

## How **BICESTER** Has Changed



# Winters Past

You may think it's cold this year, but Bicester experienced much harsher spells not so long ago



Snow in November 2010! Earlier this year Bicester experienced some of its lowest temperatures for more than a century!

Are huge changes taking place? Records suggest winter weather in Bicester has highs and lows, so maybe it is simply that memories are rather short?

The Bicester Advertiser reported on a 'Great Blizzard' that took place on 18 and 19 January 1881. Deep snow drifts clogged roads and lanes, and a woman caught in the snowstorm near her home village froze to death at Piddington. The exploits of three local young men, including Henry Plant and John Hedges, became the stuff of legend when they skated from Bicester to Oxford in 1895 by way of the frozen Langford Brook, the River Ray through Islip and the River Cherwell.

Severe snowstorms might be expected during any January period, yet Bicester was not prepared for the blizzard on 26 April 1908. Efforts to clear the resulting drifts

were vividly captured in photographs taken at the time.

The effects of harsh winters remain imprinted on the minds of many older residents. Snowdrifts over thirteen feet (four metres) high isolated the town in 1927. Freak frosts even made it possible to skate on the streets.

Some may recall the "Big Freeze" of 1947, that started on 28 January and continued into April without a let up, as temperatures fell to -18°C. Outside toilets at

Crockwell School were filled with snow and the water supply was frozen solid, closing the school six weeks. Food and fuel supplies ran short, power cuts were common and considerable manpower was required to clear the snow that blanketed the area.

Snow and ice provides a welcome opportunity for young people to develop winter sports skills. The old clay pits and the Priory Fishponds at the edge of the town frequently froze over and became popular haunts

to skate and play ice hockey. Severe winter weather disrupted the town again in 1956 and 1963 as residents struggled to maintain normal routines in testing times. The prolonged freeze of January and February 2010 equalled many weather records set during previous cold snaps and provides a timely reminder the weather can rarely be taken for granted. Hopefully, 2011 will treat Bicester more kindly.

**Peter Chivers, Bicester Local History Society**

## Home Guard Parade Marks 70th Anniversary



Bicester Library hosted an illustrated talk by members of the Local History Society about the World War II exploits of the Bicester Battalion Home Guard. The well-attended event featured a number of local military re-enactors who paraded to demonstrate the uniforms and equipment that were supplied to the Home Guard during the conflict. Proceeds totalled £140, donated equally to 'The British Legion Poppy Appeal' and the 'Help for Heroes' fund.