



Priority Site Redevelopment

Cherwell District Council is still intent on redeveloping Old Place Yard, and potentially destroying what remains of Bicester's mediaeval Priory, to build 11 self-contained flats for adults with physical and learning disabilities.

Bicester Local History Society is a designated consultee for the council's planning application as it will affect the setting of nearby listed buildings, including the dovecote, and is in the Area of Archaeological Interest.

The Society has formally objected to the proposals which reduce the open and unencumbered setting of the listed dovecote by the incorporation of three of its external walls into a private garden. We feel that the building should be accessible to the public from all sides. The other external boundaries of the garden encroach on existing public open space and this detracts from the setting of the listed building.

The Society has also objected to the application being approved, until further archaeological work has been conducted and the results assessed. The rationale for this is that the English Heritage report from 2014/15 advised:

"Were survival to be of good quality so that most of the plan of the church and cloister could be interpreted from foundation trenches and wall footings, that would be enough to say that there was substantial survival and the potential for a greater understanding of Bicester Priory. In that case the Priory would undoubtedly be of national

importance for its survival, potential, period and group value. The evidence of substantial survival of fabric from the 2013 archaeological evaluation must be taken into account. Further excavation in an open area context would resolve the problem of its survival, and any such excavation would need to be conducted in such a manner as to assume that the site was of national importance until proved otherwise."

The written scheme of investigation for archaeological mitigation prepared by EDP ignores the English Heritage advice that the site is of national importance until proved otherwise and proceeds on the basis that the development would go ahead anyway. This was the approach taken on the adjoining Bryan House site where an almost complete plan of the Priory chancel, choir, chapels and part of the north transept were discovered. Finds included a reliquary and burials with traces of wooden coffins, charnel pits and a stone-lined cist. All of this was destroyed because planning permission had already been given.

The mitigation scheme acknowledges that there will be 'impacts' (destruction) of archaeology from excavation for foundations, service runs and an underground storage tank. But the report only allows that these will be mitigated 'where possible'.

The mitigation proposals submitted in support of the application do include a 'set-piece excavation', but only after development has been approved and begun.

This arrangement is inconsistent with the English Heritage advice and would inevitably compromise survival of the archaeology.

The Society believes that a stand-alone excavation should take place to confirm if the 2013 evaluation was correct and if the site

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Proposed development plan

is of national importance.

Bicester has always played a very substantial part in absorbing development pressures within the district. More development has taken place within the last 30 years than the previous 1000, but there is a serious danger that history and heritage of this ancient place will become unrecognisable. Historic assets are a finite and increasingly endangered resource. It is vital that these sites are properly protected and that new development is sensitively designed to complement them.

The Society fully understands that the Council has to strike a balance between the need for development and the Local Plan Policy, which seeks to ensure that the character of the built and historic environment is respected. But if the area is properly investigated and found to be of significant importance, they should instead consider the economic benefits of developing the area as a historic site and thus attracting visitors to the town. What an incredible asset for the town a site of this status could be.

Village History Finmere

The village of Finmere lies to the north of Bicester, half way between Brackley and Buckingham.

In 2000 archaeologists found evidence of Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman activity in Finmere Quarry, about 0.8 miles west of the village. Five early Bronze Age cremation pits were excavated, and from one of the pits two collared urns were recovered. The cremations were dated to about 2040 to 1880 BC.

The site of a late Iron Age settlement was found west of the cremation pits and just east of the trackbed of the former Great Central Main Line railway. The settlement consisted originally of a number of roundhouses packed close together in a straight line, and then developed in phases with later structures overlapping the sites of some of the earlier ones. Enclosures, presumably to contain livestock, were created at different times and in different shapes, with the outlines of some enclosures from different periods overlapping the sites of the roundhouses and each other. Iron Age pottery recovered from the site suggests that the settlement was occupied in phases from the 4th to the 1st century BC.

A pair of ditches were found running parallel across the site about 15ft apart and in a roughly east-west direction. The ditches were identified as flanking a track, and fragments of wheel-thrown pottery found on part of the site led to the track being dated to the period of Roman occupation of Britain. The site is about 0.8 miles (1.3 km) from the course of the Roman road that linked Alchester near Bicester with Lactodurum (now Towcester), which runs through the eastern side of Finmere village.

Before and after the Norman Conquest of England Wulfward the White, a thegn of King Edward the Confessor's Queen Edith, owned the Manor of Finmere. However, by 1086 William of Normandy had granted the manor to Geoffrey



The Red Lion public house on the then Buckingham to Banbury road - 1904

de Montbray, who was Bishop of Coutances as well as one of William's senior military commanders. Subsequently the manor passed to the Earl of Gloucester, in whose family it stayed until the 4th Earl of Gloucester died without a successor in 1314. In 1347 the manor passed to the 1st Earl of Stafford, in whose family it then remained.

The village had a parish church by 1189, when its advowson was granted to an Augustinian Friary in Bristol. But the only surviving remnant from that parish church seems to be the 12th century font. The earliest surviving parts of the present church of St Michael and All Angels are the tower, the north wall of the chancel and the south wall of the nave.

The church underwent major repairs at various times in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. A west gallery was added, probably in the 1760s. In 1856-58 the Gothic Revival architect G.E. Street removed the west gallery, restored the church, widened the chancel arch and added the north aisle. A vestry was added in 1868 and a porch in 1876.

The bell tower houses three bells. William Chamberlain, of Aldgate, cast the tenor in about 1470 and an unidentified bellfounder cast the treble in about 1599. The middle bell is of unknown age but Lester and Pack, of the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, recast it in 1754. The tower also has a historic turret clock that was installed in 1697; twenty-two donors having raised between

them the £8 10s cost. The clock was altered with a new escapement and other alterations in 1858. Dr James Clarke of Finmere House designed the escapement and paid the £10 cost of reinstallation, which was done by William Bayliss, the village carpenter.

The Domesday Book records that by 1086 the village had a watermill. The village continued to have a mill on the Great Ouse until early in the 19th century when Richard Temple-Grenville, 1st Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, had it demolished.

In 1645, during the English Civil War, a Parliamentarian force from Newport Pagnell surprised a platoon of eighteen Royalists stationed in Finmere. The Parliamentarians drove the Royalists out of the village, which thereafter remained under Parliamentarian control.

In 1824 the 1st Duke of Buckingham and Chandos built a National School for the village. In 1926 it was reorganised as a junior school, with senior pupils going to the school in Fringford. The first Finmere school was closed in 1948 but a new school was built and opened in 1959.

Finmere was on the main road between Buckingham and Banbury, which was made into a turnpike by an Act of Parliament in 1744. Since the 1920s the road has been classified as the A421, and later in the 20th century a bypass was built south of the village to take the A421 past both Finmere and the neighbouring village of Tingewick.

In 1847–50 the Buckinghamshire Railway built a branch line to Banbury Merton Street through the northern part of the parish. Fulwell & Westbury station was built on the line about 1.5 miles northwest of the village. In 1899 the Great Central Railway built its main line to London through the western part of the parish and built “Finmere for Buckingham” station about 1 mile south of the village. Buckingham already had a railway station on the Banbury to Verney Junction Branch

Line and was almost 5 miles from the Great Central station, so the name was subsequently shortened to the more appropriate “Finmere”. British Railways closed Finmere station in 1963, and then closed that section of the line in 1966.

The War Department built a military airfield south of Finmere and Tingewick which was commissioned in July 1942 as RAF Finmere. It served as a Bomber Command operational training unit flying Bristol Blenheim medium

bombers which, by then, were obsolete for combat operations and used only for training. They were eventually withdrawn from this role as well and from January 1944 the training unit at RAF Finmere flew DeHavilland Mosquitoes. After the Second World War RAF Finmere served as a Transport Command storage depot until the 1950s when it was decommissioned and closed as an RAF base, although part of one runway remains in use as a private airfield.

- Matthew Hathaway

Marj's Memories The Stables in the Causeway

A very early memory of mine is Bonner's stables in the Causeway, where the Catholic Church is now. I remember old Mrs Bonner and three sons: Jack, Cecil and Harry and a daughter called Marjorie, who looked after her mother, and was well-known and respected in the town. The sons were often on horseback and it was a regular thing to see horses coming and going from there. The yard was cobbled and there were big double gates near the road.

Some years before my time, there were cottages near the stables where several Bicester families lived. An outside pump was the main supply of water. Two of the families were the Francis family and the Long family who were later rehoused in Highfield in the early thirties. The Francis family (my great aunt and uncle) had 4 children: Edith, Thomas, Lizzie and Alfie; the two youngest were named after their parents. I recall my aunt telling me of the tragic circumstances during this time when the diphtheria epidemic came about in Bicester and her two youngest children, little Lizzie and Alfie (pictured) contracted it.

They were both taken to the Isolation Hospital in Highfield (we called it the Sanatorium) and died within a week of each other. My aunt used to say “One from each bed” as the boys, like the girls, shared a bed. She told me of the sadness and how little Alfie asked for apple pie and a stick of rock when he was in the hospital.

In later years, during the war and since, we have all been inoculated against diphtheria.

- Marjorie Dean MBE



Roll of Honour

These are the local men who died in the Great War, 100 years ago this month.

Private George Hollis Gardner, of Islip.

Died: 5th March 1916 Aged: 33 Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

Private Sidney Stairs, of Bicester.

Died: 24th March 1916 Aged: 25 Served in: Grenadier Guards

Private Albert Coles, of Bicester.

Died: 28th March 1916 Aged: 29 Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

Private Francis Whitwell Owen, of Bucknell.

Died: 31st March 1916 Aged: 21 Served in: Royal Fusiliers



Bygone Bicester

(Taken from the Bicester Advertiser)

8th March 1856

COAL MERCHANT, BICESTER - Edwin Heritage returns his sincere thanks to his friends and the public for the liberal support he has met with since entering on the above trade, and begs to inform them that, in consequence of ill health, he has declined in favour of Mr John Foster, who he trusts will receive a continuance of the patronage hitherto enjoyed by himself.

COAL MERCHANT, BICESTER - John Foster begs respectfully to inform his friends and the public that he has commenced business in the coal trade, and trusts that by personally attending to business, he shall meet with a share of support.

In consequence of the competition, in the trade, it is his intention to sell the best coal at the lowest possible prices for cash.

13th March 1896

CONGREGATIONAL BAND OF HOPE - At the usual meeting on Tuesday evening of the Congregational Band of Hope Mr Walter George presided and Mr Clark, of the International Tract Society, London, gave a stirring address based on the life of the prophet Daniel, and expressed in the words "Daniel purposed in his heart not to defile himself".

At the meeting held the previous week Mr T.A. Scrivener offered medals for the best written list of Bible abstainers, and the awards were made this week by Mr Clark, who also pinned the medals upon the breasts of the successful competitors, as follows: 1st Reginald Woods, 2nd Lydia Pittam, 3rd Walter Sirett, equal 4th Herbert Baker and James Wilson.

20th March 1936

LICENSING - The transfer of the license of the White Hart Inn, Bicester, from the late Mr Ezra Webb to his widow was granted.

Mr H.F. Gallon applied for the transfer of the Star Inn, Bicester, to the Stoneburge Estate, on behalf of Halls' Oxford Brewery Ltd. Proof of notices served was given by Patrick Merry and ex-PC Page, and Mr H.T.

Smith gave details of the plans of the new building. Mr H. Clifton, the licensee, and Mr D.C. Maxwell, of Halls Brewery, made formal application for the transfer. The transfer was granted, provisionally.

18th March 1976

BACK DOCTORS SAYS MAYOR - Bicester Town Council has added its voice to the protests at plans to close Bicester Cottage Hospital to maternity cases and for it to become mainly a unit for geriatrics.

The council is to send its protest to the Oxfordshire Area Health Authority (Teaching), which has proposed the change in the interests of economy with the transfer of maternity cases to Banbury or Oxford.

Mr Joe Leach, the Bicester town mayor, told the council on Monday that they should support local doctors and other organisations in their objections to the closure.

He said women who have had their babies at the Bicester hospital always speak highly of the care and attention they have received.

"It is wrong for expectant mothers to travel 15 miles to Banbury and it will cause great inconvenience for people for visiting," said Mr Leach.

Mr John Hollis said it would be a tragedy if the hospital was closed to maternity cases. The hospital was originally run from voluntary contributions and if it still was it would serve the community well.

Mr Keith Taylor said that while last year there was a decline in maternity cases at the hospital, these had since increased.

He appealed for people who wanted to object to write to the Oxfordshire Community Health Council, which would soon be considering the AHA proposals.

The community health council, he said, had received more objections from similar plans at Chipping Norton than it had from Bicester.

"Pressure must be brought from the people of Bicester to the AHA and the community health council to prevent this from happening," said Mr Taylor.

<p>FOOTBALL.</p> <p>OXON SENIOR LEAGUE.</p> <p>BICESTER TOWN VERSUS CHIPPING NORTON</p> <p>BICESTER SPORTS GROUND, <i>Saturday, April 4th.</i></p> <p>Kick-off 3.15 p.m.</p> <p>Admission 4d. Children 2d. Stand 2d. extra.</p>	<p>That EASTER Wave. Don't delay until the last few days. Book your</p> <p>EUGENE WAVE NOW AT BOWNE'S Registered Eugene Waver, Hairdressing Saloons, Market Square, Bicester. Phone 59.</p>	<p>A. W. CASTELL WATCHMAKER & JEWELLER</p> <p>A large selection of ENGAGEMENT & WEDDING RINGS, WATCHES, :: CLOCKS, ARTISTIC JEWELLERY, Etc.</p> <p>Personal attention given to all repairs. Over 20 years practical experience.</p> <p>SHEEP STREET (Next Door to G.P.O.)</p>	<p>BICESTER HUNT PONY CLUB.</p> <p>HUNTER TRIALS at Hethe On Wednesday, April 8th.</p> <p>First Trial at 10.30</p> <p>Admission 6d. Motors 3s.</p> <p>Teas by Mr. W. Jenner, Brackley.</p>
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Adverts taken from the Bicester Advertiser - April 1936

Talks Update

Over the next few months we have a varied itinerary of talks that we hope will prove very interesting.

Monday 21st March

Muriel Pilkington explains the history behind **Votes for Women**. From the very early efforts for equality between men and women, through the attempts to get votes for women in the mid and later 19th century, to the First World War.

Monday 18th April

This will be a social event for members to celebrate the Society's 30th anniversary. It will include a talk by Bob Hessian on the history of the Society.

Monday 16th May

We learn about **Dressing Up the Past** from Ellie Reid as she talks about the craze for pageants which swept Edwardian England. What was the origin of the craze and how, in 1907, did Oxford get involved?

Exploring Your Roots Talk

Alan Simpson is a member of Oxfordshire Family History Society, where his principal role is the co-ordination of the Society's search services. He is also a member of the Computer Group Organising Panel. Membership of OFHS includes those who live in Oxfordshire and could attend the Society's monthly meetings, and those with ancestors in the county who live all over the world. See their website at: www.ofhs.org.uk

Alan's talk aimed to provide an introduction to the techniques used to research your ancestry, both for beginners and those who have already embarked on some research. He illustrated his talk with examples and artefacts from his own family, some of whom had lived abroad.

The main sources for research are: parish registers, the census, old newspapers, wills & inventories and the internet.

He recommended membership of family history societies in the area where your ancestors lived, as these groups are experts in local resources and provide good contacts. www.genuki.org.uk has a list of societies.

He advised on the copying of documents, which can be more legible when copied against a dark background. Tips on searching on the internet on websites such as www.ancestry.co.uk included entering a minimum of information on your ancestor, for example, just their surname, as this is more likely to produce a useful list of possibilities.

The evening closed with a Q&A session with questions concerning the difficulty of researching in Northern Ireland; tracing ancestors who may have died abroad and widows who had remarried.

- Sally James

Batie Brookhills No. 1413	K.E. Brookhills Bicester	May 26 th 10 days	C.S.N. Page
Henry Pishes This young man was killed instantaneously by striking a ferris wheel that broke No. 1414 over Bicester. He was working on Gault farm	Bicester	June 2 nd year	G.P. Page
My manifeste Pishes	Bicester	June 5 th month	C.S.N. Page

Extract from St Edburg's Church burial register

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