



# Bicester Historian

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The monthly newsletter for Bicester Local History Society

## New Approach Pays Off



The Vicarage & Church Terrace, Bicester.

Church Street - 1901

Apart from a few intervals when the facility has been used by other groups, we have made good use of the display cabinets in the local studies section of Bicester Library ever since it opened in Franklins House last year.

The two cabinets available to us are more suited to displaying objects than printed materials and so far we have endeavoured to fill them with such. But when it came time to put in a new display, after a sculpture group had finished using the cabinets, we decided to take a different approach.

We made some display stands to

fit in the cabinets and, calling on our large collection of old photographs and postcards, put together a printed display about Bicester in the Edwardian era. This has proved to be a very popular approach with library visitors and staff alike, and will definitely be something we consider doing again.

We would also like to make the space available for other local groups to display their own histories. So if you are involved with any organisations that would like to take advantage of this opportunity, then please get in touch with the committee.

- Matthew Hathaway



Sheep Fair in Sheep Street - 1908

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### Dates For Your Diary

#### A Window into Bicester's Architectural History Talk

20th November - 7:30pm

see page 4

#### December Newsletter Submissions Deadline

1st December

#### St Edburg's Christmas tree Festival

8th-10th December

#### Canal Communities Talk

18th December - 7:30pm

see page 4

### AVAILABLE NOW!

Our new DVD, **Bicester's Buildings**, is on sale now.

See the website for more details.



## Marj's Memories Juniper Hill

Many years ago, my family regularly cycled to Juniper to see my Great Aunt Sophie. She lived in "The Nook" opposite the post box, still the same name and site but it looks very different now. It was then a small thatched cottage with an old-fashioned garden. She was a good-living Christian widow, very kind, who was small in stature. She talked about the church and never missed the Sunday service in Cottisford.

We were always welcome and, on occasion, my brother and I took friends to see her. It was easy to cycle to Juniper in those days with not much traffic on the roads; a most enjoyable bike ride. On turning off the main road into the country lane as we approached Juniper there were bee hives on the left. I think there was a small shop but certainly a pub called The Fox which was still there in the eighties. Aunt Sophie was always pleased to see us and gave us tasty things to eat

and strawberries from her garden.

She liked to tell us about Uncle Tom, her late husband. Uncle Tom had been a regular soldier in The Blues and they met when he was serving in India; Aunt Sophie was a widow with 2 children and Uncle Tom had married her in India.

The last time I saw her she was living in Cottisford with the Sissons family (a great grand-daughter of Queenie's). We took my mother to see her and when her tea was given to her she tried to make us share it. She was then very old and frail and said she was waiting "for the Good Lord to take her".

I didn't understand our relationship to Aunt Sophie, but years later I found out that the connection was with Uncle Tom who was the grandson, like my grandfather, of Eliza Massey (Queenie in Flora Thompson's book).

- Marjorie Dean MBE

## Bygone Bicester (Taken from the Bicester Advertiser)

### 28th November 1863

**DARING ROBBERY AND CLEVER CAPTURE** - On Tuesday last, between 4 and 5 o'clock in the evening, three tramps took away from the lobby of Messrs. S and J Baker, clothiers, two large rolls of cloth and a handsome railway rug.

They got away as far as King's End, when Mr Buswell, the landlord of the Fox Inn, saw in the dusk, three suspicious persons, carrying large parcels, opposite his house, going towards the turnpike. He followed them, and meeting the young men Nix and Bottrill, asked them to go back with him and see what the men had got.

They soon came up with the men, and on being questioned by Mr Buswell, he found they had stolen the goods. He therefore took them into custody, and placed them in the turnpike house for safe keeping. He sent Nix for the police, to whom he delivered his captives, and their plunder.

Too much praise cannot be given to Mr Buswell for the prompt and cool manner in which he followed and captured the thieves, as without his voluntary help, there is no doubt the men would have got clear off with their booty.

### 17th November 1905

**NORTHERN LIGHTS** - The sky on Wednesday evening had a most curious appearance caused by what is known as "Northern Lights".

The attention of those who chanced to be out between the hours of eight and nine was attracted to the north-east, in which direction the sky had a beautiful crimson glow, and this appeared to move in various directions, caused by the clouds traversing in the light of the moon.

We hear that from Muswell Hill a magnificent view of the phenomenon could be obtained.

### 14th November 1947

**SUCCESSFUL SUNDAY SCHOOL CONCERT** - Predominant in popularity of all the varied events

of the Bicester Methodist Sunday School year is the annual concert, given on two evenings by the children themselves to their own great delight, and that of their parents and friends.

On Wednesday and Thursday last, the Wesley Hall was literally "crammed to its doors" for this year's event, and it seems that each succeeding concert is better than its predecessor.

It was a variety bill in the true sense of the word, for there was singing, sketches, recitations, pianoforte selections, a xylophone solo and even a ballet dance, which was executed in an atmosphere of appreciative quiet and interest, which spoke volumes for the capabilities of the tiny dancer.

A very good show indeed, and reflecting great credit on Mr S.G. Hedges and his school staff.

Programme:

Opening Chorus - June Leach, June Dean, Joyce Brown.

Song - Desmond Winterbone, Terry Roberts, Margaret Tuffrey, Mavis Long, Dorothy Court, Rene Court.

Recitation - Jeannette Waine.

Play "To Be a Farmer's Boy" - Toni Hedges, Peter Tysoe, Paul Nicholson, Keith Pratt, John Smoker.

The Backward Boys - Leslie Andrews, Brian Leach, Tony Smith, David Pankhurst.

Beginners Train Song.

Piano Solo "Elegie" - Roberta Trowbridge.

Song "May Fairy" - Ruth Jones, Jill Woodhouse, Sheila Dancer, Jennifer Trinder, Jeannette Waine, Rene Court, Gillian Wilkins.

Song "In the Land of Christmas" - Ann Woodman, Penny Horton, Valerie Gillians, Dorothy Court, Margaret Palmer, Mavis Long, Doreen Leeming, Mary Clifton, Margaret Tuffrey.

Play "The Hole in the Sock" - June Dean, Joyce Brown, Betty Taylor, Mary Orchard, Roberta and Pat Trowbridge, Beryl Andrews, Janet Bone, Pat Phillips, Maureen Furness, Jennifer Price.

Play "The Conceited Pirate" - Jimmy Bowman, Peter Sansome, David Jones, Edward Houghton, Brian Jaffrey, Nigel Kay, Ann Hardstaff, Pat Smith.

Primary Percussion Band - Drummers: Brian Gebbels, Ronald Smoker, David Pearce. Cymbals: Julia Nicholson, Camilla Hughes. Triangles: Norma Williams, Rosemary Young, Doreen Hill, John Reeves, Pat Heath, Barbara Gough, Barbara Gardener, Pat Loves, Pearl Philips, Pat Roberts, Pat Hodgson, Thelma Palmer. Tambourines: Ann Clifton, Pamela Browning. Castanets: Sheila Kay, Philip Williams, David Powell, Sidney Houghton, Glyn Smith. Handbells: Jean Moss, Pat Abbott.

Primary Recitations - Barbara Gough, Thelma Palmer, Barbara Gardener, David Pearce.

Piano Solo - Michael Trinder.

Primary Song "The Birdie's Ball".

Xylophone Solo - Paul Nicholson.

Play "Mary Had a Little Lamb" - Dorothy Dean, Sarah and Susan Clarke, Morfa Hughes, Jacqueline Bignall, Christine Owens, June Naylor, June Hall, Madge Haines, Pamela Haggerty, Jimmy Rowman, Michael Trinder.

Shopping Song - Anne Jones, Marjorie Skelton, Margaret Ward, Joey Leach, Pat Smith, Shirley Palmer, Shirley Dudley, Janet Holloway, Shirley George.

Ballet Dance - Ann Woodman

Play "To be Let or Sold" - June Leach, Christine West, Anne Leach, Sylvia Smith, Yvonne Marriott.

There were the usual large number of seen and unseen helpers contributing to the success of the evening, and Maurice Alley, assisted by Gilbert Alley and Humphrey Richardson, had charge of the admirable lighting effects. Toni Hedges was the accompanist throughout the concert.

## 24th November 1989

REVIVAL IS A REAL TREAT - Bicester cakes made a reappearance for the first time in decades at Bicester's Children in Need sack race.

As they were pretty well received it could be that Bicester cakes will be found regularly on the shelves of Nash's Bakery in Sheep Street as doubtless Banbury cakes, Eccles cakes and Shrewsbury cakes are found in those towns.

There were a few people who thought the whole idea was a bit of a leg pull for the charity, but the cakes are genuine enough. The recipe was found by Rosalia Nash, wife of Trevor Nash, one of the directors of the bakery.

It was mentioned in an edition of "Cookery in Colour" by Marguerite Patten and published by Hamlyn. Trevor tried to find out more about the history of the recipe but had no reply from the publisher, partly because the recipe does not appear in all editions.

So Trevor, at the suggestion of a friend, thought Bicester Local History Society might stand a better chance. Bob Hessian, society chairman, told me they had success and their letter was passed on to Miss Patten, who lives in Brighton.

Miss Patten, many will remember, was one of the first cooks to appear on television. She wrote back to say that the recipe was given to her by someone who used to live in Oxfordshire and that it was baked for special occasions such as horse fairs.

Meanwhile Trevor Nash told me that they will probably bake more for sale in their shop. The cakes are circular and baked in puff pastry and contain apple and dried fruit. Trevor believes one reason for their demise is that anything with apple in it has to be eaten within about two days. The contents of Banbury cakes last longer.

## Bicester Cakes Recipe

### Ingredients:

225g (8oz) puff pastry  
2 or 3 cooking apples  
85g (3oz) seedless raisins  
30-55g (1-2oz) brown sugar  
Mixed spice  
Milk for glaze

### Method:

Peel and slice the apples very thinly.  
Mix with the raisins, sugar and spice.  
Roll out the pastry to the thickness of a penny and cut into large round shapes.  
Place the filling in the centre of each round and fold the edges onto the centre.  
Press firmly together, turn over and make three slits in the top.  
Brush with milk and sprinkle on a little sugar.  
Bake in the centre of a preheated oven, on 230C (450F, gas mark 7), for 20 minutes.  
Check after 15 minutes and reduce the heat if the cakes are becoming too brown.



# Village History Shelswell

Shelswell lies about 4 miles south of Brackley.

Its toponym comes from Old English and suggests that the settlement may originally have been the well belonging to Scield, a Saxon settler. Although the spring that gave rise to this well is no longer traceable. The toponym was “Scaldeswelle” in 1180 and “Saldeywell” in 1219, before evolving into the present form.

Before the Norman Conquest in 1066 the manor of Shelswell belonged to a Saxon called Edwin. But the Domesday Book records that by 1086 Shelswell had been granted to Geoffrey de Montbray, Bishop of Coutances.

In 1093 the Bishop left Shelswell to his nephew Robert de Mowbray, Earl of Northumbria, but in 1095 the Earl was imprisoned for rebelling against William Rufus and his estates were forfeited.

By the 12th century Robert, 1st Earl of Gloucester, an illegitimate son of Henry I, was Shelswell’s feudal overlord. The manor then remained part of the honour of Gloucester during the 13th century and apparently as late as 1560. Sir Anthony Cope, 1st Baronet of Hanwell, then bought Shelswell in 1595 and it remained with the family of the Cope baronets until after 1675.

Shelswell had a mediaeval manor house that still stood in 1530. Moats near Home Farm may mark its site. A new manor house southwest of the former village was built either early in the 18th century according to records or in 1699 according to a date-stone found in 1875.

In the 18th century the house was enlarged and plantations made to improve its parkland. But in 1875 the house was almost completely demolished and



The 18th century manor house, demolished in 1875

replaced with an Italianate country house, designed by the architect William Wilkinson. The new house had a Tuscan porte-cochère and retained some rooms of the 18th-century house. In 1956 the 1875 house was unoccupied and falling into disrepair.

Shelswell had a parish church before the end of the 11th century, and its dedication to St Ebbe reflects the Earl of Northumbria’s feudal overlordship of the manor at that time. From 1573 the Benefice was held with that of neighbouring Newton Purcell, and Shelswell was usually referred to as a chapel of the latter. St Ebbe’s was still standing in 1618 but became increasingly dilapidated in the 18th century and was demolished around 1800. Two 17th century figures from the church have been preserved and in the 1950s were still in Shelswell Park, just to the north-east of the house.

Shelswell was a poor parish and during the Middle Ages its population tended to decline. Its lands were enclosed in different stages. In 1497 the husband of the lady of the manor evicted people, demolished two houses and enclosed 60 acres of land for arable farming. By 1528 another landowner had made further evictions and enclosures, and in 1533 Brasenose College, Oxford, bought a 90 acre farm in the parish. By 1601 Shelswell’s enclosures were complete. In 1634 the parsonage was still standing, though unoccupied, but no buildings from the former village survive today.

In 1939 the novelist Flora Thompson used the manor park as the basis of “Skeldon Park” in Lark Rise, the first book of her Lark Rise to Candleford trilogy.

- Matthew Hathaway



The 1875 manor house, photographed in 1901

## Talks Update

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

### Monday 20th November

Society member Pat Snelson gives us **A Window into Bicester’s Architectural History**.

### Monday 18th December

Martin Buckland comes to talk to us about **Canal Communities** of the past.

### Monday 15th January

We have Ben Ford’s talk on **Excavations at the Westgate**.

# Roll of Honour

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

**Gunner George Larnar**, of Lower Heyford.

Died: 4<sup>th</sup> November 1917 Aged: 25 Served in: Royal Garrison Artillery

**Private John Adams**, of Lower Heyford.

Died: 5<sup>th</sup> November 1917 Aged: 24 Served in: Royal West Surrey Regiment

**2nd Lieutenant John Frederick Woodall**, of Islip.

Died: 8<sup>th</sup> November 1917 Aged: 18 Served in: Machine Gun Corps

**Rifleman Aubrey Herring**, of Bicester.

Died: 11<sup>th</sup> November 1917 Aged: 19 Served in: Hampshire Regiment

**Private William Haines**, of Bucknell.

Died: 15<sup>th</sup> November 1917 Aged: 21 Served in: Army Service Corps

**Lieutenant Richard Frederick Bertie**, of Weston-on-the-Green.

Died: 20<sup>th</sup> November 1917 Aged: 41 Served in: Berkshire Yeomanry

**Private Leonard Holton**, of Newton Purcell.

Died: 20<sup>th</sup> November 1917 Aged: 30 Served in: Queen Mary's Own Hussars

**Private John Cyril Wheeler**, of Wendlebury.

Died: 20<sup>th</sup> November 1917 Aged: 21 Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

**Private William Payne**, of Bicester.

Died: 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1917 Aged: 19 Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

**Private Leeman John Cross**, of Cottisford.

Died: 27<sup>th</sup> November 1917 Aged: 19 Served in: Berkshire Yeomanry

**Miss Mary Hombersley**, of Islip.

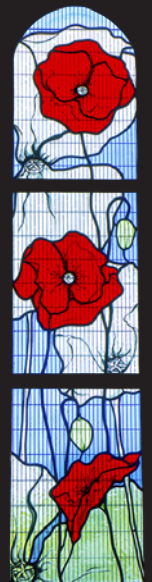
Died: 27<sup>th</sup> November 1917 Aged: 55 Served as a nurse in Serbia

**Gunner Frank Gordon**, of Bicester.

Died: 30<sup>th</sup> November 1917 Aged: 35 Served in: Royal Garrison Artillery

**Private George Aubrey Sumner**, of Beckley.

Died: 30<sup>th</sup> November 1917 Aged: 30 Served in: Royal Berkshire Regiment



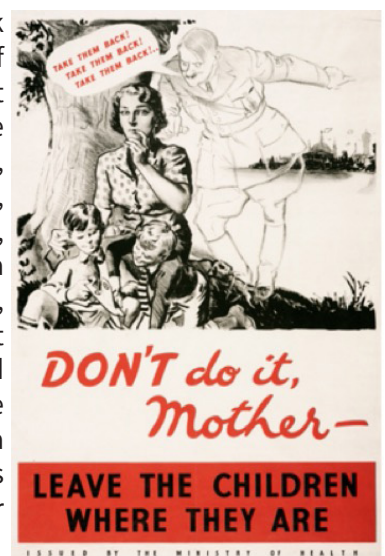
## Evacuation to Bicester and Villages Talk

To begin his talk on evacuation to Bicester and its surrounding villages between 1939 and 1945, Martin Greenwood explained that in early 1939, the realisation that war was likely lead to 'frenzied experimentation' with evacuation arrangements.

Local authorities were surveyed to establish their capacity for accommodating children, mothers with young babies and the infirm. The first wave of evacuees arrived in Bicester on 1st September 1939. They totalled around eight hundred children and teachers. This was fewer than expected, as it was anticipated that whole classes would arrive. One hundred and sixty-eight individuals were billeted in Bicester with the remainder being accommodated in the surrounding villages. Six hundred mothers and babies arrived the following day.

A packing list was issued by the government which

included a gas mask in a case, a change of underclothes, night clothes, plimsolls, spare stockings or socks, toothbrush, comb, towel, soap, face cloth, handkerchiefs and a warm coat. In reality, urban poverty meant that many families struggled to provide these essentials. Fred Smith, a Special Constable, was the Billeting officer for Bicester.





The stables behind Bicester County School were used by fifty-four students and four masters from the London School of Photo Engraving. This group included actor Kenneth Williams, who was billeted with Mr Chisholm, the vet, in Sheep Street.

Country life was a culture shock to many of the evacuees and relationships in homes, now housing additional women, were not always easy. The Rendezvous Café, set up by Mrs Cannon, and suggested by Joe Leach as a suitable venue for evacuees, provided some respite.

The 'phoney war' saw as much as half of the evacuated children return home, despite a government poster campaign to discourage this. Some evacuees stayed long-term and never returned to their city homes.

A small number of children were regarded as 'unbilletable' and accommodated in Bicester in Market End House, the former workhouse. Conditions were harsh and little or no education was provided for these children. Most establishments of this sort were eventually closed by the Ministry of Health.

Additional rounds of official evacuation occurred

nationwide in the summer and autumn of 1940, following the German invasion of France in May-June and the beginning of the Blitz in September. One hundred and eighty evacuees came to settle in Bicester at this time, followed by a further group of a similar number.

Evacuees allocated to local villages had a significant impact on village schools. In June 1940, the number on roll at Fringford School increased from ninety to one-hundred-and-forty when a party of children arrived from Walthamstow. By October of that year, this was further augmented by a group from Tottenham and Stoke Newington. A logbook entry reveals the headteacher's view that "evacuees are constantly changing, classes are by no means settled."

Host families were paid an allowance and in 1946 received a certificate from the Queen in recognition of their work.

Generally, children had mixed experiences of evacuation and the work done to support them led to the development of children's services over the succeeding fifty years.

- Sally James

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