

# **Bicester Local History Society**

**Annual General Meeting, Monday 15 September 2014, 19:30**

## **MINUTES**

Venue: The Clifton Centre, Ashdene Road, Bicester

Present: Fifty-one members and two visitors

### **1. Welcome/Format of Meeting**

Bob Hessian opened the AGM at 19:35. He thanked members for attending and outlined the format of the meeting, which would follow the points detailed on the agenda (copies of which had been placed on all seats prior to the meeting). He informed members that the raffle would take place after the AGM and before the evening's talk by Liz Woolley.

### **2. Apologies**

Apologies had been received from Hazel Thatcher, and John & Sue Leverton.

### **3. Minutes of AGM held on 16 September 2013**

Bob Hessian then summarized the key points from the Minutes of last year's AGM (2013), as follows:

BLHS had successfully changed its meeting venue to The Clifton Centre. Work had carried on with the updating of the BLHS website to ensure members were informed of events and talks. Two of the key highlights of 2013 had been the publication of the long-awaited 'Bicester Through Time' book, and the 'Bygone Bicester' DVD. In Bicester, the year had seen the completion of the new town centre development, as well as the continuing work on the Kingsmere housing development. Mention had been made of Gavray Drive, and the proposed loss of unspoilt historic meadows, hedgerows, and plants to new housing and development. (2014 AGM: Bob Hessian drew members' attention to a display situated in the 2014 AGM hall, which gave further details on Gavray Drive. This display contained a petition against any future development, which he encouraged members to sign. He also pointed out that the threat to Gavray Drive had been renewed because of the revised local plan, and that members only had a month left to put forward their views and comments.)

Subscriptions to BLHS had risen in 2013/14: Single Membership had risen from £10 to £12; Joint Membership had risen from £15 to £18; and Visitor Fees had risen from £2 to £3. The 2013 AGM had also included three amendments to the BLHS constitution, each of which had been passed unanimously. The 2013 AGM had been followed by a talk and demonstration from the Kirtlington Morris Dancers.

#### **4. Chairman's Report/Secretary's Report**

Bob Hessian then summarized the key points and achievements of the past year.

At last year's AGM, the 'Bicester Through Time' book had only just been published. The publishers of the book, Amberley Publishing, have reported excellent first year sales, and have asked BLHS whether they would like to publish one or two further titles with them. However, since the schedule of BLHS projects for 2014/15 was already pretty full, another book may have to wait a while. The two key projects that BLHS have started in 2014 are a further DVD, this time featuring some of Bicester's Old Buildings; and a new Town Trail. The Town Trail would use modern technology to impart knowledge (QR codes which could be scanned by smart phones). Funding is available for both of these projects, but BLHS had also received promises of monies from sources outside the Town/County/District Councils, which perhaps is a good indicator of the high esteem in which BLHS is held.

Another project BLHS had wanted to take forward in 2014 was the restoration of The Cholera Stone in St Edburg's Churchyard. Its current condition is very poor and the lettering is now almost illegible. After initial expert analysis, it seems that the current stone cannot be restored to its former glory. Therefore, careful thought needs to be given as to how we can preserve the stone in a different way, to ensure that this important yet tragic story in Bicester's history is not forgotten and can be re-told and shared.

In the last week, the BLHS 'Community Dig' had taken place at The Old Priory. Thanks were given to Rob Parkinson for his hospitality and to Paul Riccoboni for his supervision of the dig. Amongst the many finds was part of a medieval floor tile which matched one of the patterns previously associated with the floor of The Priory. In addition, part of a medieval stone wall was unearthed. It was agreed that everybody who was involved with the dig would be recognized with the find of the medieval floor tile.

Discussions with Cherwell District Council are ongoing concerning the future of the Dovecote.

The annual outing to Marlborough had taken place, possibly on the hottest day of the year. Nevertheless, the tour of the Merchant's House and town walk had proved highly successful and enjoyable. A repeat outing to Marlborough would be scheduled for May 2015. This would be in addition to the main 2015 BLHS outing.

A series of Village/Town/Countryside Walks had taken place during the summer months of 2014. Thanks were given to John Roberts for organizing the Countryside Walks; the many people who had assisted with the Village Walks; and the members who had kindly provided cakes for the teas at the end of the walks. As ever, these walks had been very well supported by members and continue to prove a very popular Sunday afternoon activity. The Village/Town Walks carried out this year covered: Bletchingdon, Middleton Stoney, and Brackley. The Countryside Walks carried out this year covered: Hampton Gay/Thrupp/Hampton Poyle; and Lower Heyford/Northbrook. The Countryside Walk to Mixbury/Evenley will take place this coming weekend.

Last year's participation by BLHS in the St Edburg's Christmas Tree Festival would be a hard act to follow. The BLHS tree depicted images of old Bicester buildings/scenes on cardboard cubes/baubles, and received very complimentary feedback. BLHS will be taking part in the

Festival again this year, so any new ideas for the theme of this year's tree would be most welcomed.

The new-style BLHS Newsletter, *The Bicester Historian*, had just been launched (September 2014), and had already received many very favourable comments. The intention was to produce this Newsletter on a monthly basis. Many thanks were extended to Matthew Hathaway and Gill King for their work in producing this Newsletter.

A membership questionnaire had also been sent out in August 2014. Members were thanked for completing the questionnaire. A summary of the results as well as comments and suggestions put forward, would be communicated in the forthcoming issues of the Newsletter. A big thank you was given to Matthew Hathaway and Gill King for producing the questionnaire and for the analysis of the results.

A plea for assistance was made, first for any members who would like to join the Committee, and second for any members who would simply like to help out with current projects (without joining the Committee). BLHS projects were now organized in teams, so there were a number of big or small well-defined tasks available for anyone who would like to lend a hand. Members would be very welcome to join in with the current projects.

The Bicester Museum and Heritage Trust, which had started as the Museum Group within BLHS, has now moved outside the remit of the Society and BLHS are not directly involved with them. The Bicester Museum and Heritage Trust had recently been granted Charitable Status, which was a note-worthy step forward for them. It is hoped that the Society can work together with them in the future. The Society will continue to keep its options open and continue to work towards a museum for Bicester.

Thanks were given to all the BLHS Committee members, with a special mention to Sally Dexter and Sally James. Finally, thanks were also given to all the members of the Society for their unswerving support throughout the year.

## **5. Treasurer's Report**

Sally James then summarized the BLHS Income & Expenditure for the year ending September 2014 (copies of which had been placed on all seats prior to the meeting).

The finances of the Society were looking very healthy. Despite membership numbers dropping by six, compared to last year, some visitors to monthly talks had subsequently joined the Society as full members. John Roberts had now taken over the role of Membership Officer. The main boost to the Society's accounts had been the receipt of two grants. First, £1,500 had been received from Oxfordshire County Council for the production of two DVDs: *Bicester Buildings* (project now started) and *Bicester at War* (project to begin at a later date). Second, £500 had been received from Bicester Town Council to cover part of the costs of a Town Trail. The new Town Trail would follow the excellent example produced for the town of Alnwick (project now in progress). Sales of the 'Bygone Bicester' DVD and sales and royalties from the 'Bicester Through Time' book had also greatly boosted this year's accounts. Members were asked to keep both items in mind as potential Christmas presents for this year. It was pointed out that the Society was also holding a £500 grant from last year, for the future purchase of archive storage boxes. The monthly raffle continues to prove popular and produce regular income.

Thanks were extended to Mick and Wendy Wall for their tireless efforts in organizing and running these raffles. Bob Hessian had also donated the fees for his talks to the Society. Generally, the day-to-day expenses incurred by the Society were well covered. There would be no increase in membership subscriptions for 2014/15. Thanks were given to John Roberts for his work finding speakers for the monthly talks, a task which he shared with Sally James. Finally, thanks were given to all the members who had helped with refreshments over the course of the last year, and also to those members who had helped with setting up the hall for the monthly speaker talks.

## **6. Election of BLHS Committee for 2014/15**

Bob Hessian stated that in order to adhere to constitutional rules, all existing Committee members were now asked to stand down. Bob Hessian then asked members if they were in agreement for him to take the role of Acting Chairman whilst the voting for the new Committee members took place. Members agreed to this request. It was noted that Matthew Hathaway had been co-opted onto the BLHS Committee after last year's AGM, and that he and all the other Committee Members who had served in 2013/14 would be happy to carry on in 2014/15. Members were then asked to vote on accepting the following BLHS Committee for 2014/15:

Bob Hessian (Chairman)  
Sally James (Treasurer)  
Sally Dexter (Minutes Secretary)  
John Roberts (Membership Officer)  
Gill King (Archivist)  
Matthew Hathaway  
Peter Crook

The vote in favour was unanimous.

Bob Hessian then asked the members whether they had any major questions. The question was asked whether there was a list of the items held in the BLHS archive. Bob Hessian replied that a comprehensive list wasn't yet available, but it was definitely being worked on, and once finalised, it would be included on the BLHS website.

A member expressed her thanks to the Committee as a whole, for all the hard work they had carried out during 2013/14.

The following announcements were then made:

Bicester Methodist Church Bicentenary Celebrations, 19-21 September 2014 (further details in the September Newsletter).

St Edburg's Church, Living History Event, 27 September 2014.

The meeting closed at 19:59.

The raffle was then carried out, followed by refreshments, before the talk by Liz Woolley.

Circulation of AGM Minutes:  
2014/15 BLHS Committee Members & publication on the BLHS website

Note-taker: Sally Dexter,  
23 September 2014