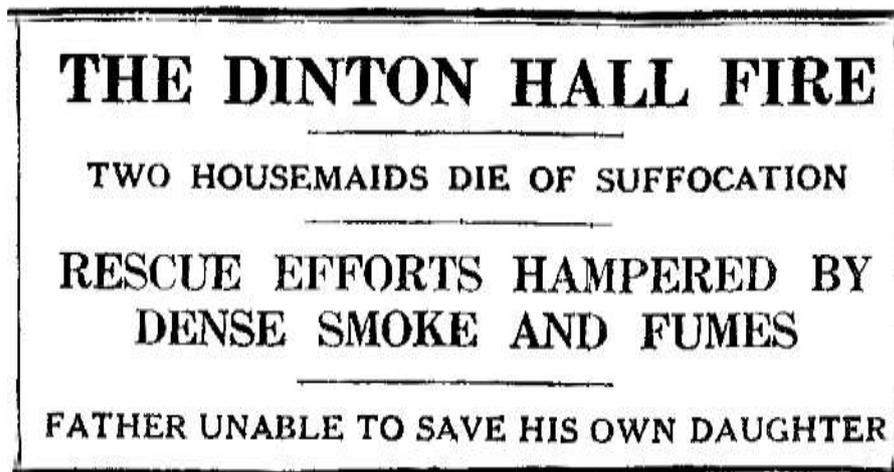


The Fire at Dinton Hall.

In the mid 1920s Sir William and Lady Ruth Currie took ownership of Dinton Hall and all its estates in the village and another family arrived from the village of Adstock, the Siretts, 'Bob' Sirett, his wife Constance May and his very young daughter Beatrice May. Why he was known as 'Bob' will remain a mystery to me as his real name was Ernest! 'Bob' was newly employed by Sir William as a stud groom to look after his horses which he did so for many years to come. Bob was a very likeable character and the family settled in very quickly. When Beatrice reached school age she went to Dinton School and soon after the Siretts had another daughter Jean. After leaving school Beatrice joined the household staff at Dinton Hall as a resident housemaid. The Sirett family lived in the cottage opposite the church on the corner of the Upton and Ford road and continued to live there for many years.

In July 1939 I was four years and three months old. Towards the middle of the month (I now know that it was Thursday 13th July) I went to bed as normal except that on that day I was not feeling well and my mother suggested that I went to her bed. Later I woke up to hear my parents talking. It was dark outside but I heard my father say that something was wrong and he thought that there was a fire at Dinton Hall. He got dressed and said he would go to see if he could help. I remember my mother lifting me out of the bed to show me the glow in the sky looking towards the Hall.



This Headline was taken from the Bucks. Herald dated 21st July 1939

Dinton Hall was in fact on fire and there was a very large and serious fire. The fire brigade from Aylesbury arrived first just before midnight and the Thame brigade just after. Mr. Sirett was one of the first to arrive after the alarm had been raised. There were six members of the staff in the Hall that night. Sir William and Lady Currie were away in London but arrived by car later during the night after being informed. Mr. Sirett, using a ladder, rescued the two maids who had jumped from the window of their room onto a flat part of the roof but he was unable to find neither his own daughter nor the other maid.

The east wing of the Hall was badly damaged especially the butler's pantry where the fire was thought to have started and the rooms above it. These rooms were next to the bedroom occupied by the two housemaids. Several of the firemen made repeated efforts to enter the area but were driven back by the intense smoke and fumes. It was clearly impossible for any human being to survive in it. To add to the difficulties of the firemen the electricity supply was out of action and large quantities of roofing, tiles and other debris were constantly crashing down. Other rooms in the servants' quarters were badly damaged but the fire was prevented from spreading to the main part of the Hall.

Two of the firemen at last managed to find the missing housemaids, both lying on the floor having attempted to crawl towards a window. The room in which they had been was not burned neither were the girls. It had been the density of the smoke and fumes that had suffocated them. The younger one was

Beatrice May Sirett aged just 16, daughter of Ernest and Constance Sirett and the other maid was Vera Edna Petts aged 23, daughter of Herbert Petts from Wolverton. Vera had been working at the Hall for two and a half years. It took the firemen till 6 a.m. the next morning to put the fire out. Sir William Currie paid tribute to Mr. Sirett and the other staff for their gallant efforts in the rescue and for removing valuable pictures and items of furniture. Many of these had been dragged out of the burning building and placed on the lawns.

The funeral of Miss Petts took place in Wolverton where she lived and Beatrice Sirett was buried in Dinton Parish Churchyard. The service was attended by a very large number of parishioners as the whole village was shocked by the tragedy.



Even after 70 years I can still remember that tragic night. 'Bob' Sirett continued his work with the horses until his retirement and he died in 1971 aged 87. He and his wife Constance May are buried in Dinton Churchyard in a double grave very close to their daughter Beatrice.

G.S.Weedon.