

FAILAND SOCIETY HISTORY

Speech given by one of the founding members, Mike Heyes, at the Annual Dinner
Friday 20 April 2018

“A couple of months ago, Dwara and Louise asked me if I would recall the time when the Failand Society was formed. I gave it some thought and realised, at my age, I had more chance of remembering events of 50 years ago than, say, last week. I agreed.

“It would be difficult to talk about this time without mentioning the building of this (Village) Hall, as the two were somewhat connected. The Hall replaced an old Nissan Hut which had been obtained from Tynesfield after the War. It served a purpose and was used in conjunction with the building that once stood opposite the Church in Lower Failand. But I can tell you that in the winter, it was somewhat lacking, and much thought was given to replacing it. Derek Avery, who was an architect living in Longwood House, designed the original building, which was opened in September 1962. I remember that day.....

“The land on which it stands belongs to the Wills family, and they kindly lent it to the inhabitants of Failand for as long as there is a Hall in existence. From this time, all activities were centred on this Hall, except for the Table Tennis Club and some Church events who continued to use the lower Hall. Various clubs were formed from this time, although the Horticultural Society, Whist Drive, WI and a Drama Group had been around for a couple of years.

“One evening, at the Failand Inn, a group of us were discussing possible future activities, when Louise’s father, Cyril Cox, thought it would be a good idea to give the village a cultural lift by inviting speakers to come along in the winter months to talk on various subjects of interest. The idea was approved and things were put in motion. The inaugural meeting was held in April 1964, and a committee* was formed:

President: Paul Robinson
Chairman: Robert Owen
Secretary: Cyril Cox
Treasurer: Len Ellis

“Ann and I were unable to attend and tendered our apologies. Of the people who attended that meeting or apologised for absence, only Jean Williams, Ann and myself remain, which is a sobering thought.

“The first talk, which included a Wine Tasting and Film, was given by John Harvey & Co. The first Dinner was held on 22 April 1965, almost 53 years ago to the day. 83 people attended plus 3 guests, and the tickets were priced at 17/6 in pre-decimal money (75p now) and included wine! Total membership at the time was 142.

“Within a couple of years, the Christmas Quiz and a Summer Outing had been added to the itinerary plus, of course, the Cheese and Wine party** although for several years this was an evening event. So you can see, over the last fifty years, not much has changed! I guess it’s a question of ‘if it’s still working, don’t mend it’.

“Another interesting statistic is that, in the first 50 years of the Society, there have only been 3 Secretaries

Cyril Cox did the first 10 years
Ann Heyes did the next 17 years
Ann Pettican did the next 23 years.

“After the first few years, it soon became apparent that the Hall was not big enough for the purpose and that an extension was needed. The Failand Drama Circle has been reformed and urgently required dressing rooms, for example, and catering was difficult - the kitchen was smaller in those days. On social occasions, the bar was provided by the Failand Inn. The landlords at that time, were Sid and Alice Howe. The bar had to be in the kitchen or, if that was being used, on or behind the stage. So plans were drawn up for the extension you see now (the whole length of the hall extended sideways) with provision for a bar and two additional rooms which could be used as

dressing rooms, or for other purposes. On the plans, the bar area had to be referred to as a 'soft drinks area', as we didn't have a licence then.

"So, another period of money-raising began and that, plus a sizeable grant from the Council, enabled the extension to be opened in 1972. A bar - I mean, soft drinks area! - not the current one - was constructed from materials obtained from the Clifton Rocks Hotel, in Bristol.

"Alice Howe said to me, one night, that she was finding it difficult to provide staff to run the bar, her husband Sid having just died, but she was prepared to supply us as cost price, if we could supply the labour.

"At the time, we were more than happy to supply the labour. This arrangement continued until one night, Alice phoned to say she could no longer continue to supply us as she was in trouble with the taxman. With her business, as with many others, she was expected to make a profit but supplying us at cost meant that she was not reaching the expected figure. It was now obvious we had to try and obtain our own licence, which we knew wasn't going to be easy, as we were aware the police would oppose any application.

"When we turned up at the Magistrates Court, we made our case and, when the magistrate asked the police to voice their objections, nobody stood up! After an embarrassing silence, the magistrate said that, in view of the police not preparing a case, he would grant the licence. At the time, we and Congresbury were the only village halls in Somerset to hold licences. I can tell you that that licence and the income it has brought, have been the saviour of the Hall. Without it, the Hall would have been taken over by the Council and financed from the Council Tax.

"The Society progressed through the decades, not without its ups and downs. It wasn't always rosy and I can remember periods when membership fell away. In a period in the late seventies and early eighties, it was difficult to get caterers for the Annual Dinner and, on five or six occasions, Jean Williams and Ann Heyes prepared the meal. I particularly remember these times because Ray (Williams) and I were never allowed to pick a sweet until everyone else had picked theirs.....in case they ran out!

"But it has survived for over 50 years and continues to grow under the guidance of Dwara and her committee.

"So, in conclusion, I ask you to charge your glasses and drink to the health of the Failand Society"

*The first committee:

Paul Robinson lived in Failand House, here in Oxhouse Lane. He was connected to the E.S and A. family. The Cheese and Wine Party was held here. Paul was involved in the planning of the Hall.

Robert Owen was a wonderful character much liked by everyone. He lived on Weston Road and was an accountant by profession. In that capacity, he was connected with all the groups and particularly with the Drama Circle. My abiding memory is of him with a biscuit tin with all the paperwork and money! He was responsible for many Failand Society after dinner speeches - like a State of the Nation Speech.

Cyril Cox lived at Longwood House. He was the managing director of a local building company based in Clifton, doing conversions. He was a driving force in the Society and interested in local government. He was selected to serve in Woodspring District Council and was Chairman for a period of three years. He and Barbara could be seen at the Failand Inn most nights.

Len Ellis lived on the corner at the top of Belmont Hill and had a business in Avonmouth. He and his wife Phyllis served for many years on various committees.

** The Cheese and Wine Party is now a late summer party of varying descriptions: an Al Fresco buffet lunch, a barbecue, a Prosecco Afternoon Tea

