



Bicester Historian



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The monthly newsletter for Bicester Local History Society



Wishing all our members a

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

from the Editor and the Committee

A Wartime Christmas

By December 1940 twenty-four thousand civilians had been killed in the blitz, hundreds of thousands had been made homeless and millions were displaced. But the nation was still determined to celebrate Christmas: an attitude which carried on for the whole of the war.

Christmas trees weren't available because the wood was needed for things and, when the far eastern rubber plantations fell to the Japanese, balloons became scarce. But strips of metal foil, dropped as chaff by enemy planes, was collected up and used as an ideal decoration in many homes.

Magazines like the Land Girls Newsletter gave ideas on homemade decorations and presents. One suggested using Physalis, or "Chinese Lanterns", to make decorative garlands in place of paper chains.

The Women's Voluntary Service started a drive for makeshift toys. Books like "Practical Suggestions in Toy Making" had been around before the war, but they got a resurgence in wartime as people tried to make the best of what they had. The government also issued booklets like "Improvise Toys for Nurseries and Refugee Camps" which gave instructions and patterns to make a variety of toys out of scraps and rubbish.

With many factories turned over to war work, consumer goods

became increasingly scarce, so adult presents tended to be more practical items. The most popular present given for Christmas in 1940 was soap.

By 1944 rationing was even more severe than ever, so a traditional Christmas dinner was out of the question. But the success of the government's "Dig for Victory" campaign meant that vegetables were in great supply.

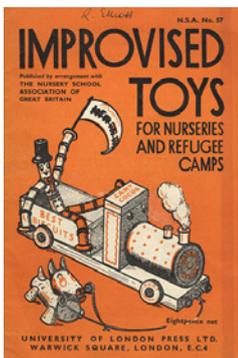


The WVS estimated that only one in ten families would have a turkey at Christmas, so they produced a booklet of recipes and ideas for a non-rationed Christmas dinner. Stuffed rabbit became a substitute for turkey, with a vegetable based stuffing like parsley and celery.

Alternatively the Ministry of Food suggested housewives serve up a "Murkey", or mock turkey. Using parsnips as legs and sausage meat shaped into the body, all wrapped in bacon, if your ration allowed it, and roasted in the oven.

Candied carrot was a sweet option. Or carrot fudge, made with grated carrot in gelatine. Paraffin made cooking fat go further (though used sparingly!). While ground up dried beans mixed with almond essence made a passable substitute for marzipan.

- Matthew Hathaway



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AVAILABLE NOW!

Our new DVD, **Bicester's Buildings**, is on sale now. £5 to members or £6 to the general public. See the website for more details.

Roll of Honour

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

Private William Thomas Walton, of Kirtlington.

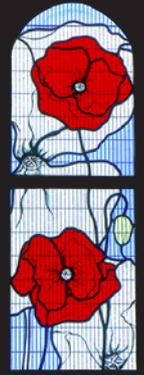
Died: 3rd December 1916 Aged: 19 Served in: Royal Berkshire Regiment

Private Thomas John Veary, of Murcott.

Died: 7th December 1916 Aged: 30 Served in: Coldstream Guards

2nd Lieutenant Wilfrid George Coggins, of Banbury Road, Bicester.

Died: 15th December 1916 Aged: 19 Served in: Queen's Own West Kent Regiment



Bygone Bicester (Taken from the Bicester Advertiser)

13th December 1856

BICESTER COMMERCIAL SCHOOL - The late master of Bicester Diocesan School, Mr T. Painter, begs respectfully to inform the inhabitants of Bicester and the public generally, that he has opened a Commercial Boarding and Day School, on his own account on a liberal principle, without any religious restrictions. The established form will be taught, but on no account will other persuasions be interfered with.

His object will be to impart a sound and useful education to all boys that may be entrusted to his care, and every attention to the comfort and improvement of the pupils will be paid both by himself and Mrs Painter.

Thinking it useless to lengthen this advertisement by an unnecessary amount of detail, he merely states the subjects taught and the terms, viz.-

Careful instruction in Reading, Writing, English Grammar, Arithmetic, Geography, History, Bookkeeping, Mensuration in all its branches, and Mapping. 15s per quarter, for day boys.

Latin, Drawing, Painting, and Music. If required, at an advance of 10s each per quarter.

Boarders above 12 years of age, 20 guineas per annum, under 12, 17 guineas per annum. Washing 7s 6d per quarter.

Should further particulars be required they may be known on application to the Principal.

18th December 1896

AN UNPROFITABLE VISITOR - A somewhat infuriated cow was being driven into the market on Friday, when it ran on the footpath near the International Company's Stores, and got into such a position that it was unable to turn round without putting its head through the side plate-glass window of the Stores. The window of course was completely smashed, but the animal was uninjured.

Such customers are most unwelcome and unprofitable, even at the Stores!

18th December 1936

PROCLAMATION OF KING GEORGE VI - Despite the pouring rain, many people assembled in the Market Square at noon on Monday, including the scholars of Bicester County and C of E Schools, to hear the proclamation of King George VI. Members of the Urban

Council assembled on a platform, and the Chairman (Mr G.H. Keays) explained the reason of the gathering and expressed the hope that they would all serve the new King well.

Mr L.V. Murphy (Clerk to the Council) then read the proclamation, which was followed by a fanfare, sounded by trumpeters of RAF Upper Heyford, and the singing of the National Anthem. Cheers for King George VI concluding the ceremony. By means of Messrs Lambournes' sound amplifier the proceedings were relayed to the crowd.

Immediately afterwards a special meeting of the Urban Council was held, when it was decided to send the following message to the King:

"The Urban District Council of Bicester, at a special meeting assembled, humbly desire, on behalf of the inhabitants of Bicester, to express their loyalty to and their affection of your Majesty and her Majesty the Queen, and trust that your Majesties will be blessed with health and strength to reign for many years to come."

A reply from the King's Private Secretary was later received, worded as follows:

"I am commanded to convey to you and all who joined in your message their Majesties' sincere thanks for their loyal message."

22nd December 1976

A VARIETY OF CELEBRATIONS - Children at the four primary schools in Bicester, as well as some of the surrounding villages, have been celebrating Christmas in their last week of the term.

They have held a number of carol concerts, some times with a re-enactment of the Nativity scene in the stable in Bethlehem.

Mummers plays have become popular as they were originally performed in mediaeval times in the winter.

Familiar characters like Father Christmas and St George accompanied by a dragon were to be found in the story of the Mummers play staged at Brookside School when a concert was presented for members of Bicester Matinee Club

Children at the school have performed shows for the old people's club for about three years and afterwards serve tea and biscuits.

One of the principal celebrations at St Edburg's School was a candlelit carol service in nearby St Edburg's Parish

Church. Guitar and recorder groups provided some of the music. Infants and junior classes at St Edburg's have also been holding parties.

The cosmopolitan population of Bicester was reflected in a concert at St Mary's Roman Catholic School. Christmas customs from various countries were the general theme. Carols from countries like Germany, Italy, Yugoslavia and of course England were sung and the children dressed in national costumes.

There was an added international flavour with foreign food such as a Yugoslav cake and Italian pizzas.

Longfields School has staged at least two productions. One was an operetta, "Lucy and the Stars", specially written by one of the teaches, Mr Ian Rye. The other was a mediaeval Mummers play, performed by a group of pupils who in the summer went in for folk and country dancing.



The schoolroom at Weston-on-the-Green was packed with villagers for the Christmas concert and Nativity play presented by pupils. All 22 of the school's children took part.



A scene from the Mummers play presented by Brookside Primary School.



A display of Christmas customs at St Mary's School.



Pupils from St Edburg's at the candle-lit carol service.



Some Longfield School pupils in a scene from "Lucy and the Stars".



The Ambrosden Pre-School Playgroup nativity play in St Mary's Parish Church.



Children at Kirtlington Primary School performed scenes from the Nativity interspersed with carols and recorder music. The school was also presented with a 60 years' certificate from the National Savings Movement since being one of the first to join the scheme when it started back in 1916.

Village History Islip

The village of Islip lies about 2 miles east of Kidlington, on the banks of the River Ray.

King Edward the Confessor (1004-1066) granted the manor of Islip to Westminster Abbey by a charter which stated he was born there, and tradition holds that he was baptised in the village church. The font now in Middleton Stoney church (pictured below) carries an inscription that claims it was the font used for Edward's baptism.

The present day St Nicholas' Church dates back to about 1200, but there used to be a chapel to the north of the church, known as the King's Chapel, which may have been the village's original church. The chapel was damaged in April 1645 in a military engagement during the English Civil War, and in the 1780s it was demolished. In 1661 the font was rescued by Sir Thomas Brown, who found it being used to make animal feed, and taken to the church on his own estate, Kiddington, near Witney. In the 19th century it was reported in the parish of Ambrosden, and in the rectory garden at Islip. Later it was given to the Countess of Jersey who presented it to All Saints church, Middleton Stoney.

The chancel of the present St Nicholas' Church was rebuilt in 1780 and the whole church was restored in 1861. It is Islip's only Grade I Listed Building.

The old mediaeval road linking



Edward the Confessor's font in Middleton Stoney



Islip from the south - 1823

London and Worcester crossed the River Ray at Islip. The original crossing was a ford, but this was later supplemented by a bridge.

In the 1640s the bridge, and Islip's location near Oxford, made the village a strategic objective for both sides in the Civil War. Early in the war, Islip was a strategic outpost for the Royalist capital at Oxford. In May 1644 the Parliamentarian Earl of Essex occupied Islip, but early in 1645 a Royalist force under the Earl of Northampton retook it. In April 1645 Oliver Cromwell retook the village in an engagement on Islip Bridge. On 4th July 1645 the Parliamentarian Lord Fairfax had his men demolish the bridge.

After the war the bridge was rebuilt and John Ogilby's Britannia Atlas of 1675 described it as having six arches.

In the 18th century the road between London and Worcester became a main coaching route and Islip developed as a staging post. The village was also on the winter route between Oxford and Buckingham, when Gosford Bridge was impassable.

In 1788 the bridge was turnpiked and the turnpike trustees closed the ford. The Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey, who were responsible for the bridge's upkeep, objected to this increase in traffic and wear on the bridge. In 1816 they tried, and failed, to pass responsibility for the upkeep to either the turnpike trustees or the county.

The Otmoor Enclosure Act of 1815 led to the partial drainage of Otmoor. This increased the flow

of the River Ray, which scoured the river bed and undermined the bridge. Otmoor Drainage Commissioners denied liability for this, but nevertheless paid for the repair of two of its arches. An engraving published by John Dunkin in 1823 (pictured above) shows this bridge as having four arches. In 1878 the Thames Valley Drainage Commission widened the river and replaced the bridge with a new one of three arches, which is still in use today.

In 1704 the rector, Robert South, founded a trust for apprenticing two children from the parish each year. In 1709 he enlarged and endowed the trust to create a school for the poor boys of the parish. A school building was completed in 1710, and in 1712 South finalised the size of the school at not less than 15 and not more than 21 pupils. The school issued each boy with a uniform of a blue coat and a blue cap.

In 1812 the number of pupils was increased and in 1815 there were almost 100 boys at the school. By then Dr South's School was following the National School system. By 1833 the number of pupils had fallen to 75, but girls were also being admitted. In 1893 a new school building was completed to replace the original 1710 premises.

Dr South's was eventually reorganised as a junior school, with secondary age pupils being transferred to a new school in Gosford. This left Dr South's with only 34 pupils by 1937. In 1950 it became a voluntary aided school and is still going strong today.

- Matthew Hathaway

Marj's Memories The Doctors' Surgery in Evan's Yard

During the war, and for some years after, the doctors for most of Bicester were Dr Montgomery and Dr House. The surgery was located in Evan's Yard, on the left, a few steps down from Sheep Street. If your doctor wasn't on duty you would see the other one. If someone was poorly, the doctor visited the house.

Dr Montgomery was our family doctor, often described as stern. He was a big man with a "straight to the point" manner, but I remember an occasion when I underwent treatment, a frightening experience for a small child, and on the way out he popped a sweet into my mouth.

Dr House, smaller in stature, was very different, a quiet and gentle man.

There was no appointment system; patients just

sat in the waiting room and were called in when a slot was vacant. It was a basic waiting room and it never seemed crowded. During the war, patients had to pay for treatment, but there was a "Hospital Scheme" and the subscription was collected from the house by an agent - a type of insurance, I guess. This all changed in 1948, when the National Health Service was introduced and an NHS card was issued that would be shown to the doctor for proof of being a member.

When a patient went in to see Dr Montgomery he would hold out his hand to see the card. This has been known, on occasion, to be mistaken for a handshake!

The "Montgomery House" surgery in Coker Close gets its name from these two doctors.

- Marjorie Dean MBE

Talks Update

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

Monday 19th December

This will be our **Members Festive Social Event.**

Monday 16th January

Tba.

Monday 20th February

Chris Day gives us a talk entitled **No Little Scandal to God or Man.**

Oxfordshire Historical Atlas Talk

Kate Tiller, one of the editors, came to talk to us about the Historical Atlas of Oxfordshire and the project to compile it.

Published in 2010, the book brings together the work of 45 contributors and uses index maps to convey information on 74 topics. This allows you to view a place within the wider county context.

The geological map shows how the pattern of bedrock influenced the location of some settlements. The farming map shows how the geology influenced the distribution of different types of farming in the

14th, 15th and 16th centuries.

Taxation records and lay subsidies of 1334 were used to show the wealth of different areas. The wool producing areas around Witney were the richest, and the Chilterns the poorest.

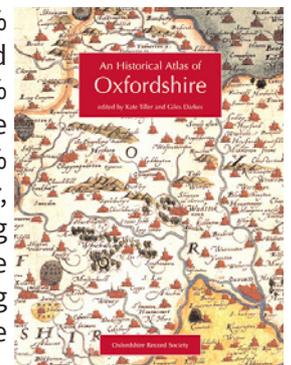
The 1870 National Education Act prompted the opening of a number of church and state schools. The map shows that in 1878 there were 370 church schools and 28 state schools.

The National Farm Survey conducted by the Ministry of Food during World War Two revealed that the Ploughley area had 396 farm, of

which 10% were of a good standard, 69% were average and 21% were poor, indicating that it was the worst farming area in the county.

Kate ended the talk by summarising the experience of compiling the book as a fascinating project that revealed more than she thought it would.

- Matthew Hathaway



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